

WHO IS THE NINETEENTH ANNOTATION FOR?

By MARTHA SKINNADER

IGNATIUS GIVES a definite answer to this question in Annotation 19 itself:

One who is educated or talented, but engaged in public affairs or necessary business should take an hour and a half daily for the Spiritual Exercises (Exx 19).

He considers that the full Exercises can be followed in the stream of life by one who because of public or business affairs cannot withdraw for the full thirty days. Yet he would limit the ability to do this to those of some intellectual standing with or without formal education.

He sees the Exercises in a modified form as valuable to a wider range of people. In Annotation 18 he makes this clear:

The Spiritual Exercises must be adapted to the condition of the one who is to engage in them, that is, to his age, education and talent. Thus exercises that he could not bear, or from which he would derive no profit, should not be given to one with little natural ability or of little physical strength (Exx 18).

He considers that nothing beyond the exercises of the First Week should be given 'to those of little natural ability or who are illiterate' (Exx 18).

This appears to have been the early practice in Ignatius's own lifetime. Francisco de Strada writes to Ignatius and Favre in 1539 from Siena:

With respect to the Exercises, may I tell you that I gave them to four Sienese who came here to Montepulciano. I did not lose much time with them, since they were all very ordinary fellows, and in this I followed the rule of our own father. They all made a general confession and agreed that they had drawn great fruit from the Spiritual Exercises.¹

A footnote in Schurhammer's life of Francis Xavier tells us that 'very ordinary' is a translation of slang word *cerbelim* meaning 'small brain'.

Further on de Strada writes:

I would like to tell you what the Exercises have been christened. They are now called 'Purgation' or 'General Confession' and since this is more descriptive, they do not shrink from it as they do from 'Exercises'.²

This appears to be the limit expected of ordinary people. In the same year we hear of Favre in Parma preparing many people through the meditations of the First Week to make a general confession.³

As I live and work in a peripheral housing scheme in Glasgow — the equivalent of the inner-city — I did not expect to do full Nineteenth Annotation work. Areas of multi-deprivation do not house the educated or talented 'engaged in public affairs or business'. Our housing scheme was built in the early 1950s for the families of unskilled and semi-skilled workers living in the overcrowded slum conditions of post-war Glasgow. Not much real planning was put into it. Over the years when better housing became available many moved out. As the particular area where we live was least popular, nobody wanted to live in it. We became an area where families with specific problems, or families who cannot cope, were housed because they had no choice.

Yet the community is still made up of a rich variety of people. There are those in their late fifties and sixties who came to the scheme when it was first built. Their early childhood and young adulthood had been spent in the grim poverty of the Glasgow of the depression and war years. They built up a real community here which in recent years they have had to watch break up. Those in their late thirties and forties have also contributed to the growth of the community and have witnessed its decline. They have known regular employment but now experience redundancy for themselves and unemployment for their teenage children as they leave school. Younger married couples, many of whom were brought up in the area, see living here as a temporary measure until better housing is available. They are bringing up young families on unemployment benefit or low wages with the threat of unemployment ever present.

Secondary education in these groups has been confined to two years post-primary or three years in a junior secondary school at a time of teacher shortage, or more recently four years in a

comprehensive school. Among Catholics, except for the younger adults, the bible is not known, and religious education stopped when they left school. Vatican II theology has had little impact on the majority. Fortunately I did not have to come to a definite decision whether or not to attempt to give the full Exercises in daily life in my neighbourhood. Without any deliberate planning or decision, it happened.

As I live in the area I meet my neighbours as a neighbour in the streets, on the buses, at the shops, at residents' and parish group meetings. As we meet informally, I can be approached informally about the problems and anxieties of family life: a mother feels strangely empty and useless as her family begins to leave home; an active person finds difficulty in adjusting to a quieter life after a heart attack; a wife suffers from hyper-tension in her anxiety for a husband who cannot cope with redundancy; the young wife of a broken marriage struggles with the loneliness of her task of bringing up her family by herself — the ordinary anxieties of many people today.

Most often, all that is wanted is a listener, someone to take an interest. However, on my return from making the Institute of Spirituality which included the Spiritual Exercises, as I listened to people talking out their anxieties and problems, I suggested to a few of them that we take some time to learn to pray, to open ourselves to God, and to find him more in our lives. I found the suggestion was welcomed, particularly because I was not merely suggesting that we pray to God to remove the problem, but that through his help we learn how to cope with it. What gave most hope was the suggestion that God could be found in the problem.

Those who accepted the offer committed themselves only to coming to see me individually once a week for about an hour. It was necessary for each one to come to me, for there is little opportunity for a parent to have a time of uninterrupted privacy in the family home. However, our house is in no quieter position than any other house in the area, and both the retreatant and I had early to learn to cope with conducting the interview amid the external noises of dogs, children, ice-cream vans' signature tunes and neighbours' televisions.

With each one I began by talking of her present life experience, not merely the present problem, and then we looked at some significant event where she had found God in her life. Without formally working at a full faith history this normally sparked off a looking back at the most important life events, and a realization of God's

presence in them. At the first meeting this was planted as a seed which grew and developed in the weeks following.

Prayer was introduced to the interview in one of the stillness exercises of *Sādhana*.⁴ Both the retreatant and I relaxed and became still as we concentrated on our breathing, and shared with each other our experience of stillness. I introduced some *mantra* into the exercise — one that seemed natural to the retreatant. This was the total prayer content of the first interview.

I encouraged the repetition of this, where possible, each day for a short time during the following week. This possibility of being still for even five or ten minutes a day proved to be a gentle but powerful well-spring of awareness of God's presence in ordinary everyday life, and of a deeper appreciation of his love and care. By the second interview I found that even such a small beginning was bearing fruit.

The early interviews had a simple pattern — a listening to the ups and downs of daily life, more obviously now shot through with the awareness of God, to be followed by some stillness exercise.

When it seemed most appropriate for the retreatant at the second or later interview, I moved on to the contemplation of her 'joyful mysteries'.⁵ Here she re-lived some peak experience of her life — actually feeling again the joy or the love first felt years ago. Once again I did the exercise with each one and shared my experience. This exercise quite simply and naturally flowed into a prayer of thanksgiving.

I suggested that this be repeated each day at home. Sometimes the same joyful experience would be returned to and deepened; at other times different ones would be contemplated each day. In this way the seed of faith experience of God's presence in life increased its growth.

After one or two weeks spent in this contemplation I found it time to introduce a scripture passage. It was not difficult to find one flowing from the retreatants' own prayer experience of the past few weeks. Obvious ones are Psalms 131 and 139 and Isaiah 43,1-7. For this I first of all lent a bible until the retreatant could afford to buy one. At this point the passage is the important thing, so we found it, marked it by page number and verse, read it over to make sure there were no insuperable difficulties, but learned nothing about the bible as a whole.

For the first two interviews after the introduction of scripture both the retreatant and I prayed the passage during the interview and shared what we had experienced. This I find is the most helpful way

of giving an introduction to *lectio divina*. The retreatant could then take a further passage to pray on during the week and report on this prayer at the next interview.

When a certain ease in this scripture prayer had been established we moved on to ignatian contemplation. As up to the present I have worked with mothers and grandmothers I find that the simplest and most natural introduction to ignatian contemplation is through Mary's joyful mysteries. Each one has had the experience of contemplating her own joyful mysteries, which invariably are connected with child-birth and the early life of her own children. They can feel with Mary the joy and wonder of carrying the child; the joy of motherhood with its accompanying anxiety for the responsibility it brings. The first of these contemplations I shared with the retreatant, but after that each one was able to take one incident for prayer each week, reporting on it in the following interview.

We followed Mary in the early years of her motherhood, using passages from Luke's gospel from the annunciation to the finding in the temple. By this time I would have introduced the retreatants to the beginning of the prayer period — the placing of oneself in the presence of God, the prayer for the grace sought, and the colloquy (without using that word). Almost without knowing it, over the weeks, the retreatant had begun to learn what repetition is, and was making a simple review of prayer.

During this introductory period we worked out what commitment could be given daily to prayer; where prayer could be made, and what was the most suitable time. This was worked out not in the sense of an obligation, but in the sense of what was possible and helpful.

When retreatants had covered all this and were at ease with it I moved on to a simple First Week theme of God's goodness to me, my poor response and his loving mercy. As this involved moving round the bible, it was at this point that we took some time to learn the difference between the Old and New Testaments, and the names of the writers of the four gospels. It was helpful to know such a simple thing as the fact that the gospels are at the back of the book and the Old Testament is at the front. I found that sufficient for general information. I could give any essential information on a passage at the interview as we used that passage for prayer.

I considered that this would be my goal — an 'Eighteenth Annotation' retreat. But as I came to this point with my first set of retreatants I realized that I was working with a group of people who were showing a great desire to be open to God. God was responding

to that openness in their prayer and life and they in return were responding to him. Their desire was so strong that they could keep to a commitment to spend time daily in prayer in noisy surroundings and liable to family interruptions. Their only possible place for prayer is a bedroom. No one here can afford to heat bedrooms. Several prayed daily in their unheated bedrooms through the winter of 1981 when the temperature dropped to fourteen degrees fahrenheit.

Considering this, and considering also that the retreatants showed ease in both *lectio divina* and ignatian contemplation, that they had grown used to the simple ignatian pattern of prayer, that they were able to organize their prayer during the week, and could report on it simply and clearly, I could see no reason why we should not undertake the full Exercises according to Annotation 19.

As my work in prayer sprang informally from people's life experience, my first group of retreatants were all at different stages, having begun at different times. When I judged the time appropriate for each one, I asked if they would like to follow a longer, planned series of prayer which would especially help them to find God in all things in their life. I gave them the title of the planned series they would be following: 'The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius'. The mention of St Ignatius drew no response. To my retreatants he was completely unknown as was also his order. None of them had heard of the Jesuits. As far as they were concerned they were following a planned way of prayer guaranteed by me. It was with this assurance that my first group launched into the full Exercises.

The commitment was a period of prayer each day. The aim was half an hour but the time was not made sacrosanct, as in the stream of family life the full time could not be guaranteed. Over and above this was the commitment to the weekly interview. During the nine months we took to complete the Exercises some interviews had to be missed, usually because the director had to be away. Even when I had to miss two interviews, the retreatants were able to cope with prayer on their own for that time, and keep a record of two weeks' prayer.

The interview followed the pattern established in our introductory weeks, except that now we set aside at least an hour and a half. I had more instruction to give — simple background to scripture texts and explanation of the text of the Exercises themselves. Retreatants had shown that they could cope with meditation and contemplation of scripture, but working with the text of the Exercises was new.

This I found, however, offered no difficulty — whether the Puhl translation was used or the Fleming.⁶ Retreatants borrowed the book of the Exercises when any specific text was being used in prayer, with the proviso that they read only the appropriate section.

The only actual ignatian texts I have hesitated to use are those of the First Week, as they come so early in a new undertaking. I paraphrased them and supplemented them with scripture readings. We began the Exercises with some introductory prayer highlighting the main points of the Principle and Foundation; then in the light of each retreatant's prayer we looked at the text of the Principle and Foundation. From the Kingdom meditation onwards to the Contemplation to Attain Divine Love all texts were used from the book of the Exercises. They were used for prayer with no scripture to supplement them. The retreatants prayed on the text alone. Time was taken during the interview to read them over and explain any difficulties without in any way interpreting the text for the retreatant.

The ignatian text is basically simple; its images, although of an early age, are clear, and rather than posing a difficulty to retreatants it proved helpful. There was a difference in the retreatants' infancy contemplations made after reading Ignatius's text on the incarnation, compared to their early infancy prayer of the introductory weeks. The imagery of the Two Standards, instead of reinforcing older attitudes to sin, revealed to the retreatants how evil was tempting them through good.

What I have found most important is to keep everything simple. I gave no background reading, as this can be muddling to those not used to much reading and not familiar with the bible. One text per week, either a scripture passage or at the appropriate time a text from the Exercises, was found to be most helpful. We did not seem to lose anything of the depth of prayer in this way, rather we gained. I found with my retreatants that it was important to have a narrow focus in prayer; a broader one could dissipate effort and become overwhelming. As retreatants grew at ease in the Exercises I saw the week's prayer move gently to its still point by the end of the week. With any more than one text we would not have reached this.

If there is not great ease in using books among the retreatants, there is less ease in written expression and making notes. At first, therefore, while reporting could be done from recall, I did not ask for

any writing. I waited for a point when there was some difficulty in remembering and suggested the making of notes after the review. This put the writing in perspective as an aid to memory and not an end in itself.

It may be asked if, with these limitations, I can be sure we were really following the full Exercises. Of this I am certain, because of the unerring way in which the prayer of each retreatant moved — different for each individual within the same general movement.

When I undertook to direct others in the Exercises in daily life, I had the simple belief that my work would be merely 'to permit the creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his creator and Lord' (Exx 16). Otherwise I would not have had the courage to undertake the task. I discovered this to be true. It was as if I was working a computer. I gave my message to the retreatant whose powers to receive it were very simple. Then it was for me to watch as the programme unfolded, quite out of proportion to my little input and her power to receive. Women who knew nothing of the intellectual concepts of spirituality, nothing of ignatian spirituality and little even of the bible found wonder in the Principle and Foundation, in the realization that all of life is gift, and that God loves each of them uniquely. They desired to respond to that love.

During the prayer of the First Week the revelation of what sin really is and of their own sinfulness overwhelmed them, as they have normally considered sin in individual actions, and on the whole considered themselves 'all right' — not really sinners. However, the revelation that, at the same time, God loves each of them in spite of that sinfulness helped them to realize just how gratuitous this love is and yet how steadfast. This gave them in varying degrees a trust in that love which enabled them to offer to follow him in the Kingdom meditation and to carry out that following in the prayer of the Second Week.

During the prayer of the Second Week each one learned gradually more of what was involved in that following. In the prayer of the Two Standards, the Three Classes of Men, and the Three Kinds of Humility each one discovered what choice God wanted her to make in her life. As none could change her state in life, and none had been living a really evil life, the choices they were asked to make were subtle but important changes of attitude: the realization that they judged others from a pharisaical standpoint; the letting go of the desire that they do work for God — their work, but rather allowing

him to work through them — his work. For one retreatant the effect of this prayer on her was a joyous sense of freedom.

In the Third Week their prayer automatically became a being with Jesus in his suffering and a seeing of his suffering continuing in the world today.

In the Fourth Week they did experience the Risen Christ and with this came a fuller realization of his presence in the world today, particularly his presence in others. The Contemplation to Attain Divine Love, which closes the Exercises, became for them a gathering together of all that had come to them in their prayer and life experience of finding God in all things — a looking back, and at the same time a looking forward in deep trust and love to a life changed by the experience of the Exercises.

We studied this movement as the Exercises progressed, taking time at the end of each stage to look back over this prayer to see what had been happening in it, why we were ready to move on, and in what direction we were moving. In this way the retreatants were aware of the movement not only in their prayer but in their life. For as throughout the Exercises their prayer affected their lives so also did their life experience affect their prayer. When the Exercises were completed, we spent at least three interviews looking back at what had happened in the whole experience.

It follows naturally that from the experience of the Exercises the retreatants learned a new theology — a new way of looking at God and his creation, or rather God in his creation. The most valuable thing about this theology is that it has not been learned intellectually but has been experienced personally. It is not something to be known but to be lived.

In finding a God present in his whole creation, loving individuals just as they are, they discovered a strange but very freeing truth that they cannot earn their own salvation: everything is gift. The important thing is not what they can do for God, but what he can do in and through them. They discovered the true humanity of Jesus — that he had to discern his Father's will. They realized that he did suffer and that he gave himself up in faith and trust to his Father. Because of this they can find him in the suffering, the helpless and hopeless — in all the agony of this world. Because they have experienced his resurrection as the outcome of his suffering they now have a quiet but deep hope.

To one retreatant in particular who had never heard of the doctrine of the Mystical Body, the knowledge of the union of each of

us in the Risen Christ has become a real force in her life. She experiences this oneness not just in Catholics, not even just in Christians, but in all whom she meets.

From this has come a deep change in attitudes. The inner security, which has grown from the acceptance of oneself as loved and valued as one is, has fostered a change of attitude to others — an acceptance of those who hold different ideas or who have different standards in life; a greater understanding of teenagers in a family; a fuller appreciation and deepening love for a husband. A growing stillness within has given a better ability to cope with family crises — being able to take the heat out of the situation. With this change of attitude there has grown a desire to help others, not by giving things to those who cannot cope, but rather by supporting them in their own efforts. Those who have been mere passengers in the parish have become active in its life. One has become a leader.

Of course the Exercises have not produced ready-made saints. These changes are merely growing. But the important thing is that they are growing from deep roots, and the daily examen of consciousness helps to encourage the growth.

After-care is simple as it can be continued in the stream of life. Most of it can be informal. Retreatants and director still live near each other, still meet in daily life. If we really believe that we find God in all things, what would normally be called spiritual direction can take place as we meet in the supermarket, at the shopping centre or in the street.

Throughout this article for convenience I have used the terms 'director' and 'retreatants'. This is not the real relationship; we are friends and neighbours. I prefer to see myself as a companion — a companion on the way. Moreover, as I receive so much from those that I accompany, I consider they are valued companions with me on my way.

Already I have a working companion. The greatest desire of one retreatant — Anne — is to share the gift she has been given by helping others through the Exercises. Already she has begun simple Eighteenth Annotation work with one person. The retreatant is a fellow worker who noted the change wrought in Anne as she worked through the Exercises. On learning the source, she asked to begin prayer with her. Anne has no anxiety about undertaking this, because as she says if God worked through me to reach her, he can use her to reach her friend. I accompany Anne as she accompanies her retreatant.

And so who is the Nineteenth Annotation for?

It is obviously for those who cannot afford the time or money to withdraw to a retreat house for thirty full days. But I cannot say that it is obviously only for those who are talented or educated. I have not found that to follow the Exercises according to the Nineteenth Annotation demands an academic education, an ease in handling books, any great intelligence, any knowledge of the bible or of theology. I have found that the Nineteenth Annotation can be given to 'very ordinary' people (Exx 18) with an ordinary ability to read and reflect. But with these ordinary abilities there must be the desire to open oneself to God and the doing of his will in one's life. It is the strength of that desire that enables anyone to undertake the six or nine months' commitment and to be steadfast in that commitment.

Our area may not be rich in academic education or intellectual ability, but it is rich in the life experience of its people. None have lived sheltered lives or particularly easy ones. Our main support has been in each other, and even now as 'an area of multiple deprivation' mutual care and concern still thrive in a deteriorating situation. For such people, catholic or non-catholic, the Spiritual Exercises are a simple instrument to enable them to be aware of God in their lives, and to enable them to express that awareness.

The answer to our question then is simple. The Nineteenth Annotation is for 'very ordinary' people (Exx 18) who cannot afford time or money to withdraw for thirty days, but who have a deep desire to open themselves to God in their lives, and to do his will.

NOTES

¹ Schurhammer, George: *Francis Xavier, his life and times*, vol 1, p 514.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p 527.

⁴ de Mello, Anthony: *Sādhana, a way to God* (Gujarat Sahitya Prakash), pp 22, 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 65.

⁶ Cf *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*, translated by Louis J. Puhl (Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1951); and *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius: a literal translation and a contemporary reading* by David L. Fleming (Institute of Jesuit Sources, St Louis, 1978).