

**God's Deepening Life in Me:  
The Evangelical Experience of Interior Freedom in the  
Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola**

Scott Christopher Newman

Submitted to the faculty of Western Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Ministry

Holland, Michigan  
2021

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HOLLAND, MI

D.MIN. PROJECT

Title of Project: God's Deepening Life in Me: The Evangelical Experience of Interior Freedom in the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola

Author: SCOTT CHRISTOPHER NEWMAN

Project Committee: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chuck DeGroat \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Internal Reader: Winn Collier

External Reader: Seth Haines

## Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support of my wife Katie and kids: Elijah, Levi, and Grace. There aren't words to thank you for all the countless ways you freed me up to pursue this work in the church and on my project. I love you all immensely and want so much for interior freedom and non-grappling love to mark my relationship with each of you!

To my advisor, Chuck DeGroat, thank you for your example, friendship, and support even before this Doctor of Ministry journey began. You and your writing have been instrumental in my healing and it was a privilege beyond my wildest dreams to learn from you these past three years!

Don and Charlotte Ferris have been model companions of Jesus as they have companioned me through some of the darkest days of my life and ministry. Thank you for the invitation to begin this journey and to continue to learn from your words and your examples. I will treasure your friendship always!!

Finally, to my Santa Cruz Bible Church family, thank you for the love and support these past three years. I hope that this work that's begun will continue to ripple out into freedom and flourishing for many in Santa Cruz County and beyond!

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1. The Journey to the Spiritual Exercises.....	1
What are the Exercises?.....	6
My Experience.....	9
Interior Freedom.....	11
Chapter 2. Interior Freedom in the Traditions.....	18
Interior Freedom in the Ignatian Tradition.....	19
Freedom in Evagrius and the Desert Tradition.....	30
The Christian Contemplative Tradition on Freedom.....	39
Differentiation of Self in Family Systems Theory.....	48
Chapter 3. Interior Freedom in Ministry and Mission.....	52
Biblical and Theological Reflection.....	57
Ignatian Freedom for Ministry.....	65
Freedom, Differentiation, and Family Systems Theory.....	86
Chapter 4. Evangelical Interior Freedom... ..	91
The Project .....	94
The Experience .....	98
Effects on the Culture of Santa Cruz Bible Church.....	120

Chapter 5. Conclusion .....124

    Convictions for Mission in Freedom..... 129

    Desires for Santa Cruz Bible Church..... 138

    Suggestions for Further Research..... 141

Appendix: An Interior Freedom Assessment Tool.....147

Bibliography ..... 149

## Chapter 1: The Journey to the Spiritual Exercises

*“Prayer also sharpens our sense of the presence of God abiding with us as we take adult responsibility for shaping our lives more and more into the pattern of Jesus’ life.”*

-Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon<sup>1</sup>

*“Without the contemplative perception of the Holy Spirit’s activity ‘in us’, the history of Christ ‘for us’ does not come alive....”*

-Jürgen Moltmann<sup>2</sup>

“Sit down, Scott. This is going to be a hard conversation.” My Senior Pastor’s voice came through the phone snapping all my senses to attention. “I’m taking the youth ministry away from you.” I don’t remember much of the rest of the conversation, but I ended it as quickly as I could, fighting to hold back my tears. As I hung up, sobs racked my body as I struggled to wrap my mind around what was happening. I’d only been in Santa Cruz a year and a half, and yet it seemed that everything I’d ever known about the Bible, theology, and ministry was failing me. I felt like a failure, I felt worthless, I questioned my sense of call.

You see, I had grown up in a very conservative spiritual environment and my earliest biblical and theological training was rigorous but also very rigid. The Bible and the Bible alone was the source of our life and thought and anyone who

---

<sup>1</sup> Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 51.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 63-64.

drew authority from any other location was labeled with the dreaded L-word, “Liberal.” That emphasis on the Bible led me to a small, conservative Christian college where I majored in Biblical Languages and then later, to Wheaton College where I earned my Master’s Degree in Biblical Exegesis. Over the course of these years, my sense of scripture gradually grew from *rulebook* to *manual for life* to weird and mysterious collection of *ancient documents* and finally to a redemptive-historical understanding of scripture. As I reflect back now on that process of growth, maturation as I experienced it was the reverence I gained for scripture. I learned to read and study it carefully, to rigorously sift through lexical, grammatical, and historical elements of the ancient text and to attend to the ways it taught us about God and about ourselves. Yet, what was largely missing for me was an experience of God through the medium of the Word in the power of the Spirit.

Even though my experience of God was largely centered in the rational knowing of Protestant orthodoxy, I had a deep longing to know God intimately and more holistically that was stoked by such evangelical writers as A.W. Tozer in *Knowledge of the Holy*,<sup>3</sup> Henry Blackaby in *Experiencing God*,<sup>4</sup> and Chuck

---

<sup>3</sup> A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Henry Blackaby and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1990).

Swindoll in *Intimacy with the Almighty*.<sup>5</sup> Blackaby's book especially helped convince me that God loves me and wants an intimate, love relationship with me. Out of that intimate, love relationship, I could learn to see where God is at work in the world around me and join God there. I had all-too-fleeting tastes of intimacy with God, but my knowledge about God and the love God has for me had run far ahead of my experience of this God.

As I completed my schooling and entered full-time ministry, it was too easy for me to mistake the excitement of learning a new theory or idea for spiritual growth and maturity. It was rare for me to stop and ponder my interior life and what might be happening in there to make me present and aware of God's nearness or to pull me away from it. This distance from myself began to take its toll on my life, ministry, and marriage as I frantically and fearfully scrambled to make people happy in ministry. Those seeming helps that I had turned to in the past—reading scripture, intercessory prayer and thinking theologically—weren't working as my fear and anxiety continued to mount. In the months leading up to the fateful call with my Senior Pastor, I actually heard God tell me in a time of prayer that everything I was doing, I was doing out of fear and not love; and yet I was so disconnected from myself and God that I felt powerless to do anything about it.

---

<sup>5</sup> Charles Swindoll, *Intimacy With the Almighty: Encountering Christ in the Secret Places of Your Life* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1996).

In the wake of my youth ministry position being taken from me, I was moved over to adult ministry and given responsibilities that I somehow had to accomplish while I was at the lowest point of my life. Depression, sadness, anger, defeat, exhaustion, and emotional fatigue were my daily companions. This was my wall experience<sup>6</sup> and it terrified me.

It was in this state that I showed up one Wednesday morning at our local pastor's fellowship. I sat next to an older, distinguished looking man, introduced myself, and began the usual pastor small-talk. When he asked me where I went to school, I swallowed hard and said, "Well, I went to The Master's College and if you've heard of it, please don't hold it against me." "Well, I went to Bob Jones, so please don't hold that against me," he responded with a chuckle and a sparkle in his eye. At that, we knew we needed to get to know each other better. Don Ferris, as it turned out, is a spiritual director, the kind of thing I'd heard about before from those touchy-feely spiritual formation people. We met for lunch and discussed spiritual direction and he offered to begin meeting with me. Coming from my background, I was hesitant, but the resources I had received in my journey thus far were clearly insufficient for dealing with my pain and trauma. So I decided to give it a try, thinking it can't hurt and might help.

---

<sup>6</sup> A wall experience is an experience whether through trauma or simply the movement of God's Spirit where those things that previous seemed to work to aid the spiritual life no longer seem to work anymore and we are invited deeper into the mystery and freedom of God's love. See Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Co., 2005), 114ff.

Thus began four years of meeting with Don for spiritual direction every month, in addition to large doses of therapy grounded in a modality called Internal Family Systems.<sup>7</sup> Slowly, all-too-slowly, I began to wake up to my life, to the internal movements of my soul, and to the wooing presence of God’s Spirit inviting me to experience God’s love in ever deeper ways. Don and I continued this rhythm for a year and a half before he invited me into a nine-month process called the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.

A younger me would have balked at doing anything that had the word, “Saint So-and So” in the title. I didn’t know much about St. Ignatius, but I did know that he was Catholic and was the founder of the Jesuit order, the order at the vanguard of the so-called Counter Reformation. As a long-time student of Reformed Theology, I was cautious about entering this kind of experience, but I trusted Don and agreed to walk through the process with him and a small group of participants. Though, truthfully, I didn’t know what I was signing up for. I just knew that I was willing to do anything to experience the person of Jesus and His love for me in ways that seemed more real and tangible.

---

<sup>7</sup> Richard Schwartz and Martha Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2020).

## WHAT ARE THE EXERCISES?

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, or Iñigo López de Loyola, was born in 1491 to a noble family at the castle of Loyola in Northern Spain.<sup>8</sup> As a young man, he dreamed of becoming a valiant and chivalrous Knight, and in 1517 (the same year Luther nailed his theses to the Wittenberg church door) he entered military service in the wars of the Holy Roman Empire against King Francis I of France. In a battle against the French at Pamplona, he was struck by a cannonball that shattered his right leg and wounded his left leg and was subsequently captured by the French. However, his captors were so impressed by his gallantry that they performed surgery to save Iñigo's legs and returned him to the Spanish forces.

Back home in Loyola for recuperation, he urged the family doctors to do surgery again to re-break his legs and reset the bones so that he would still look good in a pair of tights at court, such was his vanity. With little to do during his convalescence, he sought out books to read but could only find copies of Jacopo da Voragine's *The Golden Legend* and *Life of Christ* by Ludolph of Saxony. During his moments of daydreaming, his thoughts turned back to deeds of chivalrous valor but also to what he had read about the lives of Jesus and the saints. He began to notice that when he daydreamed about his former way of life as a noble

---

<sup>8</sup> The following account of Ignatius' life is drawn from John O'Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 23ff. and Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, rev. ed., trans. Joseph Tylenda S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

knight, he was left with feelings of emptiness and aridity. However, when he daydreamed about following in the way of Jesus and the saints “cast by him into the mode of the chivalric heroes with whom he was so familiar,”<sup>9</sup> he experienced sensations of peace and joy that seemed to stick with him.<sup>10</sup>

Once he sufficiently recovered, he determined to set out on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, like St. Francis before him. En route, he stopped in Manresa in the region of Catalonia where, for almost a year, he lived as a hermit in a cave as the ancient desert mothers and fathers had done. During this time, as he meditated on the gospels, he received several mystical experiences, which he details in his autobiography.<sup>11</sup> His conviction was that he was taught by God during this period of his life. He began to help others along the spiritual path on the basis of his own experiences, and he thus began to write down notes that came from his experiences with God and the meditations on the gospels. This became the groundwork of his Spiritual Exercises which, though he refined them through the rest of his life, remained true to his basic experience with God while at Manresa.

The exercises as we’ve received them are given in four “weeks.” The original form of the exercises made space for retreatants to experience the

---

<sup>9</sup> O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Ignatius, *A Pilgrim’s Journey*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-79.

exercises over the course of 30 days, where they devote themselves full-time to prayer and spiritual direction. So, each week of the exercises corresponds to an actual week in the 30-day retreat. Jesuit novitiates today experience this 30-day retreat, called the “Long Retreat,” as a part of their Jesuit formation to set the tone for their life in the Society of Jesus.

However, Ignatius realized that the vast majority of people who were ready to receive the gifts of the exercises would not be able to cloister themselves for 30 days, and so he made provision for the exercises to be given in the midst of everyday life in what has come to be called the 19th Annotation Retreat given over approximately 32 weeks.<sup>12</sup> Jesuit historian John O’Malley even suggests that *this* was the original way in which Ignatius intended to give the exercises.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the “weeks” of the exercises in the 19th Annotation Retreat are not literal weeks but rather like movements in the process of the exercises.

In the first week, retreatants review their lives in conversation with the Holy Spirit in order to come to know themselves as loved sinners. The second week invites retreatants to imaginatively journey with Jesus through His life and ministry as He goes about First Century Palestine announcing and enacting the good news of the Kingdom of God. In the third week, the retreatants journey

---

<sup>12</sup> So-called because the instructions for this retreat in everyday life are given in Ignatius’ 19th Annotation for directors at the beginning of the exercises. See Michael Ivens, S.J., *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1998), 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> John O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 129.

with Jesus on the road to the cross and the fourth week invites retreatants into the experience of resurrection life with Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout the four movements of the retreat, all kinds of spiritual practices and meditations are suggested which is where we get the name “Spiritual Exercises.” That’s why in his first annotation for directors, Ignatius writes,

The term ‘spiritual exercises’ denotes every way of examining one’s conscience, of meditating, contemplating, of praying vocally and mentally, and other spiritual activities as will be explained later. For just as strolling, walking and running are exercises for the body, so ‘spiritual exercises’ is the name given to every way of preparing and making ourselves ready to get rid of all disordered affections so that, once rid of them, one might seek and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one’s life for the salvation of the soul.<sup>15</sup>

Many of these have become hallmarks of Ignatian spirituality: imaginative or Ignatian contemplation, a colloquy or conversation with Jesus, the daily examen and poetic prayers such as the *Anima Christi* or the *Suscipe*.

## MY EXPERIENCE

As I moved through the exercises under the wise supervision of Don Ferris as my spiritual director, I began to understand more deeply than I ever had before my brokenness, the places in my life where I was out of alignment with

---

<sup>14</sup> It’s interesting to note that these movements in the exercises correspond roughly to the three classical stages of spiritual growth: purgative, illuminative, unitive. John O’Malley believes the text of the exercises itself consciously follows this classical pattern. See O’Malley, 48-49.

<sup>15</sup> *Exercises 1* as quoted from Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 1.

God's deepest desires for me. For example, in my idealism and perfectionism I often want to make the world around me right as I see it. I'm tempted to believe that this is bringing in the Kingdom of God, but the more I sat with the exercises and engaged in the conversation with Jesus, the more I came to see how I'm often remaking the world in my image rather than the Image of God.

Yet at the same time, I began to sense Jesus' love for me more deeply, intimately, and tenderly than I'd ever felt in my life. I was beginning to discover the truth that Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, both influenced by the Ignatian tradition, wrote about, "Prayer also sharpens our sense of the presence of God abiding with us as we take adult responsibility for shaping our lives more and more into the pattern of Jesus' life."<sup>16</sup>

As I continued journeying alongside Jesus in the second through fourth weeks, I knew things were shifting. I felt as though I knew Jesus and I could sense His voice calling to me both in the hour set aside for the exercises each day and also increasingly in the midst of my everyday life. I came to know what Kevin O'Brien put so beautifully of the unique charism, or grace, that the early Jesuits had as a result of their encounter with Jesus through the exercises:

Unlike monastic religious orders, their home would be the road. The Jesuits would meet people where they were rather than insist that people come to a monastery or a church. They offered the church a spirituality

---

<sup>16</sup> Au and Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart*, 51.

that was both mystical and practical; they would be ‘contemplatives in action,’ as the first generation of Jesuits described themselves.<sup>17</sup>

This meshed with the ways I’d been formed in the missional church movement where the primary locus of mission and ministry is not a church building but rather everyday life. Yet the practices the exercises introduced grounded me in God’s love for me in ways that countless, books, sermons, and classes never had.

All these gifts of my experience with the exercises were amazing, but the greatest and deepest gift was the beginning of an inner liberation. As I became more aware of my inner life and the ways God’s love was meeting me there, especially in the dark places I preferred not to look, I discovered that this love was beginning to sever the long-standing attachments I’d developed to things like people’s approval, idealism, and my own savior complex. The consequence is I’m increasingly able to respond to God’s invitation where I was unable to previously. As I respond, I’m finding it leads to my own healing and the healing of the world around me.<sup>18</sup>

## INTERIOR FREEDOM

As it turns out, this interior freedom is precisely what Ignatius himself experienced and intended to be the deepest fruit of the exercises in the lives of women and men who undertake this journey with Jesus. Ignatius’ word for this

---

<sup>17</sup> Kevin O’Brien, S.J., *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>18</sup> This phrasing is based off of what Charlotte Ferris often says during retreat days.

is “indifference.” His vision is that we are created “from love, of love, and for love.” Everything in the created order and every circumstance which comes our way becomes the context in which we are invited to grow in our experience of God’s love and also grow in our capacity to love in response.<sup>19</sup> Then Ignatius says, “to attain this, we need to make ourselves indifferent towards all created things.... desiring and choosing only what conduces more to the end for which we are created.”<sup>20</sup>

This freedom God’s love produces in the deep and dark places of my life has radically transformed how I show up in life and brought so much healing to the trauma I experienced in ministry. Yet I can’t remember encountering anything like it in the Protestant/reformed/evangelical world I inhabit. Even if something like interior freedom exists in evangelicalism<sup>21</sup>, it lacks the formative tools and practices to shape women and men in that freedom. Jürgen Moltmann bears

---

<sup>19</sup> This is a paraphrase of Ignatius’ Principle and Foundation in *Exercises* 23. See Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Defining “evangelical” has proven difficult both theologically and sociologically and there is some debate both in popular and scholarly discourse. For the purposes of this thesis, my focus will be on evangelicals defined according to the research methodology laid out by the National Association of Evangelicals in partnership with LifeWay Research. They define “evangelical” as someone who agrees strongly with the following four statements: 1) The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe. 2) It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. 3) Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin. 4) Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation. See *NAE LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition* available here: <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NAE-LifeWay-Research-Evangelical-Beliefs-Research-Definition-Methodology-and-Use.pdf>.

witness to this when he writes, “Without the contemplative perception of the Holy Spirit's activity 'in us', the history of Christ 'for us' does not come alive.”<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, what I am proposing in this thesis is a kind of spiritual *ressourcement*<sup>23</sup> for evangelicals where I probe the riches of Ignatian Spirituality and especially the Spiritual Exercises in order to invite evangelicals into a similar experience of interior freedom. While the differences between 21st Century evangelicalism and a 16th Century Catholic Saint seem vast on the surface, when we begin to dig we'll discover that St. Ignatius may be the ideal voice from the past to invite evangelicals into the depths of the spiritual tradition.

Ignatius was a perennial outsider, even in his own day. The exercises were formulated prior to his formal theological education in Paris and prior to his being ordained to the priesthood. The exercises do not require someone learned in the Bible or Theology, they simply require someone to come with their Bible and a hunger for more. Indeed, so simple and egalitarian was Ignatius' vision that he was hauled before the inquisition on multiple occasions on the accusation of being an *alumbrado* which was a term often used synonymously in Spain for Lutherans.<sup>24</sup> While Ignatius was not a reformer in the same sense that

---

<sup>22</sup> Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, 63-64.

<sup>23</sup> Chris Armstrong, “The Rise, Frustration, and Revival of Evangelical Spiritual Ressourcement,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 113–121.

<sup>24</sup> O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 27-28.

Luther, Calvin and others were reformers, he was a reformer within the Catholic Church. He was a reformer to the extent that it was only through forming some powerful friendships in the church hierarchy and through the famous pledge of absolute obedience to the Pope in the constitutions of the Society of Jesus that the Jesuits were able to survive beyond Ignatius' lifetime. It took nearly 500 years but the spirituality of Ignatius has brought significant reform to the Catholic Church both through The Second Vatican Council<sup>25</sup> and now through Pope Francis, the first Jesuit Pope.

Now it may be time for this most unlikely of figures to bring reform to another stream of Jesus' Church. Only this isn't the reform we're accustomed to; it's the reform or renovation of the heart, it's the radical experience of interior freedom grounded in the love of Jesus. I believe it's only as the Church and its human leaders enter into this experience of interior freedom that the Christian faith can survive the chaos and confusion of this century.

So to explore these riches, we'll proceed in chapter two to explore the nature of "interior freedom." We'll listen to the voices of those Jesuits and Ignatian practitioners from the past and present who have explored Ignatius' vision of interior freedom. We'll also dive into the depths of the history of the Christian contemplative tradition and discover that while Ignatius has a unique

---

<sup>25</sup> While it would be wrong to reduce Vatican II to a Jesuit initiative, some of the leading voices of Vatican II including Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar were the spiritual heirs of Ignatius.

process which prepares the ground of one's life to receive the gift of interior freedom, he is far from the first or only person in the tradition to talk about this reality. As we'll discover, interior freedom is the hallmark and measuring stick of any healthy spirituality.

We'll also discover that the Christian contemplative tradition is not the only tradition to identify and value freedom. The psychological world has also discovered that this freedom, articulated in the language of differentiation of self, is central for healthy individuals and communities. Indeed, there is much that the contemplative world in general and Ignatian spirituality in particular has to offer psychology about how to form differentiated people while psychology has much to offer the spiritual tradition about how to harness freedom to lead healthy, non-coercive change in our spheres of influence.

In chapter three, we'll dive into the biblical and theological articulations of interior freedom. While "interior freedom" is not a biblical term *per se*, it is present in the life of the Godhead and spills over into a healthy anthropology as the theological tradition wrestles with what it means to be a human being made in the *Imago Dei*. The Apostle Paul, in particular, harnesses interior freedom to exhort the church at Philippi into this experience as a part of his apostolic oversight of the Philippians. Similarly, we'll explore what it looks like in the 21st

century for interior freedom to shape a non-coercive, non-manipulative ministry and leadership in the life of a local congregation.

Chapter four will outline and then explore the project that forms the heart of this thesis. I invited seven women and men from my own context, Santa Cruz Bible Church, to journey with Jesus for 32 weeks in a full 19th Annotation retreat of the Spiritual Exercises. The results were beyond my expectations and demonstrate, as we will see, that there is rich potential for evangelicals to receive the gift of interior freedom through the vehicle of the exercises.

Finally, chapter five will round out this thesis by naming what I believe are some of the normative fruits of missional leadership shaped by interior freedom, both at the personal/individual level and the corporate/systemic level. Yet again, the vision is of a leadership that emerges from and is shaped by the non-grasping love of God that honors and respects people in their creatureliness as image bearers of God. We'll conclude by pointing out two major directions for future research: First, how would younger evangelicals in their 20's and 30's receive the gift of the exercises? Lastly, recognizing there is a huge need for whole and healthy pastors, I believe the exercises have great potential to be a critical piece in the process of ministerial formation whether at the seminary level or the denominational/network level.

As we embark on this journey, I think it's appropriate to cite the *Anima Christi* prayer which St. Ignatius loved so much. It's traditional in published editions of the exercises to include the prayer before the beginning of the formal exercises. I think it's relevant to include it here as well. This is the paraphrase of the *Anima Christi* done by Joseph Tetlow for his version of the exercises,

I choose to breathe the breath of Christ  
that makes all life holy.  
I choose to live the flesh of Christ  
that outlasts sin's corrosion and decay.  
I choose the blood of Christ  
along my veins and in my heart  
that dizzies me with joy.  
I choose the living waters flowing from his side  
to wash clean my own self and the world itself.  
I choose the awful agony of Christ  
to charge my senseless sorrows with meaning  
and to make my pain pregnant with power.  
I choose you, good Jesus, you know.  
I choose you, good Lord;  
count me among the victories  
that you have won in bitter woundedness.  
Never number me among those alien to you.  
Make me safe from all that seeks to destroy me.  
Summon me to come to you.  
Stand me solid among angels and saints  
chanting yes to all you have done,  
exulting in all you mean to do forever and ever.  
Then for this time, Father of all,  
keep me, from the core of my self,  
choosing Christ in the world.  
Amen.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Tetlow, S.J., *Choosing Christ in the World: A Handbook for Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola According to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen*, Studies on Jesuit Topics Series 4, no. 12 (Saint Louis, MO: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1999), 3.

## Chapter 2: Interior Freedom in the Traditions

*“Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”*

-David Fleming, S.J.<sup>27</sup>

*“May I never seek nor choose to be other than You intend or wish.”*

-Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and Sister Marie Schwan<sup>28</sup>

As a 500-year-old tool, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola have aged remarkably well. Since Vatican II, there has been a proliferation of resources, not merely for the seasoned spiritual director, but also for the lay person, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. There are so many avenues of research to be explored in the grand cathedral that is Ignatian Spirituality that this project will have to content itself with exploring one strand, albeit a central one, of the Ignatian tradition, namely interior freedom.

To proceed, we’ll begin with an examination of interior freedom in the thought of Ignatius as it appears in the Spiritual Exercises with assistance from various contemporary Jesuit and Ignatian authors. From this foundation, we will then go back and examine the resonances of Ignatian interior freedom with the concept of *apatheia* in the early church, especially through the writings of Evagrius Ponticus and St. Symeon the New Theologian. We will then journey

---

<sup>27</sup> David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises—A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (Saint Louis, MO: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1996), 27.

<sup>28</sup> Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and Sister Marie Schwan, *Forgiveness: A Guide for Prayer* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), v.

forwards again to fill out a definition of interior freedom through an exploration of how contemplatives outside the Ignatian tradition have understood it. Finally, we will conclude with a survey of the psychological concept of differentiation of self and its further resonances with interior freedom.

## INTERIOR FREEDOM IN THE IGNATIAN TRADITION

Interior freedom is the preferred term among contemporary Jesuits for Ignatius' term *indiferencia*, which in the more literal translations of the exercises is translated with the English term "indifference."<sup>29</sup> It first appears in the *Exercises* 23 in the section known as the "Principle and Foundation" which, as the name implies, lays out the foundational principles and guiding assumptions of the process of the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian Spirituality as a whole. In Ivens' literal translation, the Principle and Foundation reads:

The human person is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by so doing save his or her soul; and it is for the human person that the other things on the face of the earth are created, as helps to the pursuit of this end.

It follows from this that the person has to use these things in so far as they help towards this end, and to be free of them in so far as they stand in the way of it.

To attain this, we need to make ourselves indifferent towards all created things, provided the matter is subject to our free choice and there is no prohibition. Thus for our part we should not want health more than sickness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life

---

<sup>29</sup> Presumably, Interior Freedom is preferred to indifference in normal, pastoral, usage because of the negative and somewhat misleading connotation of "indifference" in the English language.

more than a short one - and so with everything else; desiring and choosing only what conduces more to the end for which we are created.<sup>30</sup>

Indifference or interior freedom is central to Ignatius' vision of life in Christ as the means by which a human being is able to live into glorifying God as the purpose for their creation and existence. Without indifference, it is impossible to live towards this end.

With interior freedom being such a critical piece of Ignatius' vision, we must understand what it means in his thought. From the Principle and Foundation (henceforth, P&F), we see that it is an interior posture of the soul that allows us to be free of any attachments. This then leads to an external freedom to choose whatever life circumstances we are directed towards by God's will.<sup>31</sup> In this way, Ignatian indifference is much different than the detachment found in Eastern traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Taoism.<sup>32</sup> Rather than being a static state of freedom from attachments, Ignatian indifference is primarily and critically indifference to everything but the will of God. Thus there is a clear God-ward focus to Ignatius' vision at this point.

---

<sup>30</sup> Michael Ivens, S.J., *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1998), 29.

<sup>31</sup> As will become clear, Ignatius did not understand God's will in terms of meticulous sovereignty or even primarily as something to follow in an external, moralistic way. Rather, for Ignatius and the tradition that follows him, the will of God is understood primarily through the lens of God's love. God desires that creatures be grasped and radically transformed by God's love.

<sup>32</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (New York: Harper One, 1991), 118-119.

Commenting on indifference in the P&F, George Ganss writes that it means:

Undetermined to one thing or option rather than another; impartial, unbiased; with decision suspended until the reasons for a wise choice are learned; still undecided. In no way does it mean unconcerned or unimportant. It implies interior freedom from disordered inclinations. It is a key technical term of Ignatius' spirituality. To his examples of indifference it is often wise to add some which are fully under the control of our free will, such as: whether to become a physician or a banker;; whether to read a book or go to a lecture. Ignatius' own examples often fall outside our power to choose.<sup>33</sup>

Far from being a passive attitude of the soul, indifference is an active choice. It involves a deep knowing of one's self and inner attachments so that we can allow God's grace to sever the attachment. The result is a radical freedom from anything internal or external so that we no longer are prone to thoughtless reaction to the circumstances of life but are free to discern and choose the path that will deepen our experience of union with God.

Some of the contemporary paraphrases of the P&F bring out this sense of interior freedom more clearly than the old and somewhat stilted style of Ignatius. For example, David Fleming's contemporary paraphrase reads:

God who loves us creates us and wants to share life with us forever. Our love response takes shape in our praise and honor and service of the God of our life.

---

<sup>33</sup> Ignatius of Loyola and George Ganss, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 151.

All the things in this world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts, presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily.

As a result, we show reverence for all the gifts of creation and collaborate with God in using them so that by being good stewards we develop as loving persons in our care for God's world and its development. But if we abuse any of these gifts of creation or, on the contrary, take them as the center of our lives, we break our relationship with God and hinder our growth as loving persons.

In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all created gifts insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some responsibility. We should not fix our desires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God.

Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me.<sup>34</sup>

Fleming's reading of the P&F brings out another element that's central to Ignatian interior freedom, the right ordering of desire. In harmony with the best of the Reformed tradition, Ignatian Spirituality has a robust and non-dualistic appreciation for the original goodness of the created order. Everything God has created is good and sacramental and thus has the potential to lead human beings into a deeper encounter with God's love and transforming presence. This is echoed in the analysis of Dyckman, Garvin and Liebert who write of the theology of the P&F,

God is not distant from the universe but a sustaining presence in all of creation. God's presence is not inseparable from creatures (pantheistic) but present and involved with the universe while still being independent

---

<sup>34</sup> Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 27.

of it (panentheistic). The universe is pregnant with the presence of God whose creative action is at the heart of the evolutionary process.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in the P&F we also observe an internal/external tension that is integral to the Ignatian tradition and is why the first Jesuits chose to think of themselves as “contemplatives in action.”<sup>36</sup> If it is true that God’s relationship with the world is to be conceived of as panentheistic,<sup>37</sup> then God is not to be found solely or even primarily in the interior experience but in the midst of everyday life as we live amongst the good creation. Therefore, while this interior freedom is an inner experience of the soul, within a Christian anthropology it is clear that it must manifest itself in an outward indifference or ambiguity towards any particular life circumstance or state.

This indifference is illustrated during the “Second Week”<sup>38</sup> of the exercises in the contemplations on the three types of people (*Exercises* 149-157).

---

<sup>35</sup> Katherine Dyckman, Mary Garvin, and Elizabeth Liebert, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 98.

<sup>36</sup> See: William A. Barry, S.J. and Robert G. Doherty, S.J., *Contemplatives in Action: The Jesuit Way* (New York: Paulist Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> We must distinguish what we mean by *panentheism* from the kind of modern *panentheism* promoted by Alfred North Whitehead and others where all things are ontologically part of God but God extends beyond them. Rather, we should understand *panentheism* more in the sense that Christian neoplatonists have used it meaning that God indwells all things but they are not ontologically a part of Him. This seems to be consistent with what Paul affirms as he quotes Epimenides in Acts 17:28, “For in him we live and move and have our being.” See John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 44-50.

<sup>38</sup> Keep in mind that in a 19th Annotation retreat of the Spiritual Exercises, the four “weeks” of the exercises don’t correspond to a seven day period but are rather like four movements in the dynamics of the exercises.

Ignatius asks us to imagine three types of people through the lens of a story.<sup>39</sup> Three people each receive an inheritance of 10,000 Ducats, a sizable fortune for the time.<sup>40</sup> While these people haven't necessarily come by this money honestly, they love God and desire to be free of attachment to money. The first person wants to be free of the love of money and genuinely intends to pursue that freedom but constantly gets distracted with the busyness of life and dies without having tasted of that freedom. The second person likewise genuinely wants to experience freedom from attachment to the money and so experience union with God and a realization of God's desires. They may do a lot of good things for God with their life but their desire for the money keeps them from fully facing the block that money represents to their freedom. The third and last person faces their attachment to the money and brings themselves to the point where they could truly take or leave the money because their desire is no longer for the money but only to respond wholeheartedly to the will of God. This, according to Ignatius is true, interior freedom.

Paraphrasing Ignatius, David Fleming writes of the third person,

This person says: "I would like to be rid of any attachment which gets in the way of God's invitation to a more abundant life. I am not sure what God is asking of me, but I want to be at a point of balance so that I can

---

<sup>39</sup> Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 116-119.

<sup>40</sup> Ignatius believed that a student at the time could live in Paris for 50 Ducats per year making the sum of 10,000 Ducats the equivalent of 200 years of a student's living expenses. See Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 115.

easily move in the direction of God's call. My whole effort is to be sensitive to the movements of God's grace in my life and to be ready and willing to follow God's lead." This type of person makes efforts neither to want to retain possessions nor to want to give them away unless the service and praise of God our Lord is the God-given motivation for action. As a result, the graced desire to be better able to serve God becomes clearly the motivating factor for accepting or letting go of anything.<sup>41</sup>

In this illustration, Ignatius shows us how interior freedom is the freedom from all attachments other than to the will of God and the desire for union with the Godhead. A person experiencing this freedom would be equally at peace with a fortune or with nothing, a prestigious and powerful job or no job at all, the love and affection of people in their life or people's disdain. The interior attachment to those things has been broken so that a person becomes less reactive to their circumstances and solely responds to the revelation of God's will and desires for them.

A final key illustration of interior freedom as conceived by Ignatius comes in the final contemplation of the Spiritual Exercises known as the Contemplation on the Love of God.<sup>42</sup> This contemplation serves as the culmination of the entire process of the Spiritual Exercises, and in it the retreatant reviews all the gifts they have received from God, especially through the course of the Exercises. In the

---

<sup>41</sup> Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 119.

<sup>42</sup> Ignatius, *Exercises* 230-237. See Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 175-181.

contemplation, Ignatius suggests a prayer for the retreatant which has become known as the *Suscipe*.<sup>43</sup>

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.<sup>44</sup>

In a very real sense, the goal of the entire process of the Spiritual Exercises is to be able to pray this prayer wholeheartedly as an expression of one's true desire. To pray it in this way is a genuine and courageous act of interior freedom in that it requires the retreatant to have a certain measure of freedom from their attachments and a willingness to hold loosely to their possessions or circumstances in order to receive and experience an increasing measure of God's love and grace.

In this way, interior freedom could be described in terms of divine or mystical union.<sup>45</sup> The goal of Ignatius and those who follow in his way is a freedom from those interior attachments that keep us from being aligned with and responding in freedom to God's will. In fact, the will of the one who "companions" Jesus should be so increasingly aligned with Jesus' that the two

---

<sup>43</sup> *Suscipe*, which in English is "receive," is the first Latin word in the prayer. It stems from *suscipio* see John C. Traupman, *The Bantam New College Latin & English Dictionary - Revised and Enlarged* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 409.

<sup>44</sup> Ignatius, *Exercises* 234:4. See Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 177.

<sup>45</sup> Louis Peeters, S.J., *An Ignatian Approach to Divine Union*, trans. Hillard Brozowski, S.J. (Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956).

wills progressively merge into one desire. Karl Rahner describes this aspect of interior freedom when he writes of the *Suscipe*, "Whoever commits himself to God the way he is supposed to with the help of grace and by using the three powers of the soul, enters into the Trinitarian life of God Himself. If this love is carried by the Spirit of God and his grace, then it will bring us into communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>46</sup>

It could be possible to interpret this interior freedom and Ignatius' *Suscipe* prayer in terms of an interior experience alone, a kind of desire for an experience of God's love and grace poured out while the exterior world fades away. Yet, this is emphatically not the heart of Ignatius' vision. As we've already pointed out, there is a key interior/ exterior dynamic here where what is begun in one's own interior experience must, if it is genuine, find external expression in neighbor love. Otherwise, the grace of the *Suscipe* hasn't been received.

This interior/ exterior dynamic is beautifully expressed in this prayer of Adrienne von Speyr, a 20th century devotee of St. Ignatius' way. She prays,

Lord, set me free and take me to yourself. You have shown me the chains that hold me back from my way, and if they still exist to hinder me, it is for no other reason than that in my heart of hearts I am not yet willing to detach myself from them.

How often I moan and groan and regret having so little freedom, whereas all I really mean are the obligations that daily life and my profession entail; but these obligations do not really block my path, they

---

<sup>46</sup> Karl Rahner, S.J., *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker, S.J. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 272.

do not affect its essential course, at most its outer form; if anything, they are perhaps just little tests.

What weighs so heavily does not come from outside; it lives and takes shape in my own self—I mean everything to which I am attached, which I am not disposed to renounce, which serves me as a crutch and a convenience, everything to which I believe I have a right.

Take, Lord—I am trying to ask you for this sincerely—everything that in my eyes is part of my rightful spiritual property, but that paralyzes my love for you, that makes your love for my neighbor stop flowing and freeze solid.

Let me disappear in the flow of your love to all men, so that it can pour itself out unhindered. *Amen.*<sup>47</sup>

von Speyr envisions the love of God as a kind of flow in which we get caught up and lost. Any attachments or compulsions we may have serve to block the flow of God's love through us to other people. In this analogy, the role of a human being is to be a conduit of God's love to other human beings and the experience of interior freedom is the openness of the conduit for the love of God to flow.

The *Suscipe* viewed through the two lenses we've used, interior freedom and union with God for the sake of the world, is expressed so clearly by Hans Urs Von Balthasar,

Metaphysically speaking (and, all the more so, christologically speaking), a creature is all the freer, the more it has a share in the freedom of God. But God's freedom is one that has truly emptied itself.... the "return" and "regress" of the creaturely to the absolute freedom of God is the act in which alone the creature can find its autonomy, self-being and mission.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Adrienne von Speyr, *With God and With Men: Prayers*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 54-55.

<sup>48</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises: An Anthology*, ed. Jacques Servais, S.J., trans. Thomas Jacobi and Jonas Wernet (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019), 216.

As we conclude this brief overview of indifference or interior freedom in the tradition of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, how can we sum up this Ignatian vision of interior freedom? Interior freedom is that state of the soul which, through the grace of God and in response to God's love, is able to be at a place of non-reactivity because attachments to any person, thing, or situation in life have been severed. This severing doesn't result in a detached aloofness to life, but rather provides the freedom for a person to choose to receive love from and respond in love to whatever circumstances come their way.

This, I believe, is the core of Ignatian Spirituality and the beating heart which has given so much life to those who have followed in the way of Ignatius down through the last five centuries. What's key to notice in our survey of the Ignatian tradition's view of interior freedom or indifference through the Exercises is that this freedom is born out of love and is the precondition for love in a person. To be free in one's interior is necessary for genuine love for God and neighbor to flourish.

As we proceed to the next movement in this study, it will be important to bear in mind this connection between love and indifference because there are some strong resonances between the vision of Ignatian indifference and the ancient spirituality of ἀπάθεια (*apatheia*).

## FREEDOM IN EVAGRIUS AND THE DESERT TRADITION

ἀπάθεια is the Greek word which has been translated as *impassibility* in English Systematic Theology and primarily refers to an attribute of God described by the patristic fathers and mothers of the Church. Much popular theological discourse, especially in the 20th century, understands this attribute to refer to God's lacking a capacity to suffer and, indeed, even lacking emotion.<sup>49</sup> This theological concept, according to much modern thought, is derived from Greek philosophy and not from the Hebrew and Greek scriptures.<sup>50</sup> As a result, much of contemporary theology rejects impassibility as an attribute of God as a lack of emotionality would seem to contradict the biblical witness to the emotional life of God and especially the experience of suffering and death that Jesus, the Son of God, experiences in His ministry.<sup>51</sup>

Yet a closer examination of the patristic sources leads to a much different conclusion. In a landmark study, Paul Gavrilyuk argues that the theory that the doctrine of impassibility is more derived from pagan, especially Stoic, philosophy than the Biblical witness doesn't stand up to the available evidence.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 165-166.

<sup>50</sup> As one of the most vocal representatives, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 21-23.

<sup>51</sup> See Richard Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology," *Themelios* 9, no. 3 (1984): 6-12; Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 21-60.

<sup>52</sup> Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21-46.

Rather, Gavriilyuk's research shows, "Orthodox theologians regarded qualified divine impassibility as being compatible with certain God-befitting emotions and with the incarnate Word's suffering in and through human nature. For the orthodox divine impassibility functioned as an apophatic qualifier of all divine emotions."<sup>53</sup> J.I. Packer helpfully expresses this same opinion in a more lay-friendly way as he argues,

God has no *passions*—this does not mean that he is unfeeling (impassive) or that there is nothing in him that corresponds to emotions and affections in us, but that whereas human passions —especially the painful ones, fear, grief, regret, despair—are in a sense passive and involuntary, being called forth and constrained by circumstances not under our control, the corresponding attitudes in God have the nature of deliberate, voluntary choices, and therefore are not of the same order as human passions at all.<sup>54</sup>

It is clear from even a passing familiarity with the Christian scriptures that the God of Israel who is present in Jesus is emotional and that this God suffers pain as a result of human sinfulness and brokenness which culminates in the suffering and death of Jesus on a lonely Roman cross on Golgotha. But in light of a more careful reading of the patristic sources, we may say that the fathers and mothers of the early church who held to a doctrine of *apatheia* would not reject the thought of God's emotionality or even of God suffering. Rather, what emerges from the picture of *apatheia* is a God who is free and non-reactive. Every emotion

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>54</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 121.

the Divine Being feels, every action the Godhead takes in the world, including and especially the suffering and death of Jesus, is deliberate and chosen. God is not reactive, nor is God a passive victim as we are. The creator-creature distinction affords God a kind of differentiation<sup>55</sup> from the creation, not so that God may remain aloof and distant, but so that God can choose the emotions appropriate to the unfolding of the creation in history and choose the action that is most consistent with the Divine Nature of Love.

The reason for this digression into patristic theology proper is so that we can understand the spirituality of *apatheia*. The primary understanding of salvation in the patristic period was *theosis* or deification; that salvation is a restoration of the *Imago Dei* such that through union with Christ, we can be caught up into the Divine life and become partakers of the Divine nature.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, if *apatheia* is a key attribute of God, then for a Christian undergoing *theosis*, typically through the practice of contemplative prayer and/or other ascetic practices, *apatheia* would be one of the key marks we would expect to find in someone undertaking this journey of the soul. This is precisely what we find in

---

<sup>55</sup> An important term that we will return to at the close of this chapter.

<sup>56</sup> The Biblical basis for this understanding of salvation stems from passages such as 2 Peter 1:4. This gets expounded on in the patristic era, see for example Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54 (Behr). This eventually becomes the dominant mode of articulating the nature of salvation in the Eastern Churches, see Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1957; repr., Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 114-134.

the tradition. Listen to Lossky as a key representative of the Eastern mystical tradition to the West:

The contemplation of this absolute perfection, of this divine plenitude which is the Trinity—God who is personal and who is not a person confined in his own self—the very thought, the mere ‘pale shade of the Trinity’, lifts the human soul beyond the world of being, changing and confused, in bestowing upon it this stability in the midst of passions; this serenity, or *ἀπάθεια* which is the beginning of deification. For the creature, subject to change by nature, can by grace attain to the state of eternal stability; can partake of infinite life in the light of the Trinity.<sup>57</sup>

One of the earliest practitioners to make this connection between the theology of *apatheia* and a spirituality of *apatheia*<sup>58</sup> was the theologian turned desert ascetic, Evagrius Ponticus. Evagrius was a rising star in the Eastern Church due to his penetrating intellect and his close association with the Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>59</sup> Yet through a series of crises, he renounced his life at the center of the Church and Empire in Constantinople and took up the life of early monasticism in Egypt. There he became the first figure to write extensively on the spirituality of the desert fathers and mothers and “the first to reduce to a

---

<sup>57</sup> Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 48.

<sup>58</sup> Such a distinction between theology and spirituality is anachronistic to Evagrius’ time, yet I use it here to aid the contemporary reader.

<sup>59</sup> John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO, introduction to *The Praktikos & Chapters On Prayer*, by Evagrius Ponticus, Cistercian Studies Series 4, trans. J.E. Bamberger, OCSO (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1972), xxv-xxix.

system a monastic ascetic and mystical theology which included many elements of desert wisdom.”<sup>60</sup>

As Evagrius began to systematize the spirituality of the desert in such works as *The Praktikos*, he gave *apatheia* a primary place in the system as the “immediate aim of ascetic practice.”<sup>61</sup> In the Introductory Letter to Anatolius of the *Praktikos*, Evagrius reports of the words that the desert fathers speak over young monks as the monk’s habit is conferred on them,

The fear of God strengthens faith, my son, and continence in turn strengthens this fear. Patience and hope make this latter virtue solid beyond all shaking and they also give birth to *apatheia*. Now this *apatheia* has a child called *agape* who keeps the door to deep knowledge of the created universe. Finally, to this knowledge succeed theology and the supreme beatitude.<sup>62</sup>

As the first charge a new monk would hear in the Egyptian desert, this shows the importance of *apatheia* for desert spirituality, certainly before Evagrius but also fueled by his theological and spiritual insight. Indeed, in *Praktikos 2* Evagrius writes, “The Kingdom of Heaven is *apatheia* of the soul along with true knowledge of existing things.”<sup>63</sup> So immediately, Evagrius connects *apatheia* with the “fear of God” which is a strong motif of the Hebrew Scriptures which sums

---

<sup>60</sup> Bamberger, introduction, xli-xlii.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxiii.

<sup>62</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos & Chapters On Prayer*, Cistercian Studies Series 4: trans. J.E. Bamberger, OCSO (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

up the life of faith for ancient Israel. Then, he also connects it to the “Kingdom of Heaven” which is one of the gospel writer’s favorite terms for the new order which is inaugurated in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In other words for Evagrius, *apatheia* is an essential virtue to cultivate in the Christian journey of faith.

Two observations are important here as we tease out exactly what Evagrius means by *apatheia*: first, Evagrius tells us that love (*agape*) is the child of *apatheia*. This indicates that *apatheia*, whatever else it refers to, is a state of the soul that enables love to flow. Frances Young puts it this way, “I recognize that I really need *apatheia* in order to love properly. Love requires a degree of detachment, an ability to let the other person be, to be ‘other’, to be what they are rather than what you want them to be.”<sup>64</sup> Second, by placing such a strong emphasis on *apatheia* at the head of his discussion of *praktike*, Evagrius signals that *apatheia* is not merely an internal state enjoyed by those who use contemplative practice to shut out the world; rather, it is necessary to the active life of faith in the world.

So *apatheia* enables one to live a life in the fear of God, a life marked by unconditional love for others. But what exactly is *apatheia* in this scheme of spirituality? In *Praktikos 58*, Evagrius gives us an experiential definition that should sound familiar by now, “Beyond any doubt, the ability to drive away the

---

<sup>64</sup> Frances Young, *God’s Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 293.

thought of vainglory through humility, or the power to repel the demon of impurity through temperance is a most profound proof of *apatheia*.”<sup>65</sup> We must understand here, Evagrius has been discussing how to battle what he calls eight kinds of evil thoughts: gluttony, impurity, avarice, sadness, anger, *acedia*, vainglory, and pride. These are what Evagrius refers to as the passions. As such, they represent disordered attachments or disordered desires of the soul. Evagrius’ counsel for fighting these disordered attachments is through the application of the opposite. So, as in *Praktikos 58*, the way to fight vainglory is through the cultivation of humility. Likewise, the way to fight impurity is through temperance. And it is this state of being held in tension between two poles such as vainglory and humility that Evagrius calls *apatheia*.

For Evagrius and the Desert Tradition, *apatheia* is opposed to the passions. He writes in *Praktikos 87*, “The man who is progressing in the ascetic life diminishes the force of passion.... As regards the passions, the time will come when they will be entirely destroyed.”<sup>66</sup> This is the perfect state of *apatheia*. Now it’s important to remember that the passions are not the same as emotions. Rather, the Fathers and Mothers of the Church understood them more in the sense of disordered desires.

---

<sup>65</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos & Chapters On Prayer*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

So Evagrius is concerned at the heart of his spirituality with the growth and development of *apatheia* in the soul which enables a person to be free of disordered desires and which, in turn, frees them to love God and others. Evagrius makes this clear and brings these threads together in *Praktikos 81*, “*Agape* is the progeny of *apatheia*. *Apatheia* is the very flower of *ascesis*. *Ascesis* consists in keeping the commandments. The custodian of these commandments is the fear of God which is in turn the offspring of true faith.”<sup>67</sup>

A practical example of *apatheia* at work in the spiritual life is given by St. Symeon the New Theologian. Written nearly 600 years after Evagrius, this demonstrates the power of the desert tradition in the monasticism of the East and the enduring recognition of *apatheia* as essential to the life of faith. St. Symeon insists, contrary to the current of monasticism in his day, that a monk who experiences “true dispassion” should be able to talk to or dine with a woman without having the passions aroused in him. He writes,

All Scripture and history bear witness that it is possible for someone among those who truly struggle to arrive at such great freedom and, having become once for all a participant of God’s grace, to attain to a dispassion [*apatheia*] of soul and body such that, not only does he remain untroubled and dispassionate while dining and conversing with women, but suffers moreover no injury while circulating in the middle of towns, and hearing singers and guitar players, and seeing people laughing and dancing and amusing themselves. The acts of the saints provide us with

---

<sup>67</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos & Chapters On Prayer*, 36.

such testimonies, and the pious engage in every ascetic practice and mortification precisely for the sake of this blessed condition.<sup>68</sup>

This apathetic tradition of the Christian East bears some hallmark resemblances to the indifference of Ignatius Loyola centuries later. For Evagrius, like Ignatius, maturity is represented by being able to hold oneself in tension between two or more different states or scenarios. For each, the power to do this comes from having been freed from disordered attachments of the soul, so that one can choose to respond in the way of love for God and neighbor rather than react. The resonance is clear in Frances Young's succinct description of *apatheia*,

*Apatheia*, which Evagrius believes is never actually attained in this life, should be understood as 'emotional integration', or that detachment which is essential to true love. It is nearer than appears at first sight to cultivating a well-balanced personality. It means never acting against one's better judgment, or giving way to fears, anxieties, depression, desires or bad temper.<sup>69</sup>

So two key strands of the Christian contemplative tradition—desert spirituality represented by Evagrius and Ignatian Spirituality—have very similar understandings of the nature of interior freedom even if different language is used to describe this state and different pathways are described for progressing

---

<sup>68</sup> St. Symeon the New Theologian, *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 2, *On Virtue & Christian Life*, Popular Patristics Series 15, trans. Alexander Golitzin (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 65. While St. Symeon here may sound sexist to contemporary ears, he's responding to the context and view of women in which he was situated in turn of the millennium Greek monasticism. His view of women is empowering in that he locates the problem of disordered passion (lust) with the male monks and not with the women they encounter.

<sup>69</sup> Frances Young, *God's Presence*, 292.

towards this state. Now we turn to three representatives of the Christian contemplative tradition outside these two streams to see what additional resonance there is within Christian spirituality. We will briefly look at St. Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, and Martin Laird.

## THE CHRISTIAN CONTEMPLATIVE TRADITION ON FREEDOM

### Saint Teresa of Avila

St. Teresa of Avila's best known work, *The Interior Castle*, describes the journey of the soul towards union with God through the metaphor of a castle that has seven mansions within it. Each mansion of the castle could roughly be described as a stage or period of the spiritual journey.<sup>70</sup>

The seventh mansion represents the experience of love and security in union with Christ. Though, as her description makes clear, this isn't a state of sinless perfection and isn't meant to be understood as a merely eschatological experience. For our purposes, Teresa's description of the state of the soul in this mansion resonates deeply with what we've discovered about *apatheia* and Ignatian indifference. Listen to her own words, "This is a soul who is growing increasingly detached from all things, wishing only to be alone or engaged in helping some other soul. She no longer suffers from inner aridity or strife. She

---

<sup>70</sup> This journey of the soul through the seven mansions is never strictly linear and, as St. Teresa herself would well recognize, such a schema is more heuristic than exacting.

dwells in gentle remembrance of our Lord and cultivates the most tender love for him. All she wants to do is praise him!”<sup>71</sup>

For Teresa, like her contemporary Ignatius, the experience of union with God doesn't lead to a kind of cloistered detachment from the world and its concerns. Rather, for her this experience leads to a desire to see others experience the love of God and so praise God. She also describes these souls in the seventh mansion saying,

What surprises me is that now they are overcome with an equally fervent desire to serve him, to celebrate him, to benefit any other souls if they possibly can. Not only are they no longer interested in dying, but they have a wish to live for many, many years and suffer the most intense trials if it means that they can contribute to the praising of the Lord in even the smallest way.<sup>72</sup>

This is an excellent description of what Ignatius would recognize as indifference to everything but the will of God. For Teresa, this happens only out of the experience of divine union. Ignatius would likely agree, although he himself doesn't explicitly use this kind of language in his *Exercises*.

One other interesting resonance in the seventh mansion comes in Teresa's description of how God comes alongside a timid soul to grow the courage of detachment. She writes, “When he [God] sees a timid soul, he presents her with some kind of severe trial that opposes her own will, and then he helps her to bear

---

<sup>71</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, trans. Mirabai Starr (New York: Riverhead Books, 2003), 279.

<sup>72</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, 278.

it in such a way that she grows from the experience. The soul understands this later and it alleviates her fear, allowing her to offer herself to him more willingly."<sup>73</sup>

This description bears much similarity to what we've seen in both Evagrius and in Ignatius. Growth in detachment comes through the application of the opposite. Though for Evagrius, the emphasis is more on the ascetic practice and contemplative prayer as the means of applying the opposite. While I'm sure Teresa would not object to the application of prayer and practice in the quest for the freedom of detachment, her emphasis is more on the sovereign working of God. For Teresa the difficult circumstances of life, which are somehow mysteriously allowed by God, come as Divine messengers to free us from the tyranny of the Will or Ego, so we can offer ourselves more freely to God's love.

While Teresa was a compatriot and a contemporary of Ignatius, how do these descriptions of interior freedom resonate with the work of more recent mystics? Thomas Merton in the 20th Century and Martin Laird in the 21st give us some insightful glimpses into the experience of interior freedom.

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 288-289.

## Thomas Merton

Thomas Merton was among the greatest spiritual writers of the 20th century. Although his life was tragically cut short while on a trip to Thailand in 1968, his influence has lived on and even expanded through his writings. One of his more mature works is *New Seeds of Contemplation* where he devotes three meditations to the experience of freedom.

In a meditation entitled *Freedom Under Obedience*, he writes, "The highest freedom is found in obedience to God. The loss of freedom lies in subjection to the tyranny of automatism, whether in the capriciousness of our own self-will or in the blind dictates of despotism, convention, routine or mere collective inertia."<sup>74</sup> This echoes Ignatius' vision that freedom is indifference to everything but the will of God. Yet Merton adds a key observation from the vantage point of the 20th Century that what enslaves us may be personal, but it may also be social and systemic.

Yet those systemic enslavements gain their power because of our internal attachments. Merton goes on to say, "One of the most common of illusions is that by asserting my own caprices against the dictates of authority, I am manifesting my own freedom. I am acting 'spontaneously.' This is not true spontaneity, and it

---

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, (1962; repr., New York: New Directions Books, 2007), 196.

does not lead to genuine freedom.”<sup>75</sup> From his perspective, we may choose to act either with or against the prevailing winds of culture, but that, in and of itself, doesn’t mean we experience freedom. That’s because the true freedom or enslavement is internal and to our attachments. Even the most uninhibited counterculturist of the 60’s could still be a slave to their attachments, no matter how liberated their external behavior.

What then is true freedom according to Merton? He defines it in this way, Only the will of God is indefectible. Every other freedom can fail and defeat itself by a false choice. All true freedom comes to us as a supernatural gift of God, as a participation in His own essential Freedom by the Love He infuses into our souls, uniting them with Him first in perfect consent, then in a transforming union of wills.<sup>76</sup>

Here, Merton picks up on a key theme in Evagrius’ spirituality, namely that our genuine freedom is a participation in God’s own freedom, God’s *apatheia* that we experience through our own union or *theosis* with God. There is a second element in this description that is worth noting. God never draws us into Divine union without our consent. Like Mary responding to the Angel Gabriel, God respects creaturely freedom but then through the mystical transformation of union, so aligns our wills with God’s so as to be one will. This vision beautifully blends the Ignatian vision of indifference to anything but the will of God with a vision of divine union that is implicit under the surface in the *Exercises*.

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 200.

Furthermore, Merton keys in on one more subtle but important aspect of the experience of interior freedom, namely that even attachment to perceived goods such as contemplative prayer, religious experience, peace, or recollection are still attachments that bind us and prevent us from experiencing the true freedom of God's will. Merton writes,

You will never be able to have perfect interior peace and recollection unless you are detached even from the desire of peace and recollection. You will never be able to pray perfectly until you are detached from the pleasures of prayer. If you give up all these desires and seek one thing only, God's will, He will give you recollection and peace in the middle of labor and conflict and trial.<sup>77</sup>

This vision of freedom is radical and bold, and yet it's a necessary caution for all, especially those who are already journeying along the contemplative path, whether through its Ignatian or Desert forms.

### **Martin Laird**

Finally, we come to Martin Laird, a contemporary Augustinian friar who teaches patristics at Villanova University. As a Roman Catholic with deep roots in patristic and desert spirituality, Laird has written three books that are guides for the contemplative path. In his most recent work, *An Ocean of Light*,<sup>78</sup> Laird describes a pattern of the deepening of the practice of contemplative prayer that

---

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Laird, *An Ocean of Light: Contemplation, Transformation, and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

offers a unique vision of interior freedom and resonates with what we've learned on our journey so far.

In *An Ocean of Light*, Laird describes the deepening of contemplative practice as going from what he calls Reactive Mind, to Receptive Mind, and finally to Luminous Mind. Much like St. Teresa's mansions, we shouldn't understand these mind states as sequential steps. Rather, they are experiences that indicate to us that our practice is deepening and we are more and more experiencing God in the here and now.

In describing the Reactive Mind, Laird writes,

Reactive mind is characterized by a compulsion to acquire as well as a throttling need to progress towards mastery. It is what we embarrassingly call our normal way of life, shaped by a culture that feeds on compulsion, consumption, conquest, credit, and cash. Reactive mind serves to keep God at bay even as we desire God all the same. Inconsistency and contradictions are its daily bread.<sup>79</sup>

Laird doesn't use the language of attachments here, but this is what he's describing— interior and exterior attachments that lead us to react to circumstances and stimuli rather than freely choosing our response in line with God's will.

The next mind state, Receptive Mind, marks a progression in the life of contemplation. Here, the "Receptive Mind differs from reactive mind by virtue of expanding inner stillness and spaciousness, intrinsic to awareness itself, which

---

<sup>79</sup> Martin Laird, *An Ocean of Light*, 62.

can now emerge more fully, due to the decluttering process of the practice of contemplation.”<sup>80</sup> This decluttering is a process by which the mind relaxes and becomes less reactive to the thoughts and stimulus that constantly bombard it. In this state, the attachments are beginning to be broken.

Finally comes what Laird calls the Luminous Mind. This is the fruit of a deepening practice of contemplation. He describes this deepening saying,

Over many seasons of practice, layers of clutter are removed by the liberating dynamism of stillness itself. What is revealed is a vast, dimensionless floor space cleared of clutter, a space that we have perhaps never before seen. This clear floor space is and has always been the radiant ground of all: luminous mind, full and flowering, always present, pure, and simple.<sup>81</sup>

This is beautiful, apophatic language and yet, it is described as a liberation, a freeing of the mind, heart, and soul through the contemplative practice of silence and stillness. He goes on to describe the practice in Luminous Mind as “free of any strategy to acquire, possess, and control. We let be what is (pain, gratitude, joy, desperation), without comment or quarrel.”<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 166.

While we don't want to iron out the differences between Laird's perspective and that of Ignatius,<sup>83</sup> we notice that this description of Luminous Mind resonates deeply with Ignatian interior freedom. Attachments by definition involve strategy, acquiring, possessing, controlling. Interior Freedom is a freedom to let be what is because it is the will of God in the trust that this God comes to us in love through the "what is-ness" of life.

After our all too brief survey of interior freedom in the Christian spiritual tradition, we may now ask whether there is any correspondence between what these great spiritual masters have seen and experienced about freedom and what a contemporary, evidence-based psychology says about human freedom. While a complete survey of modern psychological theory is beyond the scope of this chapter, there is a specific modality in psychotherapy called Family Systems Theory that has a concept called "differentiation of self" that resonates with what we've seen on interior freedom in the Christian tradition.

---

<sup>83</sup> Laird's contemplative perspective and practice deeply reflects the apophatic tradition of spirituality, that God cannot be contained by created words or images and so must be experienced most fully in silence, stillness, and absence. The *Spiritual Exercises* is a textbook example of kataphatic spirituality, in that it relies on words, thoughts, images, and sensual experience. While on the surface, it would seem that there's much that differs between the apophatic tradition and the kataphatic tradition, as we've seen, there may be more inner coherence than it first appears. In conversations with several Jesuit priests, each reports a common experience that the imaginative Ignatian Contemplation tends to give way to a period of silent contemplation that has much in common with what Laird describes. Interestingly, in *Exercises* 258, Ignatius describes a method of prayer in which a prescribed prayer, such as the *Our Father*, is united to the rhythm of the breath. Presumably Ignatius had some sort of knowledge of the apophatic tradition of prayer, potentially even through the Al-Andalus Sufi tradition. See Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 130.

## DIFFERENTIATION OF SELF IN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Family Systems Theory was pioneered by Murray Bowen in the 1950's and quickly gained traction as it recognized that psychopathology rarely occurs in isolation but is often related to the family system in which an individual is raised.<sup>84</sup> One of Bowen's early students was a Rabbi named Edwin Friedman who applied the insights of Family Systems Theory to family-like networks such as churches and synagogues.

A key insight of this approach is to recognize that the pathologies that manifest in an individual are often the manifestation of the anxieties of the system to which the individual belongs. Anxiety is the core problem and travels in family systems like a virus, infecting everyone it touches because of the attachment or connection between each part of the system and the whole. This is where differentiation comes in. According to Edwin Friedman,

Differentiation means the capacity of a family member to define his or her own life's goals and values apart from surrounding togetherness pressures, to say "I" when others are demanding "you" and "we". It includes the capacity to maintain a (relatively) nonanxious presence in the midst of anxious systems, to take maximum responsibility for one's own destiny and emotional being. It can be measured somewhat by the breadth of one's repertoire of responses when confronted with crisis.... Differentiation means the capacity to be an "I" while remaining connected.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> *APA Dictionary of Psychology* s.v. "Family Systems Theory," 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2015), 411.

<sup>85</sup> Edwin Friedman, *From Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985), 27.

A family system has certain ways of being, doing, relating, and responding. A person without self-awareness when confronted with an anxiety provoking situation will react according to the sub-conscious patterns of the system. This anxiety then spreads throughout the system provoking similar anxious reactions in each member of that system. As reactions, these responses usually are determined below the level of awareness because of the ingrained patterns and attachments of the system. Differentiation then is the capacity of an individual to choose their response to anxious stimulus or the anxiety of the system without being infected to the point of a thoughtless reaction.

Because of this tendency that systems have towards anxiety, Family Systems Theory believes that the most important job of the leader is to be differentiated, that is to be a nonanxious, non-reactive presence. Steve Cuss, a pastor who has written and thought extensively about Family Systems work, describes it this way,

Differentiation is the ability to be fully yourself while being fully connected to people. It is gaining clarity on where “I” end and the “other” begins. A differentiated person allows space between herself and another, even when that other person is highly anxious or asking for rescue. A differentiated leader is clear on her own values and convictions and is not easily swayed from them.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup> Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 119.

The challenge for a differentiated leader in an anxious system is that the first reaction of the system will always be to sabotage and to draw the differentiated one back into the anxious loop.<sup>87</sup> As Friedman points out, this is always an unconscious reaction, a systemic response due to the anxiety and attached nature of the system.<sup>88</sup> This becomes the true challenge for the differentiated leader,

Here is the moment of truth; will the leader have the capacity to maintain his or her differentiation? This is not the same as being unwilling to compromise or move back a little. A reciprocal, unthinking “twitch” on a leader’s part will cause him or her to forget both goals and purpose. It will return the organism to its previously undifferentiated state, and no evolution will result. Similarly, any leader can maintain his or her position by taking a rigid dogmatic stand or by cutting himself or herself off, but from that moment on, the leader is no longer a leader, only a head.<sup>89</sup>

So differentiation is the ability within a system to hold oneself in tension between the extremes of enmeshment and detachment, remaining connected and yet maintaining one’s own identity apart from the system.<sup>90</sup>

While again not wishing to flatten out the differences, there are some telltale resonances between this description of differentiation of self and interior freedom from the Christian spiritual tradition. First, we recognize the non-reactivity that is characteristic of indifference and *apatheia*. Family Systems

---

<sup>87</sup> Edwin Friedman, *From Generation to Generation*, 230.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety*, 119.

Theory makes a contribution in recognizing that the attachments which fuel our reactions are inherently social, formed by the family systems of our growing-up years and by whatever social group we come to participate in as adults. There is an inextricable connection between our inner attachments and our outer world. The Christian tradition contributes to Family Systems Theory pathways (i.e. *The Spiritual Exercises* and other forms of contemplative prayer and practice) that enable a leader to remain differentiated in the midst of an anxious system.

Second, we recognize in the description of differentiation the familiar concept of being held in tension between the poles of enmeshment and complete detachment. This is a form of Ignatian indifference, preferring not one or the other, but maintaining one's own identity despite the pressures both within and without to either give into or detach from the system.

What we've come to see in this short survey of interior freedom is that there is a key thread of this spirituality throughout the Christian Tradition that is also being confirmed as psychologically necessary for navigating the world of adult life. In the next chapter, we'll take this concept from the world of theory and work out why we are desperate for this kind of freedom in the life, ministry, and mission of the Church.

### Chapter 3: Interior Freedom in Ministry and Mission

*“All true freedom comes to us as a supernatural gift of God, as a participation in His own essential Freedom by the Love He infuses into our souls, uniting them with Him....”*

-Thomas Merton<sup>91</sup>

*“Evangelization gives you a filial dependence, that is, it makes you free and able to grow. Proselytizing gives you a servile dependence at the level of the conscience and the society. The dependence of the evangelized person, the ‘filial’ dependence, is the memory of the grace that God has given you. The proselyte instead depends not as a child, but as a slave, who in the end does not know what to do unless he or she is told.”*

-Pope Francis<sup>92</sup>

On Friday, February 7, 2020, *Christianity Today’s* Kate Shellnutt broke the news that Acts29 CEO Steve Timmis had been removed from his role in the church planting network for “a pattern of spiritual abuse through bullying and intimidation, overbearing demands in the name of mission and discipline, rejection of critical feedback, and an expectation of unconditional loyalty.”<sup>93</sup> Acts29 was started in the late 1990’s as a church planting movement that sought to marry missional church praxis with Calvinist theology in line with what has come to be called the Young, Restless, and Reformed or New Calvinist

---

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 200.

<sup>92</sup> Pope Francis, “‘The Sovereignty of the People of God’: The Pontiff Meets the Jesuits of Mozambique and Madagascar,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 26 September 2019, [https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/#\\_ftn5](https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/#_ftn5).

<sup>93</sup> Kate Shellnutt, “Acts 29 CEO Removed Amid ‘Accusations of Abusive Leadership’,” *Christianity Today*, 7 February 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/february/acts-29-ceo-steve-timmis-removed-spiritual-abuse-tch.html>.

movement.<sup>94</sup> I first came to be connected to Acts29 in 2006 while I was involved with a church plant in the Los Angeles area. As I began to learn about the movement and what it stood for, I jumped in with both feet since it seemed like the perfect expression of my own Calvinist soteriology combined with the convictions I was developing around missional ecclesiology. As a solid Enneagram 1, the idealism and the energy that radiated from this movement drew me in and I committed everything to the path of missional church planting through Acts29.

Eventually, I came to be influenced by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, two leaders of a hybrid traditional/house church movement in Sheffield, UK called The Crowded House. Their books *Total Church*<sup>95</sup> and *Everyday Church*<sup>96</sup> painted a vision of what the church on mission, centered on the gospel could look like that appealed deeply to my idealistic, younger self. Their influence in my life grew as I joined a sub-movement within Acts29 called Soma Communities,<sup>97</sup> whose leaders were also deeply influenced by the vision of *Total Church* and *Everyday*

---

<sup>94</sup> Collin Hansen, "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is Making a Comeback-And Shaking Up the Church," *Christianity Today*, September 2006, 32-38. Accessed 26 May 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 2008).

<sup>96</sup> Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 2012).

<sup>97</sup> For Soma's distinctive way of living out Gospel, Community, and Mission see: "Our Distinctives," Soma, n.d., accessed 26 May 2020, <https://wearesoma.com/our-distinctives/>.

*Church* and attempted to live out this kind of everyday life of discipleship and mission in Tacoma, WA and beyond. My wife and I moved to Tacoma in 2010 to learn and train with Soma with the desire to eventually be sent out by them to plant a Soma-style church in Los Angeles.

We spent three years with Soma, and while we were shaped there in so many beautiful, life-giving ways and developed so many wonderful relationships we still treasure, it was clear they would not support me planting a church because I didn't fit their profile of a church planter and leader.<sup>98</sup> Still, Soma deeply shaped how I thought and in many ways still think about the Church, about Mission, about the gospel, and about leadership. What I learned there set the course for much of my first 4 years in Santa Cruz at Santa Cruz Bible Church.

It was here in Santa Cruz where, from my own place of deep brokenness, sense of failure, and abuse I experienced in ministry, my journey into therapy and Christian contemplative spirituality slowly began to change my perspective about what ministry and mission could look like. To be clear, Steve Timmis isn't

---

<sup>98</sup> Soma adopted a perspective on leadership common in Pentecostal circles called the Five-Fold Ministry or APEST drawn from the gifts listed by Paul in Ephesians 4:11-13. Their interpretation of this grid meant that only "Apostolic" leaders should plant churches. Since I self-identified with the "Prophetic" gifting, I was no longer seen as a suitable church planting candidate. Furthermore, I was told in private conversation that I didn't have a "leadership gift". For more on APEST, see Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*, Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series 57 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012).

alone in the kind of abusive leadership he practiced. There are plenty more well-known examples, not just in Acts<sup>29</sup> but in Evangelicalism as a whole, but I have come to realize that so much of the way we have been formed to think about and embody Church, leadership, and mission come from places of deep insecurity, fear, need for control, manipulation, and coercion. This leads to a kind of grasping after anything we can hold on to in order to steady ourselves in the chaos of ministry. We have a dire leadership crisis.

I have both experienced and witnessed pressure exerted on lay leaders in the church to act and lead in ways that don't feel right, natural, or free in order to "advance the mission." I have seen the ways in which differences of opinion or perspective aren't respected but rather used as tools to shame or even guilt people into a particular brand of missional living and discipleship. I have even witnessed and, sadly, participated in ways of "applying the gospel" to people's hearts that pile up guilt and shame rather than relieve it.

For people in the church body, this leads at best to a lack of freedom and at worst to out and out spiritual, emotional, and/or sexual abuse. But those who suffer from this controlling style of leadership aren't just the laypeople. The increasing

rates of pastoral burnout, depression, and suicide<sup>99</sup> tell us the way we have been formed as leaders is doing incalculable damage to our own souls and not just to the churches whose care we've been entrusted with. There must be an alternative; there must be a better way!

What I hope to show in this chapter is leadership in Jesus' Church, if it is to be true spiritual leadership, must emerge from a leader's own experience of interior freedom and draw the people she leads into their own experience of interior freedom. The leadership to which Jesus is inviting us will always be free, non-manipulative, and non-coercive. I believe that when we can recover this kind of leadership in the way of Jesus, His mission will advance in ways and places that we never could have thought possible.

We will proceed with a discussion of how our human freedom is rooted in the very freedom that the Godhead experiences in the triune life. We'll tease this out through reflection on two key passages in the New Testament, as well as the recent theological tradition. From there, we'll explore what leadership that partakes in the divine freedom will look like as it is formed through the container

---

<sup>99</sup> As I was writing a previous chapter of this thesis, a good friend of mine from Soma who had since become essentially the Lead Pastor for Soma Tacoma died by suicide. The primary reason given for his suicide was diagnosed PTSD from his tours as a U.S. Army Ranger in Iraq and Afghanistan. While I know that to be true, I can't help but suspect the pressures of leading a church in decline with impossible expectations likely fueled his rapid mental/emotional deterioration. For more on this phenomenon from a mental health professional see Robert Stewart, "Seeking to Understand the Rise, Fall, and Loss of Young Pastors," [ChuckDeGroat.net](https://chuckdegroat.net/2020/05/20/guest-post-seeking-to-understand-the-rise-fall-and-loss-of-young-pastors-by-robert-stewart/), 20 May 2020, <https://chuckdegroat.net/2020/05/20/guest-post-seeking-to-understand-the-rise-fall-and-loss-of-young-pastors-by-robert-stewart/>.

of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Finally, we'll return to the field of Family Systems Theory to explore how Ignatian Spirituality combines with the insights of this branch of psychology to paint a picture of leadership in freedom.

### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

In his meditation entitled "What is Liberty?" Thomas Merton writes, "All true freedom comes to us as a supernatural gift of God, as a participation in His own essential Freedom by the Love He infuses into our souls, uniting them with Him first in perfect consent, then in a transforming union of wills."<sup>100</sup> If all our freedom as human beings, image bearers of God, is participation in God's own essential freedom, then we need to begin by exploring the freedom in which God exists and relates to the creation. Since God is always most clearly revealed to us in Jesus the Messiah who is God's true image, our Biblical reflection will focus on two key texts, one from the Apostle Paul's consideration of Jesus' life and ministry in Philippians 2 and the other from the Synoptic Gospel's account of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed.

Building on the survey of the spiritual and psychological tradition in ch. 2, we can define God's freedom as the ability to choose to be self-giving in love according to God's own nature in any moment as opposed to being reactive or self-protective. In other words, God is free and has no attachments other than to

---

<sup>100</sup> Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 200.

God's own nature and will. As we come to Philippians 2:5-11, I believe this is the point Paul is trying to make about the nature of God. The key verses for our purposes are vv. 6-7 which read:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited, [οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ]  
but emptied [ἐκένωσεν] himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness (NRSV).

Most scholars recognize that this pericope is a pre-existing hymn that Paul has adapted for his rhetorical point.<sup>101</sup> Whether or not Paul was the original author of the hymn remains a point of debate and also makes the interpretation of this hymn more challenging. The key is in understanding the meaning and relationship between the statement οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ in v. 6 and the verb ἐκένωσεν in v. 7. The amount of ink spilled on the interpretation of these verses is immense.<sup>102</sup> To summarize for our purposes, I take the first phrase, οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, to mean that Christ in his pre-existence had every right to grasp or exploit Christ's own position of power and authority within the Godhead but, as God, chooses not to do this. The verb

---

<sup>101</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians Revised*, Word Biblical Commentary 43 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 99-104.

<sup>102</sup> For an overview of the main views see: N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 56-98; Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 5-11.

ἐκένωσεν in vs. 7 then explains and further clarifies the previous statement.

Rather than grasping and holding onto power, authority, and privilege, the Second Person pours himself out [my gloss of ἐκένωσεν] in self-giving love as the remainder of the hymn makes clear. Within the upside down economy of God, this is not weakness, it's actually strength; it's not a loss of glory—it adds to the glory of God!

This passage shows us not just something about the God-Human, Jesus the Messiah, but it gives us a glimpse into the very nature of God—that God does not wield power and authority for God's own benefit, at least not in the ways we normally think of benefitting ourselves. As N.T. Wright summarizes the thrust of this passage, "The real theological emphasis of the hymn, therefore, is not simply a new view of Jesus. It is a new understanding of God. Against the age-old attempts of human beings to make God in their own (arrogant, self-glorifying) image, Calvary reveals the truth about what it meant to be God."<sup>103</sup> This truth about the nature of God revealed in Phil 2 is that God is utterly free in the sense that the Persons of the Trinity are not constrained or attached to receiving praise, honor, or maintaining certain rights. This freedom manifests in God's self-giving love and it is paradoxically this very self-giving love that leads

---

<sup>103</sup> Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 84.

to praise, honor, and glory, as we see in the denouement of the Christ-Hymn in v. 11.

Interestingly, Paul introduces this new understanding of God in order to exhort<sup>104</sup> the church in Philippi towards living in this same manner. Contextually, we are to understand that this exhortation is made possible by virtue of our union with Christ.<sup>105</sup> So we see that this free, non-grasping nature of God is also to be manifested in our lives as we live increasingly into our union with God in Christ.

This free, non-grasping love of God is manifested throughout the life of Jesus, but perhaps it is no more powerfully on display than in the scene of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night He was betrayed. This scene is narrated in each of the Synoptic Gospels, but for our purposes here, we'll be following the account in Mark's Gospel found in ch. 14 vv. 32-41.

Mark's narrative has been moving quickly but begins to slow down and more deliberately inhabit the narrative of the final days of Jesus in chapter 14, beginning with the pericope of the Last Supper. Following the meal and Jesus' prediction that the disciples would all fall away and be scattered, they go to

---

<sup>104</sup> See the imperative verb φρονεῖτε translated by the NIV as "have the same mindset".

<sup>105</sup> See vs. 1 - Εἴ τις οὖν παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ, εἴ τι παραμύθιον ἀγάπης, εἴ τις κοινωνία πνεύματος. Note Paul's characteristic ἐν Χριστῷ which signals he is talking about mystical union (and from an Eastern perspective *theosis*) and all that flows from this reality.

Gethsemane. Jesus brings Peter, James, and John with him away from the rest of the group and asks them to keep watch with him while He prays.

Jesus' internal world was in chaos in this moment as the narrative says that he was "distressed" (ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι) and "agitated" (ἀδημονεῖν). We discover the reason in the content of His prayer in v. 36 as He prays, "*Abba*, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want" (NRSV). Jesus recognizes the desire of at least part of Himself to avoid the torture, humiliation, suffering and death of crucifixion that lay ahead of Him.<sup>106</sup> Yet Jesus, even more than He wants to avoid a horrific death, desires God's will be done. So, He freely, though with great difficulty, submits Himself to the will and plan of God. He is in a place of "indifference to anything but the will of God"—a phrase we recognize by now as distinctly Ignatian but echoed thematically throughout the history of healthy spirituality.

This is the outworking of Jesus' own profound statement on the nature of power just a few chapters prior in Mark 10:35-45. Jesus' company is traveling to Jerusalem where, they believe, He will begin the glorious revolution and usher in the Kingdom of God in the power of populist, military, and political might. As they travel, the disciples begin to argue amongst themselves about who will occupy the places of greatest honor in Jesus' Kingdom. It is here that Jesus

---

<sup>106</sup> I'm leaning here on the distinction between the two natures of Christ. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 256.

subverts fallen human conceptions of power and honor telling the disciples that rather than “lording” power over those under their authority, the way of the Kingdom of God is upside down. In this kingdom even Jesus “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NRSV). What makes this passage so profound is not merely that Jesus hints at the coming crucifixion, which is astounding enough by itself. Indeed, the passage is subversive because Jesus doesn’t say He’s laying down power, rather He believes He’s exercising it truly and rightly: in service of others!

These representative scenes from the life of Jesus confirm our reading of Philippians 2, that Jesus’ non-grasping, self-emptying love isn’t just a feature unique to the Second Person of the Trinity but provides a window into the nature of God Himself. Jesus came to reveal God as Karl Rahner has reminded us in his now famous dictum, “The ‘economic’ Trinity is the ‘immanent’ Trinity and the ‘immanent’ Trinity is the ‘economic’ Trinity.”<sup>107</sup> Yahweh, the God revealed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, is revealed most clearly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And this revelation shows us a God who is supremely free, free from the attachments of the creaturely realm, free to love and give Himself in love wholly for the good and flourishing of weak and vulnerable people.

---

<sup>107</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 22.

The freedom that we see in Jesus is, as Rahner points out, the extension of the inner life of Trinitarian relations in the Godhead. Our Christian tradition teaches that the one God eternally exists in three persons. Each Person of the Trinity is distinct from the other two and yet each exists in the life of the other two, a doctrine that has come to be called *perichoresis* or coinherence. While this remains a mystery to us, it tells us that the being of God is dynamic rather than static. Many have suggested a dance as an appropriate analogy to help us understand the kind of dynamic nature of the relations in the God-head.<sup>108</sup> For our purposes here, it's important to see that the dynamic nature of this Trinitarian dance is self-giving love; no Person of the Trinity prefers themselves over the other Persons. Rather, there is a constant pouring out of each life and love into the lives of the other Persons. Just as the flow is poured out, it is poured back in through the mutual self-giving love of the others and in this way the Trinity exists in a communal flow of love.<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup> This is not to commit the etymological fallacy that *perichoresis* is derived from the same root as our modern word "choreography." Rather, it's simply a Trinitarian analogy that has its limits like any other good analogy.

<sup>109</sup> I'm assuming here what has come to be called "Social Trinitarianism" where the essence of *hypostasis* is understood as relationship. I understand that this is to wade into the territory of heated contemporary debate about the nature of the Trinity. For a contemporary pioneering work arguing the social Trinitarian view see: Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). For a more recent critique of both social trinitarianism and older hierarchical conceptions of the Trinity see Sarah Coakley's chapter "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion" in Coakley, *Powers and Submissions*, 109-129.

This is the very nature of God's freedom. God is attached to nothing other than to the divine nature, which is self-giving love. This is how Moltmann describes it in his social doctrine of the Trinity:

Where his self, his truth and goodness is concerned, God by no means has the choice between mutually exclusive possibilities. For he cannot deny himself. So he does not have the choice between being love and *not* being love. If he is love, then in loving the world he is by no means 'his own prisoner'; on the contrary, in loving the world he is entirely free because he is entirely himself. If he is the highest good, then his liberty cannot consist of having to choose between good and evil. On the contrary, it lies in doing the good which he himself is, which means communicating himself.<sup>110</sup>

Viewed from the perspective of libertarian freedom, God is constrained by the Divine nature, which manifests in the will to self-giving love. From this angle, God is a prisoner to Himself. However, Moltmann points out that God is being true to God's own nature in the self-giving love of the three Divine Persons and that this trueness to Himself is really the height of freedom.

This is also a manifestation of what we discovered about the *apatheia* of God in the previous chapter. The *apatheia* of God is not being unemotional but rather God's interior freedom to be indifferent to anything but the Divine nature, which I have already described as self-giving love. This is how the three Divine Persons are able to freely pour out their love to each other without holding back, without any restraint. This is also what affords God the freedom to respond in

---

<sup>110</sup> Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 54-55.

self-giving love to creatures made in the *Imago Dei* rather than reacting or being under any kind of internal constraint due to attachment.<sup>111</sup>

This freedom is not only communicated to within the Godhead. We see in Genesis 1 that this freedom overflows the banks of the Trinity and is imparted to human beings who are created in the *Imago Dei*, in the very image of the Trinity—though this image is marred through the Fall which came in part, through the temptation to a false kind of freedom, libertarian freedom. However, in Jesus the image is being restored as we return to the ground of our being, the self-giving love of God. In the process of sanctification or *theosis* women and men come to share once again God’s divine freedom. This is the freedom which we urgently need to recover in the life of the Church and its leaders. To the Ignatian Tradition’s account of how this freedom shows up in the lives of church leaders is where we must now turn.

### IGNATIAN FREEDOM FOR MINISTRY

Commenting on the Philippians 2 passage we have already examined, Sarah Coakley writes, “What Christ... instantiates is the very ‘mind’ that we ourselves enact, or enter into, in prayer: the unique intersection of vulnerable, ‘non-grasping’ humanity and authentic divine power, itself ‘made perfect in

---

<sup>111</sup> Though Moltmann explicitly rejects the doctrine of God’s Impassibility or *apatheia*, it’s interesting that his discussion of it comes strikingly close to the definition I offer here that seems to be supported by the Patristic sources. See Moltmann, *The Trinity and The Kingdom*, 23.

weakness.”<sup>112</sup> She represents the Christian contemplative tradition well that the way we receive the divine life, the way we partake of the very freedom of the Divine Persons is through the vehicle of prayer. This Divine Life, as we have seen, manifests itself as “vulnerable” and “non-grasping.” It is a kind of power, but it is upside down from the power that the world wields; it is power made perfect in weakness.

So as we place ourselves in the container of prayer, especially for our purposes prayer as Ignatian contemplation, how does the growth in interior freedom show up in everyday life and leadership in Christian ministry? In other words, what does leadership that is formed through prayer into non-grasping freedom look like?

I won’t claim to have the ultimate answer to that question. However, I do have my own experience of how my leadership has been reshaped as I’ve pressed into my own interior freedom through contemplative prayer, especially with the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*. As I look back over my prayer journals, four key themes have emerged for me that I suspect are among the normative shifts for those who regularly and intentionally encounter God in the space of contemplative prayer. These four themes are:

---

<sup>112</sup> Coakley, *Power and Submissions*, 38.

1. Increasingly leading others as I follow Jesus instead of leading strictly from strategy
2. Increasingly valuing growth in depth over growth in numbers
3. Increasingly moving toward a place of solidarity with the marginalized of the world instead of aligning with the rich and powerful
4. Increasingly engaging in mission including evangelism instead of engaging in proselytism

We'll explore each of these shifts in turn, but before we do, I want to briefly revisit what we mean by interior freedom in the Ignatian tradition. Remember, interior freedom is that state of the soul which, through the grace of God and in response to God's love, is able to be at a place of non-reactivity because attachments to any person, thing, or situation in life have been severed. This severing doesn't result in a detached aloofness to life, but rather provides the freedom for a person to choose to receive love and respond in love to whatever circumstances come their way. As we have already seen, this state of the soul comes about through a participation in God's own essential freedom.

Many of the ways that ministry can degenerate into manipulation and coercion are traceable to a lack of interior freedom. When a pastor is free, their decisions, actions, and ways of being in ministry are in response to the will of God, which is always according to the way of self-giving love demonstrated in Jesus. When a pastor lacks freedom, their decisions, actions, and ways of being in

ministry will be determined by whatever attachments are operating beneath the surface of their life. As such, many, if not all, of a pastor's decisions will be reactionary, pre-determined in a sense, by his or her interior attachments rather than freely chosen by a heart indifferent to anything but the will of God. When this happens a leader, consciously or unconsciously, will use their power to marshal everyone in their sphere of influence towards serving the leader's interior attachments rather than serving God and the world in love. This is the height of manipulation and coercion. So, this freedom to respond rather than react,<sup>113</sup> which is a hallmark of interior freedom, is absolutely essential for leadership in the way of Jesus. This freedom will undergird each of the four hallmarks of leadership in freedom that I will discuss below.

### **Leading Others As I Follow Jesus**

It goes without saying that a leader is someone people will follow. What is seldom discussed is that a leader is someone who follows well. The problem for leaders is the Ego or False Self has a death-grip level attachment to what Susan Howatch called the "glittering image"<sup>114</sup>; the sense of self that comes from being seen as a strong, "godly," competent leader. In our era, this frequently means that the leader must have a strong sense of purpose and direction in which he and, by

---

<sup>113</sup> The language of responding rather than reacting is a feature of Family Systems Theory and is a useful tool to shed light on Ignatian interior freedom. We'll return to an explicit discussion of Family Systems at the close of this chapter.

<sup>114</sup> Susan Howatch, *Glittering Images* (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1988).

extension, the church are supposed to go. This sense of movement and direction the leader has is supported by means of power and control, often expressed through strategy.

Now don't misunderstand me, strategy is important and has its place. It's just that strategy is always an expression of the deepest desires of our hearts. For strategy to be good and true, it must grow in the soil of hearts formed deeply by God's love manifested in Jesus. Discerning Jesus' presence and following Him must precede strategy if strategy is ever to help us press into the in-breaking reality of the Kingdom of God. As Henri Nouwen observed in his beautiful little book, *In the Name of Jesus*, "If there is any hope for the Church in the future, it will be a hope for a poor Church in which its leaders are willing to be led."<sup>115</sup>

This is precisely, though, where things get challenging. The picture of a strong leader in our world today, including the Church, doesn't include being led. The strong leader has a clear vision of where to go and marshals all the resources of his organization to accomplish that vision. In the ministry world, the bigger and more "God-sized" the vision, the more compelling it supposedly is. In reality what the instances of abuse and burnout seem to show us is that these dreams and visions aren't "God-sized" but rather "Ego-sized" and are really about propping up our fragile egos through the appearance of success.

---

<sup>115</sup> Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 64.

In the economy of the Kingdom, strategy, vision, alignment, organization, and staffing can't guarantee results. When there is success as the ministry world defines it (greater attendance, more giving, bigger buildings, etc.), it often bears very little, if any, of the hallmarks of the Kingdom as Jesus describes it in places like the Beatitudes or the parables. Where is the poverty of spirit? Where is meekness? Where is the slow, almost imperceptible growth of the mustard seed? These are the true "God-sized" visions.

I and the vast majority of ministry leaders today have been formed in the culture where the leader is expected to be the strong man with all the answers. Many of us have tried and failed to live up to those expectations. Those that do live up to the expectations often do so at great cost to their own souls and the souls of those around them. So how do we make this shift from the strongman leader to the one gently led by Jesus?

Once we reach the point where we're asking this question, we're finally prepared to receive the wisdom of Ignatius and the *Spiritual Exercises*. In the 19th Annotation of the *Exercises*<sup>116</sup>, retreatants spend an hour every day asking the Holy Spirit to lead them into an experience of the gospel stories of Jesus' life.

---

<sup>116</sup> The 19th Annotation was a note that Ignatius made in his *Exercises* that said that men and women who, because of everyday obligations, could not devote 30 days full-time to the experience of the *Exercises* should be allowed to make a retreat in everyday life. This expands the *Exercises* from 30 days to 32-34 weeks with prayer from an hour to an hour and a half each day, plus regular meetings with a spiritual director. See *Exercises* 19 in Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 18-19.

Through their imaginations, participants journey with Jesus and so learn to be His companions as they follow Him throughout His ministry to announce the Kingdom of God and effect the salvation and restoration of the entire world. This alone would be powerful indeed, but the participants are also invited to enter into dialogue with Jesus<sup>117</sup> around their emotional reactions to the scene, to ask Him (or other characters in the scene) questions, to receive Jesus' input and so continue the journey with Him.

As I engaged with this, I noticed that I became more aware of my attachments, those places where something other than love for God was holding me back from a wholehearted embrace of Jesus and His mission. In addition, the daily practice of the Prayer of Examen invited me to begin to notice where those attachments showed up in my daily life so I could invite the Spirit to grow my freedom day by day as I learned new ways of showing up in life, empowered by God's love and grace.

After nine months of this daily experience, I felt as if I knew Jesus in a truly personal way. I sensed I could discern His voice, and I heard it not only in my hour prayer sit but also increasingly in my daily life. I also began to notice I could see the telltale signs of His presence at work in the world. And slowly but

---

<sup>117</sup> In the Ignatian tradition, this is called the Colloquy.

surely, this began to reorder my priorities from what served my *missio ego*<sup>118</sup> to simply joining Jesus where He's already at work around me. This requires a daily attentiveness and many days the ego and its mission win out, but there has been a steady shift away from desires for comfort, security, safety, greatness and an equally steady movement towards following Jesus wherever He leads, whatever the cost.

Another dynamic connected to this is the ability to wait and be still. Like many pastors and ministry leaders, I tend to be action-oriented and find it difficult to wait. However, the journey of learning to be led by Jesus sometimes involves growing in my capacity to wait until I have clarity on direction from Him. A strategy will have goals associated with it that require near constant action. Jesus will often invite us into action along with Him, but there will also be times when He will invite us to simply be, to wait in a place of interior freedom between two or more directions and allow Him to love us there until He invites us to move.

These dynamics are why Ignatius named the order that flowed from the spirituality of the *Spiritual Exercises* the *Companions of Jesus*.<sup>119</sup> The defining mark of the life of a Jesuit is their willingness to accompany Jesus and follow Him

---

<sup>118</sup> An excellent phrase I'm borrowing from my friend, Ryan Kuja. See his book: Ryan Kuja, *From the Inside Out: Reimagining Mission, Recreating the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018), 58-61.

<sup>119</sup> This is the literal meaning of what is translated into English as "The Society of Jesus."

wherever He leads them. For all those who have been shaped by the spiritual container that is the *Exercises*, the interior freedom that grows out the experience with Jesus is explicitly so that we can companion Jesus in the midst of our everyday lives, taking our direction from Him and not from our own wisdom.

Henri Nouwen beautifully sums up this kind of leadership as being led by Jesus,

I am speaking of a leadership in which power is constantly abandoned in favor of love. It is a true spiritual leadership. Powerlessness and humility in the spiritual life do not refer to people who have no spine and who let everyone else make decisions for them. They refer to people who are so deeply in love with Jesus that they are ready to follow him wherever he guides them, always trusting that, with him, they will find life and find it abundantly.<sup>120</sup>

Each of the other hallmarks of leadership driven by interior freedom flow from this, an ability to be so free of interior attachments that I am free to follow wherever Jesus leads me. This leads to our next hallmark of a free leadership: valuing depth instead of numbers.

### **Valuing Depth**

Attend any evangelical pastor's conference<sup>121</sup> and the conversation among pastors will inevitably lead to the size of the congregation they lead. This is so common it's become a cliché. More than even budgets and buildings, the number

---

<sup>120</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 63-64.

<sup>121</sup> For Mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in the U.S., I assume this happens less than in evangelical circles, but is still quite normal.

of people that attend a church on a Sunday morning is seen as the ultimate mark of success for a church and a pastor.

Certainly the growth of the Kingdom is an important topic in scripture. Many of Jesus' parables discuss growing things in the natural world as pictures of the growth of God's Kingdom on Earth. The Acts of the Apostles even records the numerical growth of the Church at key points in the narrative. Surely we should be excited as the good news about Jesus goes out, as the Kingdom advances, as more and more women and men come home to the love of God in Jesus.

Yet, it is the rare church that grows through conversion growth. Take my community of Santa Cruz, CA which, along with the entire San Francisco Bay Area, is among the most post-Christian communities in the US.<sup>122</sup> In the 2010 Census, Protestant Christians made up 7.2% of the population in Santa Cruz County.<sup>123</sup> This is a minute increase from the 2000 census<sup>124</sup> and indicates that the population of Protestants in Santa Cruz County has essentially remained unchanged in that period and we have no reason to suspect any significant shifts in the results of the 2020 census. However, in the last 20 years existing churches

---

<sup>122</sup> "Churchless Cities: Where Does Your City Rank?," Barna Group, 1 May 2015, accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/churchless-cities-where-does-your-city-rank/>.

<sup>123</sup> "Santa Cruz County, California," [City-Data.com](http://www.city-data.com). n.d., accessed August 18, 2020, [http://www.city-data.com/county/Santa\\_Cruz\\_County-CA.html](http://www.city-data.com/county/Santa_Cruz_County-CA.html).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

have grown while others declined and several churches have been planted in the community. Yet if, as the data suggests, Christians have not increased as an overall percentage of the county community then the churches with all the growth strategies and missional outreaches have merely reshuffled the deck of Christians in our community. Our strategies for attracting more people seem to be most effective at merely attracting other Christians or, at best, people who were de-churched for a season.

Furthermore, when the New Testament concerns itself with numbers, as in the Acts of the Apostles, it is never because the church was seeking numerical growth but always because they were seeking faithfulness to Jesus. Consider Acts 2:42-47 where the Apostles weren't seeking the growth of the church in Jerusalem. The text says that the early church devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to community, to breaking bread, and to prayer—hardly the “formula” that any church growth strategist would suggest to a church in post-Christian America. Yet the text continues to tell us that “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47 NRSV).

What if in our desire to attract people to church in hopes of introducing them to Jesus, we've actually moved away from the upside-down Kingdom power that was so attractive to onlookers in the ancient Jewish and Roman worlds? This is, I believe, why the great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner wrote,

“The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has experienced ‘something,’ or he will cease to be anything at all.”<sup>125</sup> Shaped as he was by the *Spiritual Exercises* and the spirituality of Ignatius, this assertion makes perfect sense.

David Fleming memorably paraphrases Ignatius from his Principle and Foundation when he says, “Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”<sup>126</sup> As we have already seen, “God’s deepening life in me” is characterized by His non-grasping love, an interior freedom that enables a person to truly desire God’s life in them as their only desire and one choice. This can be true for us because it is God’s deep desire for us.

A strange paradox emerged in my experience of the *Exercises*; the more I let go of a desire to “make an impact” and simply pressed into the necessary work of letting Jesus sever my attachments to anything that’s not His love, the more my influence grew. This isn’t the kind of big, grandiose influence that I dreamed of when I was younger with churches exploding with growth and masses of people who adored my preaching. No, it was an influence where people saw my experience of the love of God in Christ and they wanted to

---

<sup>125</sup> Karl Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today,” in *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*, vol. 7 of *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15.

<sup>126</sup> *Exercises* 23. See Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 27. The emphasis is the author’s.

experience the same thing. For my part, I was free enough of the desire to have crowds of disciples dedicated to me that my primary desire for them was to experience what I had experienced whether it kept them within my sphere of influence or not. Through my increasing freedom, Jesus was drawing them into their own deeper freedom.

And so, a ministry shaped by a leader's interior freedom will first and foremost invite people into their own depths of interior freedom in Jesus. As people experience this freedom to be indifferent to anything but the will of God, they may hear Jesus calling them to other places, other churches, or other ministries. And a leader who has pressed into her own interior freedom can joyfully release them, knowing that they are experiencing a greater deepening of God's life in them. This isn't the way a church grows, but we can be sure that it's the way the Kingdom grows—first through depth, then through breadth.

### **Moving Toward a Place of Solidarity with the Marginalized of the World**

In his 1960 Meet the Press interview, Martin Luther King, Jr. observed, "I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America."<sup>127</sup> That observation has, with few

---

<sup>127</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., interview by Ned Brooks, *Meet the Press*, April 17, 1960, on NBC, transcript, [http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document\\_images/Vol05Scans/17Apr1960\\_InterviewonMeetthePress.pdf](http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol05Scans/17Apr1960_InterviewonMeetthePress.pdf).

exceptions, remained true down to today.<sup>128</sup> Even where churches are multi-ethnic, they are often not genuinely multicultural being still dominated by the majority culture.<sup>129</sup>

In the 1970's, Donald McGavran introduced the "homogeneous-unit principle" as a method for growing churches.<sup>130</sup> His thesis was churches tend to grow when they are made up of people in similar social, economic, or racial groups. This observation has some helpful missiological application with regard to unreached people groups. However, this principle as it's been applied by the church growth movement in North America has led to a racial and economic splintering of churches, and we now have a phenomenon where we have Black churches, Latinx churches, Chinese churches, etc. In the Evangelical movement, this principle has resulted in churches that are largely white and upper middle class.

For pastors with an attachment to success defined through numbers and budgets, the allure of this path to success is difficult to resist. I recently sat

---

<sup>128</sup> Around the turn of the 21st century, there was hope that Evangelical Megachurches were genuinely doing the work of integration. See David Van Biema, "Can Megachurches Bridge the Racial Divide?" *Time Magazine*, 11 January 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1950943-1,00.html>. However, in the years since the 2016 election, the gains made in Evangelical Megachurches have largely been erased. See Campbell Robertson, "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers are Leaving White Evangelical Churches." *The New York Times*, 9 March 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>.

<sup>129</sup> Ed Stetzer, "Hard Truths About Multiracial Churches," *Facts & Trends*, 7 October 2014, <https://factsandtrends.net/2014/10/07/hard-truths-about-multicultural-churches/>.

<sup>130</sup> Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. C. Peter Wagner; (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 163-178.

through two days of strategic planning at my current church led by a church consulting group. We began with a demographic overview of our context in Santa Cruz, CA. According to their demographic research,<sup>131</sup> Within a 20-minute drive time of our church campus 71.59% of the population is white, and the largest percentage of people fall into the 35-54 age range. Then we were asked to describe the “typical Santa Cruz couple” who fit all the stereotypes of white, upper-middle class people in Santa Cruz. Strategically, according to the homogeneous-unit principle, this is our target audience—the people we specifically need to attract if we want to grow our church and become successful in “reaching people for Jesus.”

While there is much Kingdom good that can come from churches pursuing this pathway, our scriptures consistently call us to solidarity with the poor and marginalized of this world. The Prophet Isaiah urges God’s people, “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17 NRSV). While the Book of Proverbs reminds us, “Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9 NRSV). This is a call not only to do work projects for the poor and

---

<sup>131</sup> The demographic data was provided by a group called Kingdom Analytics.

marginalized,<sup>132</sup> but to enter into solidarity with them. This is a nearly impossible task for churches who have been shaped and disciplined by the homogeneous-unit principle.

To break from this attachment, at this point of history, is an extremely difficult task, requiring extraordinary amounts of interior freedom. The *Exercises* speak powerfully to this reality! In the Second Week of the *Exercises* Ignatius invites us into a contemplation called the Two Standards: to reflect on the works and strategies of Satan and the works and strategies of Jesus.<sup>133</sup> As the contemplation turns to Jesus, we're invited to see Him, "in a great field of that region of Jerusalem, in lowly place, beautiful and attractive."<sup>134</sup> David Fleming paraphrases Ignatius at this point saying,

Jesus adopts a strategy which directly opposes that of Lucifer: try to help and free people, not to enslave or oppress them. His method, attract men and women to the highest spiritual poverty, and should it please God draw them to want to choose it, even to a life of actual poverty. Being poor, they will then find themselves accepting and even desiring the insults and the contempt of the world. They will come to live a life of true humility.<sup>135</sup>

Joining Jesus in this "lowly" or marginal place works itself out over the course of the *Exercises* as retreatants journey with Jesus and join Him day in and

---

<sup>132</sup> This has often been called the "White Savior Complex" and emerges out of our diseased social imaginary. See Kuja, *From the Inside Out*, 108-110.

<sup>133</sup> *Exercises* 136-148.

<sup>134</sup> Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 112.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

day out in His life and ministry. In this journey, “Christ calls us to humility and solidarity via a double freedom, the readiness to renounce everything, and even to embrace material poverty, and freedom from the fear of rejection to which members of the lonely middle-class crowd are so vulnerable.”<sup>136</sup>

What struck me so deeply in these contemplative encounters with Jesus that I had never recognized before is just how much He chooses to remain on the margins; even in the way He occupies physical space in the gospel accounts. Take, for example, Mark 8:22-26 where Jesus heals a blind man in a two-stage miracle. The account begins in the village of Bethsaida where He encounters the blind man who begs Jesus to heal him. Jesus could have performed the sign right there, but he takes the man out of village. Jesus literally moves from the center to the margins in this story and that’s where He does His healing work.

This process culminates in the Third Week of the *Exercises* as retreatants imaginatively join Jesus in His journey to the cross. This movement surfaced my many attachments that keep me from joining Jesus on the cruciform way—my own need to be thought well of, my need for approval from ecclesiastical and theological tribes, my need to be comfortable. These all manifested in fears of being labeled “progressive” or “Marxist” or a “Liberation Theologian,” fears of losing my job and privilege and ability to provide for my family, and fears of

---

<sup>136</sup> Dean Brackley, S.J., *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 89.

being put in awkward and uncomfortable situations. These attachments and fears are slowly being replaced by Jesus' non-grasping love, the true attachment my heart was made for.

When these attachments are severed and replaced by God's love, we are able to freely and joyfully live in solidarity with Jesus and the "lowly" of the world. As Moltmann so memorably put it, "It is only the person who knows that he is accepted who can accept others without dominating them. The person who has become free in himself can liberate others and share their sufferings."<sup>137</sup> As these attachments are broken, the resulting freedom leads to a kind of preference to be with the lowly. Those who are hurting and broken know their desperation for Jesus and for rescue. But those in the lowly place also reveal Jesus to us in ways that aren't possible when we continually align with the rich and powerful. In this way, the freedom to renounce power and wealth lead to a deeper and truer power and wealth.

### **Increasingly Engaging in Mission**

In a fascinating transcript of a meeting between Pope Francis and a number of Jesuits in Africa, Francis makes a profound distinction between what he calls mission or evangelism and proselytism. He argues, "Evangelization is essentially witness. Proselytizing is convincing, but it is all about membership

---

<sup>137</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 60.

and takes your freedom away. I believe that this distinction can be of great help.”<sup>138</sup>

The Pope is referring explicitly to a kind of prosperity gospel, but the point is valid for much of how we preach the gospel in the Protestant, Evangelical circles I’ve traveled. What begins as an honest desire to see people come to know Jesus, subtly becomes about building and growing our churches and our influence. Sharing the gospel and participating in mission then becomes an inner compulsion rather than something that emerges out of our own freedom and response to the presence and work of Jesus around us. Then when the message of Jesus is shared out of our own interior captivity, rather than inviting women and men into the freedom of Jesus, they’re invited into the same kind of inner captivity that we experience.

Francis describes this dynamic eloquently as well,

Evangelizers never violate the conscience: they announce, sow and help to grow. They help. Whoever proselytizes, on the other hand, violates people’s conscience: this does not make them free, it makes them dependent. Evangelization gives you a filial dependence, that is, it makes you free and able to grow. Proselytizing gives you a servile dependence at the level of the conscience and the society. The dependence of the evangelized person, the “filial” dependence, is the memory of the grace that God has given you. The proselyte instead depends not as a child, but

---

<sup>138</sup> Pope Francis, “‘The Sovereignty of the People of God’: The Pontiff Meets the Jesuits of Mozambique and Madagascar,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 26 September 2019, [https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/#\\_ftn5](https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/#_ftn5).

as a slave, who in the end does not know what to do unless he or she is told.<sup>139</sup>

If this is true, and I think it is, then this paints a fascinating picture of the soil in which the rise of the new fundamentalism in our day has occurred. Where we do connect with people who don't yet follow Jesus, our movement toward them is often driven by a sense of duty or an inner compulsion. Our message is too often predicated in first stirring in people a fear of hell and God's wrath, rather than inviting them into an experience of the love of God revealed in Jesus. This is bondage for both the missionary and those to whom we preach. We have created whole generations of church-goers who exist in a kind of spiritual bondage.

If we want to see the mission of the Church renewed and the gospel advance in our day, we must urgently recover a mission shaped by the love of God that brings about our interior freedom. The great missionary theologian, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin expressed the true motive for mission that resonates deeply with Ignatius' vision and the *Exercises*. Newbigin writes, "I think that the deepest motive for mission is simply the desire to be with Jesus where he is, on the frontier between the reign of God and the usurped dominion of the devil."<sup>140</sup>

As we've seen thus far, the *Exercises* invite us into a journey where we become companions of Jesus in His work. Imaginatively, we learn the

---

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 129.

personality, voice, ways, and telltale signs of Jesus as He made His way through first century Palestine. We learn to receive Jesus' love even when the inner voices of shame resist it. But this is all in the service of learning to "choose Christ in the world" as Joseph Tetlow puts it.<sup>141</sup> This means discerning the voice of Jesus and the characteristic signs of His Spirit at work in the world and then aligning ourselves with that work. It also means increasingly not being distracted from Jesus' love by the circumstances of life. This is precisely what Newbigin invites missional leaders into and the *Exercises* are a fitting vehicle to prepare us for that work.

The true work of mission is not rationally convincing people of their need for a savior, it is not manipulating people's emotions or circumstances to reach a decision point, it is not inviting them into a specific culture and way of life. It is joining Jesus in His renewal of all things through His love. It is living as a free person from the inside out in a world where the forces of Satan, Sin, and Death seek to enslave us both internally and externally. It is bearing witness that the only liberating power in the universe is the love of God revealed through the Cross. It is vulnerably offering our stories of how this love is breaking our dependence on anything that's not God so we can live humbly, do justice, and

---

<sup>141</sup> Joseph Tetlow, S.J., *Choosing Christ in the World: A Handbook for Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola According to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen*, Studies on Jesuit Topics 4, no. 12 (Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1999).

walk daily with the Triune God. As we do, it speaks to the deepest desires of people's hearts, rooted in the *Imago Dei*.

Women and men do not long for the comfort and security of a Christian subculture, or even a "Christian" nation. They long to be loved, they long for true, interior freedom, they long to no longer be enslaved by the voices of fear and shame that lock them and our world in cycles of violence and destruction. When we companions of Jesus live our ordinary, everyday lives in His love and the resulting freedom, the Spirit will use that to awaken the deepest longings in the hearts of our families, friends, neighbors, and coworkers so they too can find their home in Christ's love.

The testimony of Christian scripture and theology and my experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* all point to the urgent priority for growing our experience of interior freedom for Christian ministry. Now finally, I want to explore how a branch of contemporary psychology, Family Systems Theory, expresses the role that freedom plays in leadership from a psychological perspective.

### **FREEDOM, DIFFERENTIATION, AND FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY**

As we briefly discussed in ch. 2, Family Systems Theory is a psychological school that sees that psychopathologies often result from the social environment a person finds themselves in. This could be a family of origin, adult family, workplace, or church. Within these family systems, anxiety spreads and

manifests itself in psychopathologies. The role of the leader within a system is to remain a “non-anxious presence” in order to calm the anxiety of the system.

Within Family Systems thought, this happens as a leader achieves differentiation.

According to Steve Cuss,

Differentiation is the ability to be fully yourself while being fully connected to people. It is gaining clarity on where “I” end and the “other” begins. A differentiated person allows space between herself and another, even when that other person allows space between herself and another, even when that other person is highly anxious or asking for rescue. A differentiated leader is clear on her own values and convictions and is not easily swayed from them.<sup>142</sup>

The inherently social nature of Family Systems Theory makes it the perfect place to conclude our discussion on freedom in the life of Christian leaders. Family Systems contributes to our spiritual and theological discussions of freedom the recognition that the attachments which fuel our reactions as leaders are inherently social, formed by the family systems of our growing-up years and by whatever social group we come to participate in as adults. There is an inextricable connection between our inner attachments and our outer world.

This is precisely why finding a place of freedom or differentiation as a leader in an anxious and internally unfree church is such a challenging task. We are constant recipients of the anxieties and attachments of our church systems. But without this freedom, these anxieties will consume our lives, inner and outer.

---

<sup>142</sup> Steve Cuss, *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 119.

In an effort to soothe their own anxieties, an undifferentiated or unfree leader will constantly resort to control or manipulation which reinforces the anxiety of the system in a vicious cycle. Yet, when we are aware of how these systems contribute to and even form our attachments, we can more easily identify them and, in the space of contemplative prayer, sever those attachments so we can be free to respond in love.

This is what the Ignatian Tradition has to contribute to Family Systems thought: a pathway in which a leader can be differentiated, even in the midst of an anxious system. The gifts of the *Exercises* lead us to hold ourselves in balance before all created gifts<sup>143</sup> so that we can, with Ignatius, cry “take, Lord, and receive... all that I have and call my own.... Give me only your love and your grace. That is enough for me.”<sup>144</sup> A leader in this space, indifferent/differentiated to everything but the love of God will be a powerful, non-anxious presence in the midst of our anxious churches. Such a leader will be gentle rather than forceful, content rather than manipulative, and open-handed rather than coercive. In our day when leaders, especially church leaders, are viewed with suspicion as manipulative and coercive, this kind of non-grasping, differentiated leadership is what will lend our gospel credibility as we seek to introduce a broken and hurting world to the love of God.

---

<sup>143</sup> This is the language of the Principle and Foundation. See *Exercises* 23.

<sup>144</sup> Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 177.

## CONCLUSION

I've been writing this chapter in the context of some of the most difficult circumstances the world and my church has faced in recent memory. COVID-19 continues to pile up bodies and spread fear and conflict worldwide, historic fires in Santa Cruz County have displaced 77,000+ people, the political atmosphere is the most toxic and divisive in living memory, and Santa Cruz Bible Church is in the midst of a pastoral transition and search for the next Lead Pastor. For me, it's been a time of great anxiety and great humbling as I write about interior freedom but find myself experiencing so little of it.

A special challenge has been the direction of Santa Cruz Bible Church. We're a church that's not unified on what it wants to be. Our Elder team and many of the loudest (and most wealthy) voices in the church want us to grow and recapture some of the spark and polish that made us a mega-church in the 1980's and 90's. There's a desire on the part of those with power to bring in a Lead Pastor who will inspire and manage the church staff so that we can grow into a bustling hub of faith for our community again.

For my part, this chapter is an expression of what I hope our church becomes; following in the free, patient, gentle, non-grasping way of Jesus in solidarity with the marginalized and exploited of the world. Yet, the deeper work for me has been to find the place where I have the inner freedom to let Santa

Cruz Bible Church be the church it wants to be, whether I like or agree with it or not. That's a tall order for this idealistic Enneagram 1 and yet struggling with God to find that space is the only way I've been able to remain sane in the midst of these seismic changes in our world. The invitation from Jesus now is to remain free and continue to carve out the space in my daily life to pay attention to His work and His call around me. This is how I will increasingly be a gentle, free, non-manipulative, non-coercive leader in the Kingdom.

## Chapter 4: Evangelical Interior Freedom

*"I'm amazed at the intimacy of the dialogue I have had with Jesus. He shone his light onto the vulnerable places of my life and heart. Not in judgment, but with his gentleness and abundant love. He led me into healing and freedom in areas that were holding me in bondage."*

-Rebecca C.

*"Finally... love, love, love. The overwhelming, never ending, unfathomable love of Jesus, that fills us and allows us to love others is more alive and real to me than ever.... and the greatest of these is love."*

-Kerry P.

Even before I finished my own journey through the Spiritual Exercises, I knew that the experience of Jesus' love, along with the resulting freedom I was beginning to experience, was something I desperately wanted others to experience as well. In the midst of my life, trying to live "on mission" as well as raise up and equip missional leaders, the encounter with Jesus and His love for me was something that began to radically reshape how I engaged the mission.

Suddenly, I was spending less time on mission and more time in quiet prayer and contemplation with Jesus, and yet at the same time I found myself living in more sustainable rhythms. I became more aware of where Jesus was calling me to spend my time and efforts, and I grew in freedom to the point where I could choose to not pursue opportunities that I didn't hear Jesus calling me towards. This walk with Jesus that was developing through contemplative spirituality, and especially its Ignatian variety, was contributing to my healing from the burnout and abuse I'd experienced in my own missional leadership.

My own experience is significant because missional leaders tend to struggle on two fronts: 1) They learn mission as a series of techniques and behaviors which often leads to 2) an experience of burnout when they exhaust themselves through activity and/or don't see the outcomes they are hoping for. The missional leaders I'm trying to raise up in my context at Santa Cruz Bible Church need a way to experience the kind of interior spaciousness and freedom that will allow them to hear and respond to the call of Jesus in our local context while releasing any expectation of outcome.

In my role as Discipleship Pastor at Santa Cruz Bible Church, I was perfectly placed to integrate elements of contemplative and Ignatian spirituality into the life of this congregation, especially its emerging missional leaders. However, there were some potential roadblocks.

Contemplative spirituality tends to be viewed with suspicion in evangelical contexts due to its roots in more Catholic and Orthodox spirituality. Inviting people into a process called "The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" is always going to encounter resistance.

Furthermore, the time commitment was a concern. The 19th annotation of the Spiritual Exercises is approximately 32 weeks. The very American tendency to want quick fixes and immediate results tends to scare people away from making commitments this lengthy. My context in Santa Cruz, CA makes it even

more challenging with the slow-to-commit and quick to back out mentality of a California beach town.

This led to some experiments with missional leadership development that were shorter and less time consuming, where I tried to combine some of the contemplative experience I'd had in the exercises with some missional church theory and praxis. The results were encouraging, but they still didn't begin to approach what I'd experienced in the exercises.

Then as I began my Doctor of Ministry program, it was clear that this was a perfect opportunity to do a deep dive on the Spiritual Exercises and get real data on how they're received in an evangelical context such as Santa Cruz Bible Church. With the blessing of my Lead Pastor, I was able to move forward with putting together a cohort to go through the 19th Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises led by the spiritual director who had first taken me through them, Don Ferris.

So to move through this chapter, I'll explore the research question and hypothesis that drove my project. We'll explore the contours of the project as well as the initial learnings I received from Don Ferris and his wife, Charlotte, who have been leading evangelicals through the exercises for 19 years. Then we'll explore the real, lived experiences of the retreatants as they made their way through the process, followed by some concluding reflections on how the

experience of the exercises has already begun to re-shape areas of the culture at Santa Cruz Bible Church.

As we've seen in previous chapters, the heart of Ignatian spirituality is interior freedom. So I decided to focus my research on the question: How will the experience of the 19th Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius draw evangelicals into an experience of interior freedom?

My hypothesis is that the Bible-centric nature of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius combined with the new practices of imaginative contemplation and the Examen will help evangelicals be open to transformation leading to interior freedom.

## **THE PROJECT**

To test my hypothesis, I put together a project that involved leading a cohort through the 32 weeks of the 19th Annotation of the Exercises with the hope that each participant experience an increase in their own interior freedom, so they are able to hear and respond to the call of Jesus on their lives. For my methodology, I chose a mixed-methods approach that encompasses both Action and Phenomenological research. The Action portion is worked out through the process of the 32 week retreat. The Phenomenological research focuses in on the real, lived experiences of the retreatants as they made their way through the retreat.

While it feels crass to try to measure an individual's growth in interior freedom, I needed a way to notice the shifts happening in the retreatants' lives through the 32 weeks. So I designed a 10 question assessment to allow them to talk about their lives in a way that gets at their experience of interior freedom.<sup>145</sup> I established a baseline for each retreatant by administering the assessment before the start of the retreat. Then I administered it again at the end of the 32 weeks in order to identify where movement had happened.

The rhythm of the exercises was that each retreatant would commit to praying an hour a day with the materials given to guide them through the prayer exercises. Then every two weeks, each would meet individually with Don Ferris for a spiritual direction session. The same day, the group would meet all together to share what had stirred in them the previous two weeks and to go over the prayer materials for the upcoming two weeks.

For the purposes of the project, I took copious field notes during these group meetings and from the review times where Don would share with me some key movement he saw in their direction sessions. These gatherings allowed me to see in real time the kinds of movements of the Spirit that were drawing each retreatant into a greater experience of their own interior freedom.

---

<sup>145</sup> See Appendix 1 for the assessment tool I created.

For the retreatants in this project I invited seven individuals from within Santa Cruz Bible Church. They were a mix of staff and lay leaders. Each was a person who had expressed interest in the exercises or who was ready for this kind of a commitment in my assessment.

I learned from Don and Charlotte Ferris that the readiness of the participants is essential for them to make it through the whole process and gain the most benefit from it. When they interview participants before the exercises, they are looking for a person who is longing for more in their faith. Most often these are people who have lived for many years as a part of churches, serving, doing Bible studies and small groups. Many have served in lay leadership or on a church staff. While most of these people would be considered “mature” by the standards of contemporary evangelicalism, there is often a gnawing sense that something is missing from their spiritual life and there’s more out there for them. People in this space are the perfect candidates for going through the exercises.

This fits with the developmental spirituality Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich outline in their book *The Critical Journey*.<sup>146</sup> They describe six stages of the spiritual journey. The first three encompass the typical discipleship pathway of most evangelical churches. A person comes to faith in Jesus in stage 1. Stage 2 is the life of learning, growth, and practice that characterizes discipleship. Stage 3

---

<sup>146</sup> Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005).

is the life of service that most evangelicals would call maturity. Stage 4 is where their paradigm moves beyond the usual evangelical models. They describe this stage as the inward journey. It typically includes an experience that they call “The Wall.”<sup>147</sup> The wall is an experience in life, usually difficult, that brings us to the end of our own resources. Hagberg and Guelich write:

Fundamentally, it has to do with slowly breaking through the barriers we have built between our will and a newer awareness of God in our lives. We have spent our own energy; we have come to the end of our ropes. We are ready to learn about freedom—the liberty of living without grasping.<sup>148</sup>

The Ferris’ experience with directing the exercises has shown that unless people have reached this “wall” stage of their spiritual journey, they likely won’t really benefit from the wisdom of the exercises. This fits with the wisdom of St. Ignatius himself who was willing to let anyone begin the exercises but warned that unless an individual was ready, they would not benefit from them and could even be harmed by going beyond the first week<sup>149</sup> of the exercises.<sup>150</sup>

Each of the seven retreatants I invited into the experience of the exercises was in or had been through a “wall” experience in life. They experienced the

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 113ff.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>149</sup> Remember “week” here isn’t a literal week. It represents the first of four movements or phases in the process of the Spiritual Exercises.

<sup>150</sup> *Exercises 18*. See David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises – A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (Saint Louis, MO: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1996), 16-17.

kind of disorientation<sup>151</sup> that leads to wrestling with God and prepares a person to enter deeper into the mystery of the Divine Love. A great part of the growth in interior freedom that I'll describe as we continue in this chapter is due, I believe, to each of the participants being in this place of disorientation and ready to receive the grace of the exercises.

### THE EXPERIENCE

The journey with Don Ferris and each of the seven retreatants was thrilling throughout. I still find myself amazed that I was able to see the Spiritual Exercises happen at Santa Cruz Bible Church. It is unusual to have an experience like this in a church like Santa Cruz Bible, and yet the response was overwhelmingly positive. As I sifted through the pre and post exercise assessments, as well as my field notes, eight themes emerged as consistent in the experiences of most or all of the participants. These eight themes are:

1. Evangelical faithfulness
2. Moving from knowledge about Jesus to real, tangible encounters with Jesus
3. Having the conversation with Jesus when difficult moments happen in life
4. Releasing the impulse to control life, leading to greater humility and dependence on Jesus

---

<sup>151</sup> For this language, I'm leaning on the paradigm of Orientation -> Disorientation -> Reorientation popularized by Walter Brueggemann. See Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007).

5. Healing of wounds that fuel attachment
6. Moving from obedience to companionship
7. The deepening of desire
8. Contemplative awareness

We'll take each of these eight themes in turn to see how they mesh together to form a vision of interior freedom.

### **Evangelical Faithfulness**

While Don and Charlotte Ferris spent close to 40 years in church ministry, they have always run the Spiritual Exercises as a part of their para-church ministry, currently known as Beyond These Shores. Don remarked to me many times throughout the 32 weeks that he has never had a group go through the exercises and remain so faithful and consistent to show up, not only to the direction sessions and group times, but also to their daily hour of prayer. He attributed it to the discipline of a daily "devotion" or "quiet time" that evangelical churches tend to encourage. I suspect that may factor heavily into it, especially since the group of seven ranged in age from 50-73. They were formed during an era in which discipline was highly prized and emphasized. It has made me wonder if a younger group were to go through the exercises if they would show up as consistently.

Another element that may play into this was the experience of having myself, as a pastor who has cared for people and walked through life with people, invite the retreatants into the experience. As we have already observed, it is critical that people be at the place in life where they are ready to enter the container for transformation that is the exercises. Knowing the staff and congregation as I do, I was attuned to the people who were ready to commit to the process for their own transformation. This may also point towards the value of local churches providing access to the experience of the Spiritual Exercises as opposed to it being offered solely by para-church ministries or individual spiritual directors.

In terms of our overarching question about how the exercises draw evangelicals into an experience of interior freedom, faithfulness/consistency is a key ingredient. While initially the commitment may be made primarily out of duty and obligation, the discipline of staying faithful to the commitment even when things get hard is essential to the exercises.

The exercises quickly bring up what many directors have called “resistance.” This internal resistance is a strategy of the Ego or False Self that attempts through tactics such as boredom, disinterest, distraction or aridity to keep the retreatant from showing up for prayer. The False Self is self-protective and will usually fight at all costs so that it doesn’t become displaced by the love

of Jesus that brings freedom. There are several points in the exercises when resistance tends to rise up, making it very hard to continue showing up for prayer.

This is where the faithfulness and discipline that Evangelicals are formed in helps them press through in order to receive the love of Jesus that frees them from the attachments of the False Self. Faithfulness in the process creates the conditions for interior freedom to flourish.

### **Moving from Knowledge About Jesus to Encounters with Jesus**

All the participants in the study had a long history of regular Bible study. One participant was seminary trained. Especially in the first few months of the retreat, the retreatants had a difficult time making the shift from engaging scripture in an analytic way to encountering God through scripture in a contemplative way. Don would often caution the group that as evangelicals we're addicted to insights; we feel a compulsion to find new nuggets of truth that tickle our intellect or warm the heart. While the study of scripture has an important place in the Christian's life and faith, that is not the way the exercises invite retreatants to engage scripture.

The exercises invite participants to engage scripture in a form of *Lectio Divina*, a kind of meditative, prayerful way of reading scripture.<sup>152</sup> The point is

---

<sup>152</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 66-67.

not to understand the text grammatically, historically, or even redemptive-historically. Rather, it is a way for participants to enter into conversation with God. Instead of approaching the Bible with the analytic tools of exegesis or inductive Bible study, one simply needs to be self-aware enough to notice what in the text stands out to them, what draws them, repels them, makes them curious, comforts them, disgusts them, etc. Then this becomes the basis for the encounter with God in love.

Ignatian spirituality takes *Lectio Divina* one step further and invites participants to imagine themselves in the narrative scenes of the Bible, especially the gospel stories of Jesus.<sup>153</sup> This Ignatian Contemplation or Holy Imagination trusts the imagination, a faculty given us by God, as a means by which God can communicate with us. It is in these imaginative, contemplative encounters with Jesus where our knowledge about Jesus is challenged and our experience of Jesus deepens immensely over 32 weeks.

As the retreatants engaged with Jesus in this way, their intimacy with Him deepened. Many reported that Jesus would often want to hug them. In moments of deep sadness and desolation, Jesus would invite them to simply sit next to Him, put His arm around them and simply sit in silence together.

---

<sup>153</sup> Exercises 47-48. Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 42.

For many retreatants, Jesus would get very personal with them. One participant reported that Jesus gave her a nickname, “Little Lamb,” and would frequently address her with that name in a way that made her feel seen, known and loved. Even for those participants who experienced difficulty with Holy Imagination, they reported sensing His presence in ways that made them feel love, acceptance, warmth, reception, and delight.

One of the questions in the pre and post assessment I created asked retreatants to imagine the face of Jesus looking at them and to describe what they saw and how it made them feel. In the pre-exercises interview, one woman reported that she saw kindness, love, and acceptance in the eyes of Jesus. When I asked her the same question in the post-exercises interview she said with great emotion in her voice that she sensed overwhelming love and compassion from Jesus and that He felt so real to her now.

This tangible sense of the presence of Jesus through imagination is a key component of the journey to interior freedom. It’s in these imaginative encounters that Jesus would constantly and consistently express His love in word and action to the retreatants. As we’ve seen in Ignatius’ principle and foundation, it is only as we’re held in the love of God for us in Jesus that our inner attachments begin to lose their power and we can experience true interior freedom.

## Having the Conversation with Jesus

When I first began seeing Don Ferris for spiritual direction, I didn't know what to expect. I had never been to a director before and had only recently heard there was such a thing as a "spiritual director." It was a completely new experience for me. Having had some experiences with a therapist, I thought it might be similar where I would tell Don what difficult things were happening in my life and then he would give me the spiritual answer—maybe a practice or two and then I'd be on my way to solving my problems.

However in my first session with him, I described to him the season I was in as I was deeply wounded and waking up to the abuse and trauma I experienced in ministry. Where I expected him to start talking about the healing process and what that looks like, he simply leaned towards me and with a curious expression on his face asked me, "So have you been able to have a conversation with Jesus about this yet?"

This question became a hallmark of each of my sessions with Don for the four years he was my director. It's a question that emerges straight out of the exercises and is closely related to the Ignatian Contemplation we just addressed. The "Colloquy" or conversation is a part of the Ignatian Contemplation the retreatant is invited to engage with in their prayer every day.<sup>154</sup> As a part of using

---

<sup>154</sup> *Exercises 54. Fleming, Draw Me Into Your Friendship, 48-49.*

Holy Imagination to enter into a gospel story, one is invited not just to visualize the scene and bring their senses into the moment in the imagination, but also to have a conversation. The conversation happens most often with Jesus but can happen with other characters in the story as well.

It's in the colloquy that much of the fruit of the exercises is to be found. Retreatants are encouraged to talk to Jesus as one would talk with a good friend. They can bring the reality of their daily lives, their emotional responses to the scene they witnessed in their imaginations, questions, fears, concerns, hopes to Jesus. In turn, retreatants consistently find Jesus loving and compassionate in His responses and questions. He often will assume the role of spiritual director and ask questions that help the retreatant get underneath the surface of their lives to discover their root level attachments.

It's here when difficult things emerge in a person's life that Jesus helps them discover the ways in which the circumstances are an avenue through which God is inviting them into a deeper experience and return of love.<sup>155</sup> None of the participants used this kind of language in the pre-exercise interviews. When facing difficult situations or circumstances, there was talk of looking to scripture, Biblical principles, circumstances, conversations with friends or trusted mentors to help guide them. In my post-exercise interviews, almost all the participants

---

<sup>155</sup> This is the heartbeat of Ignatius' Principle and Foundation. See *Exercises* 23.

reported some form of having the conversation with Jesus when difficult circumstances or a challenging decision needed to be made over the course of the 32 weeks of the retreat.

One of the participants, a pastor who has been in ministry for over 40 years and previously pastored a large church in Northern California with a wide-reaching radio ministry now oversees a recovery ministry at our church. In one conversation with Jesus he reported expressing his feelings to Jesus that he had been knocked down a few pegs in his current role. He felt like a worker rather than a son. Jesus responded to him that He did not lower him to work with people in recovery, He had actually elevated him by entrusting him with the people closest to the heart of the Father. This was so significant for his journey through the exercises that this experience was repeated very similarly a few months later with lasting reverberations in the retreatant's life. He reported that this conversation with Jesus revealed and stripped away his attachment to prestige and to control, freeing him to love and serve the recovery ministry Jesus entrusted to him.

### **Releasing the Impulse to Control Life**

A consistent theme that turned up in my field notes and interviews is control. All of the retreatants reported a growing recognition of the ways they are addicted to the strategies of control. Control is a natural human response to life

in a broken, chaotic world and to the wounds we all acquire as we journey through life. The Ego or False Self, as psychologists and spiritual directors tell us, is the persona that forms in order to protect us from the hurts and pains of life.<sup>156</sup> This is the part of our soul that believes the lie that we can protect ourselves if we maintain enough control over our life and environment. As a result, we find ourselves grasping for anything we feel might steady us in the storms of life. Our careers, relationships, bank accounts, achievements, power, authority, intellect are often twisted and distorted into strategies by which we believe we can control ourselves and our world in order to keep us safe from harm. This is the essence of the grasping that is unfreedom. These strategies are often experienced as compulsions over which, ironically, people feel they have no control. There's an inability to release the grip on what gives a sense of safety, security, and control.

One retreatant who identified herself as an Enneagram 2<sup>157</sup> also described herself as co-dependent.<sup>158</sup> As a young mom, her husband and mother were both tragically killed in a car accident. Her two young daughters were in the car as well and both suffered extensive injuries. As a result of this trauma, she

---

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 29-36.

<sup>157</sup> See Helen Palmer, *The Enneagram: The Definitive Guide to the Ancient System for Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 101ff.

<sup>158</sup> Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon, *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 43ff.

developed a very codependent relationship with her daughters. Up to the present where her daughters are adults with families of their own now, she still has what she describes as a compulsive need to be over-involved in the lives of her daughters and grandchildren.

As Jesus encountered her through the course of the exercises, she grew increasingly aware of how the over-involvement in her daughter's lives was really about maintaining a sense of control as if that involvement and vigilance could keep them safe from another tragedy and spare her the pain of another traumatic event. This awareness and the leading of Jesus in her conversations invited her to begin to choose freely, for the first time, to not need to be over-involved in her kids' lives in the ways she was used to.

Ignatius' spirituality speaks directly to this phenomenon of the compulsion to control our worlds in ways that, paradoxically, we seem powerless to stop. In the words of his principle and foundation as paraphrased by David Fleming, "I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me."<sup>159</sup> Instead of being caught between the compulsion of control and the inability to release our death grip, the encounter with Jesus frees us to choose only what better leads to the greater and deeper experience of God's love in union and communion. Many of the participants noticed their ability to release

---

<sup>159</sup> Exercises 23. See Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 27.

control of difficult or challenging situations in the post-exercises interview.

Always the reason given was that they had developed a greater awareness of and trust in Jesus to lead them through the circumstances in a way that, regardless of outcome, would deepen their intimacy with God.

This dependence with its corresponding humility was a major fruit of the exercises in the lives of each retreatant. In both my pre and post-exercise assessments, I read Ignatius' prayer, the *Suscipe*:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will—all that I have and call my own. You have given it all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.<sup>160</sup>

I invited the participants to simply notice what the prayer stirred in them. Then I asked them if they thought they could pray the prayer wholeheartedly for themselves. In the pre-interview, most responded that they would like to be able to pray the prayer and thought that there were times in their lives when they could have prayed the prayer wholeheartedly. Tellingly, after the exercises as I administered the same questions, each and every participant expressed much more reluctance to pray the prayer with a corresponding acknowledgement that they have yet to live into the radical freedom of this prayer. Yet, the ability to drop religious pretense and admit how far they each felt from being able to

---

<sup>160</sup> *Exercises 234:4*. See Fleming, *Draw Me Into Your Friendship*, 177.

wholeheartedly pray this prayer was a significant sign of growth in interior freedom.

### **Healing of Wounds that Fuel Attachment**

One of the core convictions of the Spiritual Exercises, as Charlotte and Don Ferris have developed them, is that sin and thus attachment are inextricably connected to places of brokenness and wounding. In the first week of the exercises, one of the graces that retreatants are asked to pray for develops like this:

1. to grow in awareness of my own sin
2. to become aware that my sin comes out of broken and wounded places
3. to embrace that brokenness and woundedness as part of myself
4. to allow God's love to flow into those broken and wounded places<sup>161</sup>

We saw this four-fold grace realized in the lives of the participants time and again throughout the 32 weeks.

The woman from the previous theme's discussion who suffered a catastrophic loss in early adulthood when her husband and mother were killed in a horrific car crash thought she had dealt with the trauma of her past and that

---

<sup>161</sup> Charlotte and Don Ferris, *Choosing Christ in the World: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (unpublished manuscript, October 2016), typescript.

healing had taken place. Yet she came into the exercises aware of her tendency to over function in her job, in her church volunteer role, and in the lives of her kids.

So early in the exercises when the retreatants were invited to review their own graced history,<sup>162</sup> it became clear to her that this trauma was still very much alive and well in her body and her soul. This trauma became her central place of encounter with Jesus for much of the remainder of the retreat.

As she returned to that memory in her imagination through the course of her prayer exercises and direction, she began to see that Jesus was with her through this horrific event. Even a tragedy such as this couldn't separate her from His love. This sense of Jesus with her, His loving presence throughout her story into the present moment became an anchor for her and a source of great healing.

Each of the retreatants experienced similar ways in which Jesus' love and presence at the tender places of the wounds of the past began to free them from the habits and strategies they'd developed to protect themselves. As they recognized these strategies and how they no longer needed them in order to stay safe in the world, they began to be able to choose to live in more courageous ways. They began to be more open and curious about their lives and inner

---

<sup>162</sup> This is the term the Ferris' use to describe a series of prayer exercises in which the Holy Spirit reveals the presence of Jesus throughout a person's story. The goal is to come to understand and feel a sense of God's providential care and presence with each person throughout their history, both in good circumstances and in bad.

reactions and so live from a place of greater wholeness and security in Jesus' love.

### **Moving From Obedience to Companionship**

In the conservative, evangelical Christian subculture, obedience is a big deal. It's easy to see this theme revealed in scripture from the Ten Commandments all the way to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 where Jesus commissions his disciples to teach people to obey everything He's taught them. The problem is that this kind of obedience easily turns into a kind of servile obedience; the obedience of a servant to a master. This is where the evangelical "check-list mentality" comes in, when we believe that the Christian life can be boiled down to a series of checkboxes. As long as the boxes are regularly being checked, a person is on the right track in their life. This feeds the challenge that many evangelicals face, namely we still believe our identity comes from what we do rather than as gift. This fuels exhaustion and burnout as many of us perceive our inability to slow down and rest from our doing.

This challenge is widely recognized but it isn't easily addressed, at least not through the usual means of Bible reading and intercessory prayer that evangelicals offer.<sup>163</sup> The exercises invite retreatants to move from a place of

---

<sup>163</sup> Even in today's "gospel-centered" climate, the exhortation to repent and believe doesn't go far enough in that the means by which to repent and believe aren't explicitly taught; either for fear of legalism or because they're not understood. The result tends to be cycles of shallow repentance paired with intellectual belief and leaves lingering feelings of guilt and shame as deep transformation fails to take place.

pursuing service obedience to pursuing companionship to Jesus. It is in the space of companionship to Jesus where we journey with Him as a loved one and friend that we can rest from our anxious, frenetic activity and learn to simply “Be.”

As I’ve already noted, each of the participants came into the retreat with strong habits of daily Bible reading and prayer. Many participants used the language of obedience in the pre-interview to describe these daily practices. In addition, the question asking participants about how they responded to a prompting from God was often answered using the language of obedience. What is striking though is that in the post-exercises interview, the language of obedience popped up again with several retreatants. However, post-exercises these participants talked about their life with Jesus shifting from a place of having to obey and do to a place described by the language of love, relationship, and companionship.

The exercises facilitate this journey from obedience and performance to companionship and simply being. Early on in the exercises, it’s common that the retreatants treat the exercises as yet another checklist to do. Frequently in the group times, there was lots of judgment language about how the previous two weeks of prayer had fared.

Slowly, as the exercises deepened and the retreatants were invited deeper into the mystery of God’s love for them in Jesus, they were able to move past

having a sense of what ought to occur in prayer and simply let be what happens in prayer. Several retreatants reported at moments during the exercises where they were facing difficult challenges in their lives that Jesus would simply invite them to come and sit next to Him. They would spend almost the whole hour of prayer simply and silently next to Jesus, held in His arms.

Rather than these experiences feeling unfruitful, they trusted the relationship and journey with Jesus enough to recognize that this simply being with Jesus was not a waste of time; it was a kind of culmination of the whole process of the exercises. Several participants have reported to me that these kinds of invitations from Jesus have continued in their prayer lives well after the end of the formal retreat.

This is precisely what Ignatius experienced in his relationship with Jesus, and his Spiritual Exercises were designed to facilitate just such a companionship with Jesus in the midst of everyday life. That's why a better translation for what we know formally as the Society of Jesus, the Jesuit order, is the Companions of Jesus. For Ignatius, the heart of being a Jesuit is simply entering into companionship with Jesus in everyday life apart from the formal functions of Church life and hierarchy. This began to be the experience of the retreatants over the course of the 32 weeks and beyond.

One participant describes herself as a very dutiful Enneagram 1.<sup>164</sup> After the exercises, as I asked her to tell me what her experience of interior freedom was like now having gone through the process, she said she now has a greater spaciousness in her life to observe what she believes she has to do versus what she is really invited into by Jesus. This space and observation gives her the permission she desperately needs to not give in to her rules. All of this, she reported, stemmed from her experience of Jesus' love.

As a result, she was able to experience a deeper inner freedom to simply stop the cycle of busyness and activity and simply be. She is one of the few participants who had an established contemplative practice before beginning the exercises, but there had always been a kind of inner restlessness as she went to her practice. At the close of the retreat, she reported that silence and stillness was still a hard discipline for her. Yet, she felt a greater freedom to choose this discipline for herself and a greater settledness in her spirit at entering into the practice, even if the time spent in prayer is at times largely distracted.

### **The Deepening of Desire**

The retreat begins with an exercise from John 1:35-39. The retreatants are asked to pray for the grace to understand their desires for the retreat. As they do, they are invited to use their holy imaginations to enter into the story and

---

<sup>164</sup> Palmer, *The Enneagram*, 72ff.

experience Jesus asking them what they want. Then they're asked to pay attention to what desires surface in that encounter.

Each of the retreatants reported good desires such as knowing Jesus more intimately, direction for the future, letting go of old patterns of thinking, breaking the cycles of busyness, etc. In the prayer exercises of the next several weeks, they were asked to pay attention to how their desires shifted, changed, or deepened. Throughout the retreat, they were asked to continue checking in on their desires to see what was stirring deep within them.

This awareness and attentiveness to desires, especially as they grow, shift, or deepen, is a key feature of the exercises. It's built on a conviction that, as image bearers of God, the deepest desires in the heart of every human being will be desires for union and communion with God and the attending freedom that results from God's love severing attachment to anything that isn't God. As the retreat progresses and they experience more and more of Jesus' life and ministry, as well as the deepening of intimacy with God, their desire grows to be free of attachments as they become aware of them. The taste of Jesus' love has stirred within them a desire for something deeper and truer than their previous ways of relating to God.

As the retreat drew towards a close, all the participants expressed a desire not to return to the old patterns of their life with God and wanted to know how

to sustain these new habits and rhythms of being with Jesus daily that they had learned and experienced through the 32 weeks of the formal retreat. In the closing day of the retreat and in the post-exercises interview, each participant expressed desires formally similar to what they expressed at the beginning of the retreat: deeper intimacy with God, increased freedom in the midst of chaotic life, a greater experience and acceptance of God's love for them. However there was something qualitatively different from the way they expressed these desires at the beginning of the retreat. Both they and I were aware there had been a deepening of their desires that was fueled by the experience of Jesus and His love for them and the intimacy of journeying day in and day out with Him for 32 weeks.

### **Contemplative Awareness**

Much of our life happens below the level of our conscious awareness. When we act and react to the stimulus of our lives, we often have difficulty expressing why we acted or reacted the way we did. Hidden attachments and idolatries drive much of these daily behaviors. In essence, we're asleep through much of life in a way similar to the experience people have of driving to work only to arrive and not remembering much of anything about the drive. The exercises invite retreatants to wake up to their lives, to live with awareness of

both what's happening around them and inside them, and to be able to freely choose a response to the events of life.

The colloquy or conversation with Jesus is one way in which the exercises invite participants to greater awareness of their lives. The practice of the Examen is another critical way that participants wake up and grow in awareness of their lives. It's a short prayer, done once or twice daily in which the participants review their day under the leading of the Holy Spirit. The essence of the practice is to recognize the places throughout the previous day in which God came to them and they were able to receive, and the ways God was coming to them in love that they did not recognize and receive. Then they are invited to ask the Spirit for the grace to respond in a different way tomorrow in the similar circumstances, to be able to recognize the ways God comes to them, even in difficult circumstances and allow it to call forth in them a greater response of love to God and others.

This has the effect over time of sensitizing a person to their life and the ways that God comes to them in love through the variety of circumstances of life. The person keeping this practice begins to recognize God coming to them, not just in hindsight through the 10-15 minutes of the time set aside for the Examen, but also, increasingly in the present moment in the midst of everyday life.

The awareness of the retreatants' own inner reactions and movements sensitizes them to their inner world in the midst of everyday life as well. In the post-exercises interview, many of the participants reported that they found themselves aware of their lives in surprising ways. Several reported that they were finding a place of detachment<sup>165</sup> where a stimulus would happen and they were present enough to choose their response rather than react in a thoughtless way according to the dictates of their various attachments. They clearly saw this as a kind of freedom—one that we would easily recognize from the discussions of freedom in the Christian tradition from previous chapters.

When I asked one participant about her experience of interior freedom after the close of the formal retreat, she told me about liking the preaching of a pastor who was popular amongst a certain population of older evangelicals. In the past she has felt the need to explain or justify her appreciation for his ministry and other such choices in her life. However, she now feels a greater sense of being able to like what she likes without the compulsion to defend her preferences. While I don't share her appreciation for that particular preacher, I was so encouraged to hear her growth in having freedom to not be enslaved to the opinions and critiques of others. This was a big step forward in her journey.

---

<sup>165</sup> The language of detachment was surprisingly the participants own choice.

## EFFECTS ON THE CULTURE OF SANTA CRUZ BIBLE CHURCH

Even before the close of the formal 32 week retreat, our Lead Pastor and Executive Pastor were commenting to me on the impact they saw on the lives of the participants in the retreat, particularly the three who are part of the staff at Santa Cruz Bible.<sup>166</sup> Our staff meetings for years had been a place where the staff had been reluctant to speak with courage and vulnerability. Much of this stemmed from the presence of the previous Lead Pastor who had been abusive, manipulative, and narcissistic and a similarly rigid and narcissistic Youth Pastor who had been let go and then split the church by starting a new church across town. There was a lot of self-protective fear on the staff and a reluctance to share opinions that might run counter to the Lead Pastor. Those who went through the 32 weeks of the exercises began to show up in increasingly vulnerable and courageous ways in the staff meetings. Many observed that they were able to assert themselves in ways they had not been comfortable with previously. It's contributed to a culture of greater trust and vulnerability on the staff.

The timing was perfect because shortly before the close of the retreat, our Lead Pastor announced he had been offered and accepted a new position at a spiritual formation ministry in Silicon Valley. That initiated a season of great uncertainty for us on the staff because within our polity, the Elder Board holds all

---

<sup>166</sup> We began with four staff members but one woman retired from staff during the course of the exercises.

the power to determine the future of the church and who the next Lead Pastor will be. As of the time of writing, there remains a disconnect between the staff and elder teams about what kind of church God is leading SCBC to be in the future. This has certainly provoked a significant amount of anxiety amongst us about the future of the church. However, as I've talked with those who went through the exercises, though anxieties and fears still persist, there is a growing sense of freedom to let the church be what it wants to be, to speak up when asked or given opportunities, but not the need to manipulate or play politics to achieve our hopes and desires for the church.

Lastly, several of the participants lead Community Groups at Santa Cruz Bible, a ministry which I oversee. I have a regular rhythm of meeting with leaders for prayer, coaching, and support. For me personally, it's been so fun to see how these coaching meetings with those who have been through the exercises have taken on much more of a tone of spiritual direction. We've been able to talk about what they hear from Jesus around the places of challenge or stuckness they're facing. Seeing them take their leadership cue's from Jesus and His invitation rather than my direction has been one of the greatest joys I've experienced in ministry. To be sure, it doesn't eliminate the challenge of leading a group, managing personalities, or inviting people to take steps of courage in their journey of discipleship and mission. What it does give is a confidence that

we're following Jesus' leadership rather than trusting our own and a sense that we will be held in His love whether things appear "successful" or not.

## CONCLUSION

Getting to share the experience of the Spiritual Exercises with my church family at Santa Cruz Bible has been a highlight of a lifetime. It was thrilling to see how Jesus met each participant in such personal and powerful ways over the course of the retreat and brought them the grace of a greater measure of interior freedom. The results and themes that I've shared speak for themselves. Even with the hurdles of the exercises' Catholic origin and the big commitment, the experience with the seven participants has shown that a process like the exercises can be done with great fruitfulness at an evangelical church. The only qualification I'd give is that the church leadership needs to be open to it. If there hadn't been a culture already established by the Lead Pastor that put a great emphasis on spiritual formation, I think the project may not have gotten off the ground. Even if it had, I think it would have been met with quite a bit more skepticism from the people I invited into the process.

My intention is to continue the work of introducing evangelicals to the contemplative tradition through the Spiritual Exercises wherever God takes me in ministry. In this era in which evangelicalism has come to be known simply as the religious arm of a particular political party, my desire and hope is that this

kind of contemplative spirituality would spark a quiet renewal, that evangelicals would increasingly experience the kind of inner freedom and security in Jesus' love to reclaim the missional prophetic posture our world so desperately needs.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

*“The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic’, one who has experienced ‘something’, or he will cease to be anything at all.”*

-Karl Rahner<sup>167</sup>

*“He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas.”*

-Thomas Merton<sup>168</sup>

When I walked onto the campus of Western Theological Seminary for the first time two and a half years ago, I had so many interests I wanted to pursue through this course of study, research, and writing. What emerged for me very quickly and has stayed constant through this entire process were two central threads that have shaped my life and trajectory.

The first is the reality of God’s mission and our vocation to join the triune God in the renewal of all things. Far from being simply evangelism, mission has to do first and foremost with the activity of God through the Son and Spirit in the world where everything wrong is being made right, where every tear might be wiped from every eye, that God and humans might exist in the shalom originally

---

<sup>167</sup> Karl Rahner, “Christian Living Formerly and Today,” in *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*, vol. 7 of *Theological Investigations*, trans. David Bourke (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 15.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 160-161.

intended for us. As God's people, we are privileged, called, and equipped to join the Holy Three in that work of announcing and embodying the good news. As a pastor for over 15 years, a central focus of my ministry has been preparing and equipping God's people to be these agents of the good news of God's restoration of all things both in word and in deed.

Yet the "wall experiences"<sup>169</sup> of my own life here in Santa Cruz were apocalyptic in the true sense of the word. They revealed just how much of my missional life and leadership was oriented towards the head. I knew quite a bit about God, the Triune Mission, His love, missional ecclesiology, missional rhythms of living, but my experience of God's love was incredibly shallow compared to that depth of knowledge. I was missing the love that led the Father, Son, and Spirit to overflow their banks and create the world in love. I was missing the love that led God to pursue a broken, fallen world in love rather than leave us to our own devices. I was missing the love that God has for me personally as a bearer of the *Imago Dei* who often tries to hustle for my worth and value rather than resting in the confidence that "when God's love spilled over into creation He thought of me. I am from Love, of Love, for Love."<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> See Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Co., 2005), 114ff.

<sup>170</sup> Adapted from the poetic paraphrase of the Ignatian Principle and Foundation. See Jacqueline Syrup Bergan and Sister Marie Schwan, *Forgiveness: A Guide for Prayer* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004), vi.

This revelation led me down the path of contemplative spirituality and its intersections with contemporary psychology. This is where I first discovered spiritual direction, the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, kataphatic and apophatic spirituality, and family systems theory. What drove me wasn't simply an intellectual curiosity. Rather, it was a desperation, an inner sense that I was lacking what I so desperately needed to be at home in the world—acceptance and belonging in God's love and grace.

This thesis is really the coming together of these two significant strands of my adult life: mission and formation, action and contemplation. As I moved through this program, my initial suspicions were confirmed that missional ecclesiology and contemplative spirituality are inextricably connected. One doesn't truly exist without the other. As Thomas Merton famously said,

He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity and capacity to love will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas.<sup>171</sup>

Another voice in the contemplative tradition, Philip Sheldrake, affirms this as well,

Thus, at its heart, Christian spirituality is founded on "discipleship," a dual process of conversion (a turning away from disorder and towards new life offered by God in Jesus Christ) and of learning how to follow in

---

<sup>171</sup> Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, 160-161.

the way of Jesus and, like him, to proclaim God's Kingdom.... Christian spirituality is inherently rather than accidentally connected to continuing Jesus' mission.<sup>172</sup>

The Spiritual Exercises were such a transformative experience when I first went through the 19th Annotation retreat back in 2016/17. Through the process I gained a significant and deepening awareness and experience of God's love for me in Jesus and a sense of intimacy with Him. This led, as I've shared in previous chapters, to a kind of shifting and renewal of my life on mission to the point where I sensed the connection between action and contemplation even if I couldn't yet fully articulate the relationship.

So when it came time to decide on a research focus for this degree, it was obvious that I needed to pursue Ignatian Spirituality. I wanted to understand the exercises better, I wanted to understand the ins and outs of this incredible gift Ignatius had left to the Church, I wanted to see if it truly is possible for an evangelical church to embrace something as foreign to our experience as Ignatian spirituality.

As I read broadly in the Ignatian tradition and reflected on my experience of the Spiritual Exercises as I prepared for my project, the central theme of interior freedom emerged as the true core of Ignatius' vision. There are many features in the exercises specifically and Ignatian spirituality more generally.

---

<sup>172</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 39.

Ignatian Contemplation, Colloquy, the Prayer of Examen, the movements of the four “weeks” of the exercises, specific key meditations along the way are all hallmarks of Ignatius’ vision. All these distinctives are the means by which the Spirit of God severs a person’s inner attachments and allows them to experience the freedom of indifference to anything but the will of God that Ignatius so beautifully describes.

What I discovered in my broad reading is that this interior freedom, which goes by different names in different traditions of spirituality, is central to any healthy spirituality. As we have seen, this insight into the urgency of cultivating interior freedom is not only the insight of the realm of spirituality, it has also been identified in the psychological world as a core feature in any healthy family, church, or organizational system. From the perspective of the Christian scriptures, the traditions of spirituality, and psychology, interior freedom is the central hallmark of a healthy person.

In the evangelical world especially, interior freedom, as expressed in the life and mission of the church and its leadership, has not been carefully explored. Yet as we stand here in the midst of great seismic shifts in the world and church, Karl Rahner’s warning to the church has never been more relevant, “The devout

Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic', one who has experienced 'something', or he will cease to be anything at all."<sup>173</sup>

As one who is seeking to live on mission in one of the most post-Christian environments in the United States, I can confirm that being embraced by the mystical/contemplative tradition within Christianity seems to be cultivating a different quality of conversation than anything I've experienced previously in my life and ministry. People tend to be eager to hear more about the contemplative stream of Christianity and want to press in to understand it. Rather than this being a sign of "watering down" the message to "please people's itching ears", I think it confirms the prophetic genius of Rahner's statement. Contemplative Christianity resonates down to the center of a person's being, the place where the *Imago Dei* can never be stamped out.

### **CONVICTIONS FOR MISSION IN FREEDOM**

As we conclude this deep dive into interior freedom, how should it actually show up in life and mission in a local context? Four convictions have emerged for me. They are:

1. Trusting in the deeper work
2. Everyone's journey is honored
3. Power is given away

---

<sup>173</sup> Rahner, "Christian Living Formerly and Today," 15.

#### 4. Preference is given to the broken and marginalized

In discussing freedom, it's hard to be prescriptive about what mission in freedom looks like. Yet, because women and men indelibly bear the stamp of God's image and human attachments at core tend to be very similar across time and space, I'll risk saying these convictions will always be present where ministry is done in freedom that honors the freedom of the other. They may look different depending on context, but I believe they will be present in mission shaped by interior freedom. We will briefly examine each of these convictions in turn before we conclude with suggestions for further research.

#### **Trusting in the Deeper Work**

Mission, whether at the level of the individual missional community, the local congregation, or larger local networks, is a slow, painful work in post-Christian contexts. People's trust in the church, particularly white-evangelical churches, is at an all time low.<sup>174</sup> We leaders may be tempted to give up out of despair, discouragement, or burnout for how hard it is to live on mission and equip people to join us.

---

<sup>174</sup> This phenomenon has been masterfully captured by my advisor, Chuck DeGroat in his bombshell book on narcissism in the church and by Kristen Kobes DuMez in her recent book surveying the history of how evangelicals came to embrace Donald Trump. See Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020); Kristen Kobes DuMez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020).

The wisdom of the Ignatian tradition tells us that ministry in freedom holds results with entirely open hands. The deeper work is the work that God wants to do in us through the slowness, the pain, and the discouragement. These experiences have the capacity through the presence and power of the Spirit of God and our own attentiveness to catalyze deep, soul-level transformation. It's here where, in the words of Charlotte Ferris, "our own deep healing leads to the healing of the world."<sup>175</sup> Sometimes the best way of engaging the mission is attending to our own healing and transformation.

This trusting the deeper work recognizes that there is something beyond the success/failure spectrum, however those two poles are defined. We may succeed or we may fail in our ministries and missional efforts yet "everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God."<sup>176</sup> As we come to taste freedom, we grow in the capacity to release our grip on the pursuit of success. Similarly, failure doesn't destroy our identity. Both experiences are ways in which God meets us in love, forms us in love, and grows our capacity to love God and others. Ironically, this is the true Kingdom definition of success. Where love is present, the mission will advance even when we can't perceive it or it takes a form that we don't recognize. Being formed in

---

<sup>175</sup> I first heard this in a retreat given by Charlotte and Don Ferris, 11 November 2015.

<sup>176</sup> *Exercises 23* as paraphrased by David L. Fleming, SJ, *Draw Me into Your Friendship: The Spiritual Exercises – A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading* (Saint Louis, MO: Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1996), 27.

this way is what will keep us steady and non-anxious in the midst of the difficult missional and ministry contexts to which we're called!

### **Everyone's Journey is Honored**

Once we have attending to our own deep healing and transformation in conversation with Jesus, we are in a place to honor the journey of everyone we encounter. This includes those who are not yet followers of Jesus and those who are already connected to our faith communities and churches. Doing the inner work in conversation with Jesus allows us to be patient and gentle with people as they work out their own journeys. When people don't come along as fast as we would like them to, when their stories lead them away from the communities that we lead, when we disagree with the stances and positions they stake out, we can freely honor their journey.

This is made possible because we no longer need anything from them. The gift of Ignatian spirituality leads us to the place where we increasingly recognize that all we need are God's love and grace and these have already been freely and abundantly given to us in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Freed in this way, we can honor people in a truly mutual relationship as opposed to needing them to satisfy some deep need in our own souls. As we honor people in this way, even when they don't come along according to our plans for them,

there is unexpected gift there. As Ignatius reminds us, everything has the potential to call forth in us a greater response of love to God.

This is a much less anxious way to engage mission and ministry. Too often I find myself anxious and tense because my plans aren't coming together the way I envision. Yet the ability to trust the wisdom of God's plan and God's work in me can lead me to trust God's work in those around me as well. I think people can sense when we come to a place of non-anxiousness and, as a result, they feel seen, known, loved, and honored by us.

Paradoxically, this freedom and honoring their journey is what draws people in and attracts them to us, our communities, and ultimately to Jesus because this freedom and honoring of women and men's journeys is how God treats us. When this non-grasping way of love is embodied and enacted in a community, it becomes a "hermeneutic of the gospel"<sup>177</sup> allowing people to witness the way that God honors and treats all daughters and sons of God. To return to Frances Young's statement I quoted in Ch. 2, "I recognize that I really need *apatheia* in order to love properly. Love requires a degree of detachment, an ability to let the other person be, to be 'other', to be what they are rather than what you want them to be."<sup>178</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 227.

<sup>178</sup> Frances Young, *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulations of Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 293.

## Power is Given Away

As we have seen, Jesus constantly and consistently gave away power and glory (Philippians 1:1-11; John 17:22). Yet the warning of J.R.R. Tolkien's parable, *The Lord of the Ring's* Trilogy, still rings true. Our hearts are easily corrupted by power often working insidiously, slowly worming its way in even through the desires to do good. The temptation to use the levers and means of power whether they be cultural, political, or ecclesiastical is too great. We may even desire to use these tools of power in order to help others come to know the love of Jesus. Yet left to our own devices, we become corrupted by power and do damage to our own souls and the souls of those we so desperately want to reach.

Mission in freedom will always emerge out of the severing of attachment to power. Only the love of Jesus is strong enough to break our addiction to power, thereby allowing us to follow in the way of Jesus by giving power away. As we've seen, this is paradoxically the true power of God and the Kingdom at work, but to our modern, American eyes this looks suspiciously like weakness. If the history of Christendom teaches us anything, it's that power, privilege, and being centered always afflicts the Church with dis-ease right at its heart. This is why the Kingdom of God has always flourished at the margins of the world where we most resemble our King who hung naked and bleeding from the imperial cross.

Freed from the need for power, we're free to give it away. We're free to invite various and diverse voices to speak into the mission without feeling threatened. We're free to be enriched by different ideas and perspectives, especially from the most broken and marginalized of the world.

The great irony of post-modern culture is that we in the Western world have been shaped by the Christian story enough to finally be suspicious of power in all its subtle varieties yet the Church continues to cling to power believing it's necessary for the preservation of the faith.<sup>179</sup> The world, in this instance, follows the way of Jesus more faithfully than the Church. When we can be formed in the freedom to follow Jesus in the way of non-grasping love, our way and our message will be attractive in the ways it always should have been.

### **Preference is Given to the Broken and Marginalized**

Freely giving away power leads directly to the preference for the broken and marginalized. Jesus consistently demonstrated a preference for the poor and

---

<sup>179</sup> One of the more recent examples occurred as I wrote this chapter where the six Southern Baptist seminary presidents released a statement anathematizing the use of Critical Race Theory in the struggle for racial justice in the U.S. While one may disagree with elements of CRT while still pursuing racial justice, the concern here is that there is not and hasn't been a corresponding statement condemning Christian Nationalism. The sense it leaves me with is that these white men are signaling to their denomination that while culture, norms, concerns will continue to remain central to the life of the denomination, often at the expense of their Black sisters and brothers in the same denomination. See George Schroeder, "Seminary presidents reaffirm BFM, declare CRT incompatible," *Baptist Press*, 30 November 2020, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/seminary-presidents-reaffirm-bfm-declare-crt-incompatible/>. For a response from a Black pastor who is leaving the denomination, see Charlie Dates, "'We out': Charlie Dates on why his church is leaving the SBC over rejection of critical race theory," *Religion News Service*, 18 December 2020, <https://religionnews.com/2020/12/18/we-out-charlie-dates-on-why-his-church-is-leaving-the-sbc-over-rejection-of-critical-race-theory/>.

marginalized throughout His ministry and invites us to follow in this way. Much of the New Testament is taken up with this theme. Yet the contemporary worlds many of us inhabit seem designed specifically to keep us separate from those who live on the margins. In so doing, we have removed ourselves from the very place where Jesus tells us we will find and experience God (Matthew 25:34-40). Our attachments to wealth, to prestige, to power and influence keep us among those who will further our journey to the top. And because we are subtly seeking this kind of power and influence, we tend to cut ourselves off from the most marginalized and exploited. When we do encounter them, it is only when we descend from our safe suburbs and neighborhoods and church campuses to do them acts of charity before running back where we are most safe.

In the Ignatian tradition, freedom is the indifference to everything but the will of God. It follows then that as we grow in interior freedom, we will increasingly seek God out in the places where we are told we can encounter God. This posture towards those on the margins is not one of doing them acts of charity; rather it is standing in solidarity with them because we seek to stand in union with Jesus! As Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, “the union with the Lord’, which all spirituality proclaims, is not a separation from others; to attain this union, I must go through others and the union, in turn, enables me to encounter

others more fully.”<sup>180</sup> It is this standing in solidarity with Jesus in the marginalized and exploited that will radically transform the way missional communities live.

This living with the most broken and vulnerable in the world in the very same moment that we are, mysteriously, living in union with Christ is a prophetic act of mission that gives radical witness to the in-breaking of the new order of God’s Kingdom. This radical act of solidarity and union with God and the marginalized is only possible for the souls that have cultivated a deep sense of freedom because this flies in the face of almost every attachment our culture has formed in us from the very beginning of our lives. Ignatius makes this point in *Exercises 146*:

The third [point for contemplation], to consider the discourse which Christ our Lord makes to all his servants and friends whom He sends on this expedition [the mission of God], recommending them to want to help all, by bringing them first to the highest spiritual poverty, and if his Divine Majesty would be served and would want to choose them—no less to actual poverty; the second is to be of contumely and contempt; because from the two things humility follows. So that there are to be three steps; the first, poverty against riches; the second, contumely or contempt against worldly honor; the third, humility against pride. And from these three steps let them induce to all the other virtues.<sup>181</sup>

While this openness to poverty, both spiritual and actual, should be the free posture of a leader, I think this can also characterize missional communities as

---

<sup>180</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, rev. ed, trans. and ed. Caridad Inga and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 119.

<sup>181</sup> Fleming, *Draw Me into Your Friendship*, 112.

well. Of course, each member needs to have the freedom to choose for themselves, but a community pressing into its collective freedom will increasingly find itself drawn to the margins of the world where the Triune God is most active!

### **DESIRES FOR SANTA CRUZ BIBLE CHURCH**

I've often wondered what Ignatius would say to Santa Cruz Bible Church were he present with us. How would a spiritual master diagnose the challenges we've faced, especially over the last 20 years of decreasing attendance, lead pastor transitions, and church splits? What does reform look like in my context?

I think following the way of interior freedom would invite us to release our grip on the past. There's a strong desire in my context to return to our heyday and recapture the spark that saw SCBC become a place where many people encountered Jesus' love for the first time. Along with that dynamism came wealth, power, and influence as we built a multi-million dollar campus and became a regional hub. Our Sunday attendance drew from Santa Cruz County and beyond and many pastors who served at SCBC later went on to give leadership to other churches in the region.

However, today we're a much smaller, much older congregation that has lost much of its energy and vitality. In true Ignatian fashion, the way of freedom would invite us to acknowledge that God wants to meet us where we are and

allow these experiences of decline to be the place where we can be reintroduced and reformed in the love of God manifested in Jesus and made present in the Spirit. The impulse to grow again, though cloaked in the language of a desire to reach the lost, is all too often a cover for our own fear and insecurity. However, if we can receive the love of God meeting us in this place, I have to believe that would capture the energy of “choosing Christ in the world” and joining God in the *Missio Dei*.

Free to choose Christ, we can discern Jesus’ leading. In my own discernment about where Jesus might be moving and working in our midst, many of the people who are attracted to us are not the wealthy and put together. They are the down and out, the weird and funky, those that religious people are uncomfortable to attend church with and sit next to. It is precisely this discomfort, which is really unfreedom, that keeps us from walking this path.

It’s interesting to me that many of those who have undergone the exercises at SCBC see similar things and sense a leading to be a church that ministers the presence of Jesus to the marginal places in our county. I’m reminded of a passage I love from Erich Neumann’s *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic* where he writes,

My own shadow side is a part and representative of the shadow side of the whole human race; and if my shadow is anti-social and greedy, cruel and malicious, poor and miserable—if he approaches me in the form of a beggar, a negro or a wild beast—then my reconciliation with him will

involve at the same time my reconciliation with the dark brother of the whole human race. This mean that when I accept him and, in him, myself, I am also accepting, in his person, that whole component of the human race which—as my shadow—is “my neighbor”. Here the love of one’s neighbour preached by Jesus of Nazareth becomes love of one’s neighbour in the form of the thief and the shadow.<sup>182</sup>

Many in the Ignatian tradition see sin similarly to the way the Jungian Psychological tradition see the shadow. In the Jungian tradition, the way to be a good person is not by suppressing and repressing anything we judge “bad”, but rather by receiving it in love as Neumann points out here. This is strikingly similar to Ignatius’ insight that all things have the potential of calling forth in us a greater formation in love to God and others. Even our sin becomes the opportunity for us to know our belovedness in greater and deeper ways.

The reason for this seemingly esoteric detour is this: we are a church that does not know itself as fully-loved sinners and so must always be searching out ways to prove and justify our collective worth by seeking success as the evangelical world defines it. Being formed, grounded, and held in Jesus’ love will free us to acknowledge our sin and how we project it on others and so pursue the wholeness that will enable us to embody the love of God for all, especially for those most broken, wounded, exploited, and marginalized.

---

<sup>182</sup> Erich Neumann, *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, trans. Eugene Rolfe (1969; repr., Boulder, CO: Shambala Publications, 1990), 95.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While this thesis has been an in-depth look at interior freedom in the Ignatian tradition, there are so many avenues of research in the Spiritual Exercises and Ignatian Spirituality that yet remain untapped as it relates to protestants in general and evangelicals in particular. The Jesuit order has close to 500 years worth of writing and reflection on the exercises with countless commentaries, monographs, edited volumes, sermons, and journals devoted to exploring and mining the riches of the tradition for life and faith in our contemporary world.

Evangelicals have yet to fully open themselves up to the richness of these pre-enlightenment traditions of spirituality, even if there are encouraging signs.<sup>183</sup> So there are many ways that the spirituality of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises can be applied and explored for evangelicals. Two of particular interest to me are how the experience of the exercises would be received by younger retreatants and how the exercises can be applied to the process of ministerial formation.

---

<sup>183</sup> I think here of the work of ministries such as Renovaré and academic programs like the Talbot Institute for Spiritual Formation and the Christian Formation and Ministry department at Wheaton College. Two local Bay Area organizations doing good work in this area are Don and Charlotte Ferris' ministry, Beyond These Shores, and WellSpring.

## Younger Retreatants

The test group I led through the exercises was on the older end of the age spectrum. None of the participants were under 50. I think there is some good reason for this as those who are ready for the exercises have lived enough life to hit their “wall-stage.”<sup>184</sup> Those who are ready likely tend to skew older.

However, I first went through the exercises at age 33, two years after my traumatic, abusive experiences with ministry in Santa Cruz. As I’m writing, the current group I’m leading through the exercises with Don Ferris includes a man in his mid-30’s who came from a Fundamentalist Christian upbringing and is in the process of deconstructing and reconstructing his faith. There’s some reason to believe that Millennials are experiencing their wall-stage earlier than some previous generations. The older half of the Millennial generation came of age and entered the working, adult world after college or grad school during the midst of the Great Recession making it more difficult than in the previous 70 years to get established in a career. Now the COVID-19 pandemic has hit when many of us are in the first half of our child-raising years and younger Millennials are themselves trying to get established in the work world.

I would suspect that at this moment in history, for these and a variety of other reasons, there might be more people in their 20’s and 30’s who would

---

<sup>184</sup> Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 113ff.

potentially be ready for the experience of the exercises and a deeper way to engage their relationship with God. It would be fascinating to take a group entirely in this age range through the 19th Annotation of the Spiritual Exercises and compare their growth in interior freedom to the growth of the group that went through my project. Furthermore, if the results are similar, it would be an interesting follow-up study to track that group over a number of years and see what their growth in interior freedom leads to in terms of their life and ministry choices.

### **Ministerial Formation**

There has been a growing awareness in protestant circles that narcissistic leaders and narcissistic systems are a major pandemic in the life of the church.<sup>185</sup> While the reasons for this pandemic are complex and thoroughly diagnosing the root causes are beyond the scope of this thesis, it seems clear that the way we train and form leaders has played a significant role in the problem.<sup>186</sup>

While the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises are certainly not a panacea, they provide a formal, robust, and repeatable process that could sit alongside the

---

<sup>185</sup> See again my advisor Chuck DeGroat's *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community From Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*. See also Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020).

<sup>186</sup> Even leadership training and formation is situated in larger cultural movements at work. For an interesting and, in my opinion, compelling diagnosis of much of the problem in the world of education in general and theological education in particular see Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020).

more traditional process of theological education as a way to form the future leaders of the church. When the exercises are experienced under the wise care of a seasoned spiritual director, it helps those of us on the narcissistic spectrum to become aware of the places where we resist vulnerability to the love of God. Furthermore, as we explored in our discussions of Family Systems Theory, the growth in interior freedom is the quality necessary for maintaining a non-anxious presence in the midst of an anxious system. For pastors in training to be equipped with these powerful tools to remain free and non-anxious in the midst of their first-call churches and beyond will set them up for a lifetime of healthy leadership that resists the tendency towards either abuse or burnout.

I recognize that there are difficulties because of accreditation for seminaries to require a process like the exercises. However, a worthy area of research could be for a denominational or network body responsible for ordaining or licensing pastors to research the short and long term effects of having a group of ordination candidates complete the exercises as a part of their ordination process. The Church desperately needs healthy leaders and leaders desperately need their churches to do the hard work of preparing them for a lifetime of leading and caring for God's people in health and freedom.

## CONCLUSION

The central mark of missional leadership in freedom is resisting manipulation and coercion at every turn. This is really the central thread that runs through my convictions about mission and ministry in freedom and holds them together. Manipulation is a use of one's power to coerce others through the use of their attachments in order to achieve desired ends usually defined as the increasing of one's or the collective's wealth, power, and privilege. Manipulation is a betrayal of the way of love. Love feels no need to grasp but is free to hold its hands open because it knows it will persist no matter what else is taken away.

Mission and ministry in freedom will always be open to the working of God in surprising and even disturbing ways. Indeed, the freedom is possible because we have come to intimately know the love of God revealed in Jesus. More than that, we trust it because every situation has the potential to call forth in us a greater experience of God's love and a greater response of love to God.

Now, recognize, this does not mean that we throw our hands up and refuse to plan or work with excellence. A good leader will make plans and seek to create with excellence that reflects the beauty of the Godhead. The very fact that we often equate planning and excellence with pushing people shows that something has gone terribly wrong in our conception of leadership and work.

The love of God that severs attachments and brings freedom to our souls needs to shift our entire framework for leadership.

When we lead from our own freedom in a way that honors the freedom of those we lead and the freedom of those we are trying to introduce to the love of God, I believe new creative possibilities and situations will arise that we couldn't have dreamed of under the old models of coercive, fear-based leadership. These communities may not look outwardly impressive or even missional in the ways we're used to but you can be sure, where interior freedom exists, the Kingdom is growing and thriving just as surely as the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32).

## Appendix: An Interior Freedom Assessment Tool

1. Tell me a little about what your spiritual practices look like right now?
2. Tell me about a time in the last few years (**Post-Exercises:** during the course of the Exercises) when you've responded to a prompting from God. What did that look like?
3. **Pre-Exercises:** Other than the fact that I asked you, what leads you to want to make this commitment to the Spiritual Exercises this year? **Post-Exercises:** Looking back now, what do you notice about what led you to make the commitment to the Exercises for the past nine months?
4. What desires do you have for your relationship with Jesus at this period of your life?
5. Close your eyes and picture the face of Jesus looking at you. Describe the expression on his face as you see it right now; not as you think it should be.
6. **Pre-Exercises:** Have you ever had long periods of stillness and silence? What was that like for you? **Post-Exercises:** How would you describe the time you've spent in stillness and silence with Jesus?)
7. **Pre-Exercises:** Have you ever had a period of "waiting on God" in your life? What was that experience like? **Post-Exercises:** How has "waiting on God" shifted for you over the course of the exercises?
8. **Pre-Exercises:** Tell me about a time in your life where you experienced a kind of spiritual freedom as you understand it. **Post-Exercises:** How have you come to taste the experience of Interior Freedom?)

9. **Pre-Exercises:** When you face an anxiety producing situation, how long does it generally take for you to return to your “baseline” or “center?” **Post-Exercises:** Do you notice that has shifted over the past nine months?)
10. Listen to this prayer. As you do, notice what thoughts and/or emotions it stirs in you. Do you believe you could pray this prayer wholeheartedly at this moment?

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding,  
and my entire will,  
All I have and call my own.  
You have given all to me.  
To you, Lord, I return it.  
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
Give me only your love and your grace,  
that is enough for me.<sup>187</sup>

---

<sup>187</sup> This is the “Suscipe” from *Exercises* 234:4.

## Bibliography

- . *NAE LifeWay Research Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition*. Nashville: Lifeway Research, 2015. Accessed 30 December 2020. <http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/NAE-LifeWay-Research-Evangelical-Beliefs-Research-Definition-Methodology-and-Use.pdf>
- Armstrong, Chris. "The Rise, Frustration, and Revival of Evangelical Spiritual Ressourcement." *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 113–121.
- Au, Wilkie, and Au, Noreen Cannon. *God's Unconditional Love: Healing Our Shame*. New York: Paulist Press, 2016.
- Au, Wilkie, and Cannon, Noreen. *Urgings of the Heart: a Spirituality of Integration*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995.
- Au, Wilkie, and Au, Noreen Cannon. *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*. New York: Paulist Press, 2006.
- Barry, William A., and Doherty, Robert G. *Contemplatives In Action: The Jesuit Way*. New York: Paulist Press, 2002.
- Barry, William A. *Finding God in All Things: A Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1991.
- Barry, William A. *Letting God Come Close: An Approach to the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises*. Chicago: Jesuit Way, 2001.
- Barry, William A., and Connolly, William J. *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*. New York: HarperOne, 2014.
- Barry, William A. *Spiritual Direction and the Encounter with God: A Theological Inquiry*. New York: Paulist Press, 1992.
- Barry, William A. *With an Everlasting Love: Developing an Intimate Relationship with God*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

- Bauckham, Richard. "Only the Suffering God Can Help: Divine Passibility in Modern Theology." *Themelios* 9, no. 3 (1984): 6-12.
- Bergan, Jacqueline, and Schwan, Marie. *Forgiveness: A Guide for Prayer*. Revised and Updated ed. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004.
- Blackaby, Henry, and King, Claude V. *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*. Nashville: LifeWay Press, 1990.
- Brackley, Dean. *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2004.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*. 2nd ed. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007.
- Callaghan, Brendan. "Do Teddy Bears Make Good Spiritual Directors?: Ignatius Loyola Meets Donald Winnicott." *The Way* 42, no. 3 (July 2003): 19-32.
- Chester, Tim, and Timmis, Steve. *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2012.
- Chester, Tim, and Timmis, Steve. *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2008.
- Clark, Todd D. "Embracing Maturity: An Ignatian Christian Leadership Formation Model for Emerging Adults" D.Min Thesis, George Fox University, 2014. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/73>
- Coakley, Sarah. *God, Sexuality and the Self: an Essay "On the Trinity"*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Coakley, Sarah. *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002.
- Coakley, Sarah. *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God*. London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2015.

- Cook, Alison, and Miller, Kimberly. *Boundaries for Your Soul: How to Turn Your Overwhelming Thoughts and Feelings into Your Greatest Allies*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2018.
- Cooper, John W. *Panentheism the Other God of the Philosophers: from Plato to the Present*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Cuss, Steve. *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019.
- DeGroat, Chuck. *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- DuMez, Kristen Kobes. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020.
- Dyckman, Katherine Marie, Garvin, Mary, and Liebert, Elizabeth. *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women*. New York: Paulist Press, 2001.
- Evagrius Ponticus. *The Praktikos & Chapters on Prayer*. Cistercian Studies Series 4. Translated by John Eudes Bamberger. Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1972.
- Ferris, Charlotte, and Ferris, Don. *Choosing Christ in the World: The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*. Unpublished manuscript, October 2016.
- Fleming, David. *Draw Me Into Your Friendship: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading of the Spiritual Exercises*. Studies on Jesuit Topics 17. Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.
- Francis. "'The Sovereignty of the People of God': The Pontiff Meets the Jesuits of Mozambique and Madagascar." *La Civiltà Cattolica*. September 26, 2019. [https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/#\\_ftn5](https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-sovereignty-of-the-people-of-god-the-pontiff-meets-the-jesuits-of-mozambique-and-madagascar/#_ftn5).

- Friedman, Edwin H. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985.
- Gavrilyuk, Paul L. *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Rev. ed. Translated and edited by Caridad Inga and John Eagleson. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Hagberg, Janet, and Guelich, Robert. *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*. 2nd ed. Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Co., 2005.
- Hawthorne, Gerald F., and Martin, Ralph P. *Philippians Revised*. Word Biblical Commentary 43. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004.
- Hansen, Collin. "Young, Restless, Reformed: Calvinism is Making a Comeback- And Shaking Up the Church." *Christianity Today*. September 2006. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/september/42.32.html>.
- Hirsch, Alan, and Catchim, Tim. *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*. Jossey-Bass Leadership Network Series 57. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012.
- Howatch, Susan. *Glittering Images*. New York: Fawcett Publications, 1988.
- Ignatius of Loyola. *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*. Rev. ed. Translated by Joseph Tylenda. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001.
- Ignatius of Loyola, and Ganss, George E. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992.
- Ivens, Michael. *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises: Text and Commentary: a Handbook for Retreat Directors*. Inigo Texts Series, vol. 4. Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2016.

- Jennings, Willie James. *After Whiteness: An Education In Belonging*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020.
- Jung, C. G. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1939.
- Kuja, Ryan. *From the Inside Out: Reimagining Mission, Recreating the World*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018.
- Laird, Martin. *An Ocean of Light: Contemplation, Transformation, and Liberation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Langberg, Diane. *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. 1957. Reprint, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.
- McConvery, Brendan, ed. *Living in Union with Christ in Today's World: the Witness of John Calvin and Ignatius Loyola: Conference Papers from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth*. Dublin: Veritas, 2011.
- McGavran, Donald A. *Understanding Church Growth*. 3rd ed. Revised and Edited by C. Peter Wagner. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990.
- Meadow, Mary Jo. "Four Stages of Spiritual Experience: a Comparison of the Ignatian Exercises and Jungian Psychotherapy." *Pastoral Psychology* 37, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 172-191.
- Merton, Thomas. *Contemplation in a World of Action*. Gethsemani Studies in Psychological and Religious Anthropology. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.
- Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*. 1962. Reprint, New York: New Directions Books, 1961.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. *Experiences of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

- Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*. Translated by Margaret Kohl. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Netherwood, Anne. *The Voice of This Calling an Evangelical Encounters the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. London: SPCK, 1990.
- Neumann, Erich. *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*. Translated by Eugene Rolfe. 1969. Reprint, Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 1990.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989.
- Newbigin, Lesslie. *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.
- Nouwen, Henri. *In the Name of Jesus*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989.
- Nyguyen, Joseph H. *Apatheia In the Christian Tradition: An Ancient Spirituality and It's Contemporary Relevance*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018.
- O'Brien, Kevin F. *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011.
- O'Malley, John W. *The First Jesuits*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Osmer, Richard R. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Packer, J.I. *Knowing God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973.
- Palmer, Helen. *The Enneagram: The Definitive Guide to the Ancient System for Understanding Yourself and the Others in Your Life*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988.
- Peeters, Louis. *An Ignatian Approach to Divine Union*. Translated by Hillard L. Brozowski. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1956.

- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Vol. 1, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- Rahner, Karl. *Further Theology of the Spiritual Life*. Vol. 7, *Theological Investigations*. Translated by David Bourke. New York: Herder & Herder, 1971.
- Rahner, Karl. *Spiritual Exercises*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1967.
- Rahner, Karl. *The Trinity*. Translated by Joseph Donceel. New York: Herder & Herder, 1970.
- Robertson, Campbell. "A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers are Leaving White Evangelical Churches." *The New York Times*, 9 March 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>.
- Schwartz, Richard C., and Sweezy, Martha. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. 2nd ed. New York: The Guilford Press, 2020.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- Sheldrake, Philip. "Befriending Our Desires." *The Way* 35, no. 2 (April 1995): 91–100.
- Sheldrake, Philip. *Spirituality: A Brief History*. 2nd ed. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013.
- Sheldrake, Philip. "The Influence of the Ignatian Tradition." *The Way Supplement* 68. (1990): 74-85.
- Sheldrake, Philip, ed. *The Way of Ignatius Loyola: Contemporary Approaches to the Spiritual Exercises*. London: SPCK, 1991.
- Shellnutt, Kate. "Acts 29 CEO Removed Amid 'Accusations of Abusive Leadership'." *Christianity Today*. February 7, 2020. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/february/acts-29-ceo-steve-timmis-removed-spiritual-abuse-tch.html>.
- Silf, Margaret. *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*. 10th

- anniversary ed. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007.
- Smith, Huston. *The World's Religions*. New York: Harper One, 1991.
- Sölle, Dorothee. *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*. Translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Stetzer, Ed. "Hard Truths About Multiracial Churches." *Facts & Trends*, 7 October 2014. <https://factsandtrends.net/2014/10/07/hard-truths-about-multicultural-churches/>.
- Stewart, Robert. "Seeking to Understand the Rise, Fall, and Loss of Young Pastors." ChuckDeGroat.net. cited 20 May 2020. <https://chuckdegroat.net/2020/05/20/guest-post-seeking-to-understand-the-rise-fall-and-loss-of-young-pastors-by-robert-stewart/>.
- Swindoll, Charles. *Intimacy With the Almighty: Encountering Christ in the Secret Places of Your Life*. Nashville: Word Publishing, 1996.
- Swinton, John, and Mowat, Harriet. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. 2nd ed. London: SCM Press, 2016.
- Symeon the New Theologian. *On the Mystical Life: The Ethical Discourses*. Vol. 2, *On Virtue & Christian Life*. Popular Patristics Series 15. Translated by Alexander Golitzen. Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996.
- Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*. Translated by Mirabai Starr. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003.
- Tetlow, Joseph A. *Choosing Christ in the World: A Handbook for Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola According to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen*. Studies on Jesuit Topics 4, no. 12. Saint Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1999.
- Thibodeaux, Mark E. *Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer*. Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001.
- Thibodeaux, Mark E. *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2015.

- Tilby, Angela. "Jung Among the Christians." *The Way Supplement* 69 (1990): 117-128.
- Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God: Their Meaning in the Christian Life*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 1978.
- Traub, George W., ed. *An Ignatian Spirituality Reader: Contemporary Writings on St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Spiritual Exercises, Discernment, and More*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008.
- Traupman, John C. *The Bantam New College Latin & English Dictionary*. Revised and Enlarged. New York: Bantam Books, 1995.
- Tylenda, Joseph N., S.J., trans. 2001. *A Pilgrim's Journey: The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press.
- Van Biema, David. "Can Megachurches Bridge the Racial Divide?" *Time Magazine*, January 11, 2010. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1950943-1,00.html>.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Hans Urs Von Balthasar on the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises: an Anthology*. Edited by Jacques Servais. Translated by Thomas Jacobi and Jonas Wernet. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Prayer*. Translated by Graham Harrison. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986.
- von Speyr, Adrienne. *With God and With Men: Prayers*. Translated by Adrian Walker. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- Wakefield, James L. *Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006.
- Warner, Larry. *Journey with Jesus: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.
- Wright, N.T. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.

Williams, Rowan. *The Wound of Knowledge: Christian Spirituality from the New Testament to St. John of the Cross*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979.

Winner, Lauren F. *The Dangers of Christian Practice: on Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2018.

Young, Frances. *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity*. Current Issues in Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.