

**A Biographical Sketch of
William P. Sampson, S.J.**

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CHAPTER 1

Family (1928-1946)

This is a chronological account of William Sampson's life. During the early 1970s he was living within walking distance of the National Archives in Washington, D.C. He made repeated visits there to research his family in the census, immigration and military records. His main findings concerned his mother's people, the Gordons. They were of Scottish ancestry. He had an interest in the American Civil War and was glad to find some of his own people who fought in that war.¹ Although he talked minimally about his family, he would probably think a biography should start with a discussion of it.

Mixed Ancestry. Fr. Sampson's father was William Paul Sampson, Sr. His paternal grandparents were George A. Sampson, who was born in June 1873 in New York and Rosie (Rose) Hoffman, who was born in 1870 in Germany.² Rose migrated to the United States in

¹The notes that William Sampson made on his family history may still exist among his personal papers. Jim Walsh, S.J., his literary executor, did not have these papers, but they may be stored in the archives of the Maryland and New York Jesuit provinces, which have a policy of embargoing such material for 50 years after death. Or he may have passed them on to his relatives during his lifetime.

²Rosie Hoffman (Sampson)'s mother, Victoria Hoffman, was born in 1845. See Anonymous, "Census of New York, 1905," <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed August 25, 2012. See also the web page hosted by Ronald James Newman, from which much of the following family history is derived. It is titled, "Ancestors of Ron and Lori Newman"

1886 at the age of sixteen. Both of George's parents were New York born. George worked as a motorman on the railroad. George and Rosie were married in 1894. They rented the home in which they raised their family. Between 1895 and 1901 they had five children.

Bill's father was the oldest.³



Figure 1-1: Fr. William Sampson's Parents and Grandparents.

(Plantsville, CT), at <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/n/e/w/Ronald-J-Newman/index.html>, accessed August 25, 2012.

³The other children of Bill's paternal grandparents (his aunts and uncles) were George F. Sampson, born in 1897, who by 1920 was working as a bookkeeper at a machine shop. Then came Pauline E. Sampson, born in 1899 and Thomas Sampson born in 1901. Both Pauline and Thomas were working as stenographers in 1920. See Anonymous, "1905 Census of New York," and "1920 United States Federal Census (Population Schedule), New York City," [Digital copy of original records in the National Archives, Washington, D.C.], accessed at <http://www.AncestryInstitution.com> at the National Archives on March 15, 2012.

Bill's mother was "Daisey" Gordon (Sampson). His maternal grandfather was Joseph Michael Gordon 1857-1927 or 1943). He was born in New York harbor in 1857.⁴ Joseph's parents, both of whom were born in Edinburgh, Scotland were Michael Gordon (1837-1857) and Rosanna Curry (b. 1839). Michael died on February 10, 1857, a month before Joseph was born, so that Rosanna raised him alone in Jersey City, N.J.

Fr. Sampson's maternal grandmother was Marcella Agatha Feenan (Gordon) (1861-1931). She was born on Race Street in New Orleans, Louisiana. Her father was John Feenan (1822-1885). He migrated from Cork Ireland to New Orleans on May 11, 1853. His wife, also born in Ireland, was Elizabeth Brenann (1838-1885).⁵ John and Elizabeth Feenan had, besides Marcella, who was the second oldest child, eight other children born between 1859 and 1874. The Feenans migrated from New Orleans to Jersey City, N.J. in about 1863 during the Civil War.

Bill's maternal grandparents, Joseph and Marcella (Feenan) Gordon, were married on November 19, 1875 in Jersey City, where they first lived. Then in 1892 they moved to Appleton Avenue (now the Hutchinson River Parkway) in the Bronx , where they joined St. Raymond's parish at 1759 Castle Hill Avenue.⁶ They had eight children, the first five of

⁴Joseph Gordon was buried in the St. Raymond's parish graveyard in the Bronx.

⁵John Feenan's parents were James Feenan and Margaret. They lived in Cork, Ireland.

⁶St. Raymond's parish was established in 1842 as the first Catholic parish in the Bronx. The church building where William attended mass, which still stands, was dedicated in 1898. St. Raymond (1204-1240) was from Catalonia, Spain and a member of the new Order of Our Lady of Mercy for the redemption of captives. He helped ransom slaves held by the Muslims and gave himself up as a hostage for the ransom of others. He is the patron

whom were born in Jersey City. Besides Daisy Gordon (Sampson), who was the sixth child, they had Rose Ann (1884-1972), Edward Francis (b. 1887), Marcella (b. 1889), William Michael (1890-1969), Charles Francis (1892-1970), Joseph Michael (1902-1942) and Alice (1904). Most of these children raised their own families in St. Raymond's parish, so that Bill had many Gordon cousins while growing up. When Bill's maternal grandmother, Marcella, died in 1931, she was buried from St. Raymond's.



Figure 1-2: Bill's paternal grandmother, German-born Rose Hoffman Sampson in the 1930s.⁷



Figure 1-3: Bill's parents, William and Daisy Sampson on their wedding day, June 24, 1919 at St. Raymond's Church.⁸



Figure 1-4: Left to right are Daisy Gordon Sampson (1896-1944), who was Bill's mother, then comes Joseph Michael Gordon (1857-1926), who was Daisy's father and Bill's grandfather and on the right is Pauline Sampson (1898-1993), who was Bill's paternal

saint of childbirth and expectant mothers and infants. See Anonymous, "St. Raymond Parish History," http://www.straymondparish.org/parish_history.html, accessed August 17, 2012.

⁷The picture of Rose E. Hoffman is from the webpage, "The Gordon Sampson Clan," <http://trees.ancestryinstitution.com/tree22343474/person/17296334947/media>, accessed November 10, 2012.

⁸*Ibid.*

aunt. The caption on the “Gordon Sampson Clan” web page reads, “Daisy is on the left with her sister in law Pauline Sampson on the right. The gent is Joseph Michael Gordon, the man, the myth, the legend. The reason I am pretty sure it’s Pauline is the hand written note on the back, by Daisy: ‘Paula & Dad and me & cat. Judge for yourself we all ... look full of health yes or no. . . cat is cute? I ... you that I tried to smile butThis was in a photo album at one time but glue damage has erased the script.’”⁹

Bronx Childhood (1928-1946): Father’s Death. Bill’s father, William Sampson, Sr. was born on February 27, 1895 in Manhattan, N.Y. His mother, Daisy Gordon (Sampson) was born August 27, 1896 on Appleton Avenue (now the Hutchinson River Parkway) in the Bronx, N.Y. Daisy and William, Sr. met before World War I. A family history web page commented, “This man who wooed and won the love of his life, had the great good fortune to go on to have a family with her.”¹⁰ Before they were married, William, Sr. served in World War I during 1918 and 1919. Daisy was said to have had a “stroke” at age 22 when it was incorrectly reported that William had perished as a member of the “Lost Battalion.” He was one of the 550 members of the 77th Infantry Division, also known as the Statute of Liberty Division, which was part of the Lost Battalion. They were the first division of American draftees to arrive in France, landing in April 1918. The division sustained many casualties.

In the “Lost Battalion” episode, William’s division was among those cut off and surrounded by enemy forces in the Argonne Forest for six days. They were part of what was supposed to be a three-pronged attack with another American force on one flank and a French force on the other. What William’s battalion did not know until it was surrounded

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰ Anonymous, “Caption from Picture: Daisy and Baby Marcella on George’s 2nd Birthday,” in the webpage, “The Gordon Sampson Clan,” <http://trees.ancestryinstitution.com/tree22343474/person/17296334947/media>, accessed November 10, 2012.

was that the other two forces had retreated. The battalion refused to surrender despite relentless attacks and low supplies. They were finally rescued when headquarters realized the problem and sent reinforcements.¹¹ William's division returned to the U.S. in April 1919.

Several months after his coming home, William and Daisy were married on June 24, 1919 at St. Raymond's Parish Church. As noted this was the parish in which Daisy grew up. William worked as a probation officer or, as he was also called, "Special Officer" for the Catholic Protectory of New York.¹² The Protectory was a residence which in some periods had as many as 2,300 orphans and neglected, abandoned or delinquent children. It existed between 1863 and 1938 on a 129 acre tract, which had St. Raymonds on its northeast corner. Financed mainly by the government, the Sisters of Charity of New York ran the institution. The boys were taught letterpress printing, chair caning, shoemaking, baking, carpentry, blacksmithing, wheelwrighting, farming and gardening. The girls learned to embroider, cook and make gloves.

In 1920 the young Sampson family was renting the dwelling in which they lived. A family picture showing Daisy and the couple's second child, Marcella, in their yard had written on its back in Daisy's hand, "1781 Buhre Avenue [now the Hutchinson River

¹¹Geoff Smith, *The Lost Battalion: Americans fight for their lives in World War I* (New York: Scholastic Inc., 2012).

¹²Anonymous, "Death Certificate for William P. Sampson" (New York City: Department of Health of the City of New York, Municipal Archives, May 31, 1929), (manuscript in possession of author). See also, anonymous, "Caption from Picture: Daisy and Baby Marcella on George's 2nd Birthday," which is on "The Gordon Sampson Clan" web page. The 1920 Federal Census listed his employment in 1920 as "bookkeeper."

Parkway], May 21, 1922.” A few blocks away at 1820 Appleton Avenue lived Daisy’s parents, brothers and sisters. In 1930 the Sampsons’ home, which by then they owned, was valued at \$3,000. It was the least expensive dwelling in the neighborhood. Most dwellings were valued at two or three times that amount.¹³

There was a gap of about five years between the births of the first two Sampson children in 1920 and 1921 and the last three between 1927 and 1930. A Sampson family historian speculates that the gap was because Daisy had a recurrence of the stroke she suffered during World War I or miscarriages. The fourth child, the future Fr. William Sampson, was born on September 4, 1928. Like all the Sampson children, he was baptized at St. Raymonds.

On May 31, 1929 William Sampson, Sr. died at the age of 32 years at the family residence at 1167 Throgmorton Avenue, Bronx. The cause of death was pneumonia which resulted in heart failure.¹⁴ He was ill for one week preceding his death. He left four children and another on the way. Young Bill was less than a year old.¹⁵ Because of a dispute, Bill

¹³See Anonymous, “Federal Census of New York State for 1930,” <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed August 25, 2012. By the 1940s the Sampsons were living at 1167 Throgmorton Avenue in the Bronx. See “Federal Census of New York State for 1940,” <http://www.ancestryinstitution.com>, accessed August 25, 2012.

¹⁴Anonymous, “Death Certificate for William P. Sampson.” Many came back from World War I with lung problems.

¹⁵William Paul Sampson, Sr. was buried in St. Raymond’s parish cemetery, section 1, range 34, where his parents would eventually join him. See Ronald James Newman, “Ancestors of Ron and Lori Newman” (Plantsville, CT), at <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/n/e/w/Ronald-J-Newman/index.html>, accessed

grew up knowing little about his father's side of the family. An account of the dispute is given by Bill's niece, the daughter of his sister, Marcella. At the funeral William Sr.'s mother, Rose Hoffman Sampson, accused Daisy of killing her son. This resulted in Daisy, who had been Rose's friend, never speaking to her again. Bill's niece writes:

I had always heard from my mother Marcella, that after Bill's death, all contact with his family had been lost. My mother said that his mother accused Daisy of "killing her son." This might have occurred at his funeral. Daisy was pregnant at the time with Charley. She never forgave her for whatever occurred. This sad letter makes you wonder about the whole situation:

Fort Lee, N.J.
Sept. 10 1929

Dear Daisy:

I have thought of you many, many times since last I saw you. It seems that I can have no rest until I find out how you and the children are getting along.

I can't imagine why you should say that you want nothing to do with me for we seemed to be such friends before.

You are my daughter-in-law, my sons wife and I want to be a mother to you to help you and the children, even more now that Billy is not here to do it. Don't think I was trying to butt in your affairs or am trying to do so now, but only trying to be good to you.

If you would only say one word to let me know that you still wanted to be friends with me, I would forgive and try to forget everything and do anything in this world that is in my power to help you.

Tell the children that Grandmother sends them lots of love and hopes to see them very soon. Please write and tell me how you feel towards me, or come and tell me if you would like to.

Lovingly,
Mother¹⁶

August 25, 2012; "Military registration card of William Paul Sampson" (1917), accessed at <http://www.ancestry.com>, accessed August 25, 2012).

¹⁶"The Gordon Sampson Clan," <http://trees.ancestryinstitution.com/tree22343474/person/17296334947/media>, accessed November 10, 2012.

Young Bill grew up under the cloud of a double death, that of his father and that of the relationship with his father's family. He did not mention this in his writings but he repeatedly talked about the importance of loving one's enemy. In his first book he wrote:

The love command is not about a general feeling toward humanity, but a centering of our attention on our enemy and our lovelessness. The contrast between ourselves and God is most forceful in the contrasting ways we relate to that one person - His fullness of affection and my indifference or anger or even contempt. His desire to clothe me with a share in His affection is the good news. All the joys of intimate knowledge of God come to us only along the path of the coming of love into our unloving. . . .

The Kingdom of God is in the relating to those we do not love, who do not love us, who are not grateful, who are hostile, who are unfair, who are manipulative, resentful toward us, or contemptuous. The Spirit will draw near to me in his, the enemy's face and features. The enemy is the locus of God's present burning desire, and the doorway to all the gifts of deeper faith and more intense joy.

This is so much the case that a Desert Father said, "if you go into prayer and the face of your enemy does not come, then you are not in the presence of the living God." . . .

Had God not ordered us to love so perfectly, we would never have come to know the lofty nature of the gifts He desires to give us. What a frustration for God, then, when we reduce the command to an affectionless loving. Once we do that, we no longer need affection. We no longer bother with it. We no longer seek it from God. His desire to share with us the affection He has for our enemy is blocked.

This experience of our helplessness, our inability to love specific people, is not unique to beginners. In fact, it is frequently not present in the beginning. It is only with the coming of a certain freedom into our lives that such honesty can be endured. . . .

In one sense, then, the growing into the love command produces a growing darkness. The self-image is denuded of love. The self sees its own poverty more and more clearly. Into that darkness shines the real loving of God. How He loved me "anyway," and how He loves my enemy with the real affection of a father! Our humility and unworthiness are bathed in His warm affection for us. We become very unconscious of all the good He is working within us. We live

in faith. That anxious attention to "How am I doing?" gets swallowed up in the terrible needs of our brothers and sisters.¹⁷

Added to the difficulties of the Great Depression and the absence of a breadwinner, Bill's mother also had the poverty of family estrangement. At the same time she held the family together and was much loved by Bill, Jr.¹⁸ Bill's oldest brother, George A. Sampson (May 11, 1920-September 3, 1973), was just turning nine when his father died. In the following decade he attended elementary school and three years of high school, after which in 1940 he served in the field artillery of the Army during World War II. The second oldest child was Marcella Sampson (1922-died by 1999). The third child was Joseph "Joe" Gordon Sampson (October 3, 1926/1927- November 6, 1999). He attended three years of high school before joining the Army during World War II. After the war he married Nancy A. Brunello in 1952. They had six children, all of whom were girls.¹⁹ He worked for the New York Police Department, rising to the rank of inspector. After retirement he lived at Colorado Springs, Colorado near some of his children.

Starting in the 1960s after he had finished the seminary, Fr. Sampson enjoyed spending holidays such as Christmas with his nieces and nephews in New York City. About

¹⁷William P. Sampson, S.J., *The Coming of Consolation: how God gets through to us* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986), pp. 50-53.

¹⁸Rev. James P. M. Walsh, S.J., "Interview with the Author," (Washington, D.C.: August 26, 2012), p. 8, (manuscript in possession of author), stated that Bill talked lovingly of his mother.

¹⁹These children were Gwen (Schooley), Jeany, Gerri (Hooper), Margie (Smith), Lisa (Schoep) and Joanne (Scott). See Anonymous, "Obituary of Joseph Gordon Sampson," *The Gazette* (Colorado Spring, CO: November 8, 1999), <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-5938106.html>, accessed August 25, 2012.

this he wrote in 1963, “I have always found [while in the seminary] Christmas a most unpleasant period. Nowadays when I can get home I enjoy it very much with the nephews and nieces. I usually do a lot of wrestling with them, naturally.”²⁰

Bill attended St. Raymond’s grade school between 1934 and 1942. He then enrolled between 1942 and 1946 at Regis High School at 55 East 84th Street on New York’s Upper East Side. Regis was a Jesuit-run boys high school, established in 1914 as the result of an endowment by a wealthy widow, Julia M. Grant. Because of the endowment, the students paid no tuition and the school was selective in admission, with only about ten percent of applicants being accepted. Special consideration was given to those who could not otherwise afford a Catholic education.²¹ Bill’s high school yearbook offered the following biography:

Member of the Guard in Junior year and of the Sanctuary Society in Senior... Bill also spent four years in the sodality. . . he debated in his first two years here, besides garnering a Next-in-Merit award in Freshman and a General Excellence Medal in Soph. . . . Junior year saw him captaining the Chess team. . . as a Senior, his varied interests called him to the Regian Staff, and the Glee Club.²²

²⁰William P. Sampson, S.J., “Letters to the Author,” (Washington, D.C.: December 28, 1963), p. 1, (manuscript in possession of author).

²¹Anonymous, “Regis High School,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regis_High_School_\(New_York_City\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regis_High_School_(New_York_City)), accessed August 25, 2012.

²²Anonymous, *Regian Yearbook: 1946* (New York: 1946). The graduation picture and yearbook information is available courtesy of Anthony D. Andressi, Ph.D., the Regis High school archivist.



Figure 1-5: Bill Sampson's 1946 Regis
High School Graduation Picture

CHAPTER 2

The Jesuits (1946-1960)

After high school Bill entered the New York province of the Society of Jesus on September 8, 1946.²³ He followed the lengthy Jesuit preparation for the priesthood, starting with the novitiate, which lasted two years (1946-1948) at the 80-acre St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson in Hyde Park, N.Y. The novitiate was on a bluff overlooking the Hudson.

Novitiate and Juniorate at St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson, N.Y.: 1946-1950. Bill's younger colleague, Rev. Jim Walsh, S.J. (b. 1938), mentioned that Fr. Sampson had described his master of novices as an intimidating, severe man who promoted lengthy prayer focused on Augustine, Ambrose, Aquinas and the Bible. Distractions had to be fought.²⁴ The more logical approach, as Bill later commented, was that the distraction was what was really on his mind and what he should bring before God.

In his ministry Bill wrote at length and cite multiple authorities against the type of lengthy prayer that was promoted in the novitiate. The custom of hour-long prayer, as he

²³This is the date given on Bill's tombstone for having entered the Society.

²⁴Walsh, "Interview" (Washington, D.C.: August 26, 2012), p. 8. Fr. Walsh grew up in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. His ancestors were coal miners. During his regency, he taught at Gonzaga High School for a single school year (1962-1963) before matriculating at Harvard University.

documented, began only in the 1500s.²⁵ The traditional approach was frequent, short prayers. Several examples of his arguments against long prayer can be seen in his first book.

He wrote:

Let us look briefly at a suggestion made by St. John Chrysostom:

He who prays should not try after long prayer, but should pray often, for both Christ and St. Paul teach us to make use very frequently of short prayers, repeated frequently at intervals.

Now Chrysostom was a desert monk for a time. These monks got into the whole question of prayer, so his suggestion is not just a surface impulse, nor is it meant for beginners only. What does Chrysostom see in long prayer?

Should you pray at great length, it will often happen that you open yourself to attacks of the devil, giving him ready access to your mind to distract and upset you, leading you away from what you are saying.

I can imagine telling my dear novice master that I stopped praying after three minutes for fear the devil would get in, as blessed Chrysostom warns.

But if you give yourself up to short, frequent prayer, dividing up the time of prayer discreetly, you will easily retain control of your mind, while making such prayer with greater recollection.

Notice the values he sets forth: attention is critical. Length may harm that critical value, so it is not advisable. Brief prayer can be attentive.

Is Chrysostom a single voice speaking in a way that is far from the actual tradition in the early centuries? Let us hear St. Augustine. He is writing to a woman who is starting a "house of prayer," the lady Proba. Augustine tells her that attention should never be forced.

The brethren in Egypt are reported to have very frequent and very brief prayers; the prayers are, as it were, quick and ejaculatory, for fear the wide-awake conscious attention so indispensable in prayer should vanish or lose its keenness by

²⁵Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, p. 98.

prolonged exercises. And in this they show plainly enough that, just as this attention should not be allowed to exhaust itself if it cannot continue for long, so neither should it be suddenly suspended if it be sustained.²⁶

At another point Bill cited no less than Thomas Aquinas as an authority for short prayer. He wrote, “St. Thomas Aquinas specifically raised the question: how long should prayer be. His response:

It is becoming that prayer should last only so long as is useful for arousing the fervor of interior desire; but when it goes beyond this measure, so that it cannot last without tedium, prayer is not to be stretch out.

[Bill continued] If only I had had that text when I was a novice. Notice that St. Thomas has a norm. If a person comes to the fervor of interior desire quickly - is, in other words, in consolation – his prayer will be short. This is similar to the suggestion of St. Ignatius Loyola: to pray longer in desolation. It also spells out that prayer has a purpose in which length of time is irrelevant.”²⁷

Besides lengthy prayer, there were other problems in the novitiate. In response to complaints in 1963 about seminary formalism and bureaucracy by a friend, Fr. Sampson described the fake piety he had experienced, but advised against voicing criticism if one wanted to stay in the religious life:

I don't think the Society novitiate would be very different from yours. It is traditional to concentrate on externals at that state in the formation. We had thousands of odd prayers, I don't know where they got them (or where they went too). One deal we had was to make a daily round of the statutes in the chapel, 10 of them. I had a very difficult time figuring out something different to say to each saint. I thought they would be displeased if I used the same prayer to

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 67-68. The quote from Aquinas is *Summa Theologiae* (II-II, 83, 14c).

two. I don't think many kept up this novitiate practice in later life. It would be a sad thing if you started confusing these things with sanctity and you do run into people who apparently have. I doubt very much that you run any great danger along this line.

Perhaps as the years go by the liturgical mood will even affect the novitiates. But until that occurs it is an old tradition that dominates their outlook. The idea of 2 masses on Sunday is one I would find difficult with. My greatest problem used to be our daily litany—about 10 minutes. But figuring I had to do it every day I adjusted and now find it very easy to pray during that time.

Remember too that just because you disagree with a certain approach or don't believe a certain pious legend, that you have to inform everybody on your attitude right away. Most things are relatively unimportant and not worth getting into a fight about.

I don't think your reaction is unusual. I would say a great number of novices in any order feel the same way. You just have to keep your ultimate goal in mind and realize the only alternative to following somebody else's ideas on religious life is to start your own order. Eventually (sooner in fact than as a Jesuit) you will be doing what you want.²⁸

One of the Jesuits who went through the novitiate at the same time as Bill described some of its other aspects, besides long prayer and fake piety, "Right away we had a daily order of activities, which included considerable periods of prayer and spiritual reading. There was emphasis on silence in the house. We spent time outside for sports, but there was a lot of work, such as cutting grass and digging ditches. Indoors we did cleaning, work in the dining room, sweeping corridors and other chores."²⁹

At the age of seventeen, Bill was willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the formation program. At the end of the first month of novitiate, the novices made a thirty-day

²⁸Sampson, "Letters," (December 28, 1963), p. 2.

²⁹Gerard Campbell, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuits: Rev. Gerard J. Campbell, S.J.* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Jesuit Community, 2008), p. 6.

retreat, based on the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556). He was the founder of the Jesuit order. The retreat master preached the retreat, as this was before individually directed retreats which are now the method. There were four conferences a day, four one-hour periods of prayer and periods of spiritual reading, often on the lives of the saints or treatises on the spiritual life by Alphonsus Rodriguez (1526-1616).³⁰

When the novitiate ended after two years, the novices made their first vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the evangelical councils of perfection. Then followed a two-year juniorate (1948-1950), also at St. Andrew-on-the-Hudson, N.Y. This was a period of classical education, focusing on Latin, Greek, French and English. The students wrote themes in Greek.

Philosophate at Woodstock, Md. (1950-1953): *Επικαια*. Following the juniorate was the three-year philosophate. This was at Woodstock College, which from 1869 to 1969 was located in Maryland along the Patapsco River, west of Baltimore. Its courses were taught in Latin. This lessened for some students their understanding.³¹ The curriculum earned the students the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in philosophy. In the summer the philosophers

³⁰Campbell, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuits*, p. 6. Alphonsus Rodriguez authored *The practice of Christian and religious perfection* (Dublin: J. Duffy, 1914).

³¹Bill's classmate, Francis Schemel in *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuits: Rev. Francis Schemel, S.J.* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Jesuit Community, 2008), vol. 6, pp. 8, 11, commented, "I found the classes interesting, although my failure to conquer Latin made learning more difficult since all our classes were in Latin. . . I got through philosophy, but since everything was taught in Latin, my studies didn't go as I had hoped. No matter."

took science and other courses to round out their education as classical scholars.³² Besides majoring in philosophy, Bill seems to have minored in English. At some point prior to teaching French starting in 1960, Bill studied the subject in Quebec to improve his abilities.³³

The philosophy curriculum included logic, epistemology, rational psychology, cosmology, general metaphysics, special metaphysics (natural theology), and general and special ethics. Each course explained and defended a number of truths or theses which students learned to prove and on which they were examined. Philosophers who denied these truths were treated as adversaries and refuted. On the philosophy faculty in Bill's first year was Fr. Norrie Clark, S.J., who taught the logic course. Fr. Hugo Beiler, S.J. taught a course in practical psychology.³⁴

During the philosophate Bill made several life-long friends, such as Paul L. Cioffi (1928-2004), Francis Schemel (b. 1925) and William C. McFadden (b. 1930).³⁵ One of his classmates observed that the educational-spiritual atmosphere in Maryland was less strict than that of the New York province. Bill welcomed the change. The classmate commented:

We were southern Catholic gentlemen as opposed to the New Yorkers, who, it was said, would climb up one another's backs to get ahead. Since they had

³²*Ibid.*, p. 10.

³³Walsh, "Interview," (August 26, 2012), p. 8.

³⁴Schemel, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuits*, p. 8.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 9; Paul Cioffi, S.J., "Homily of the Funeral Mass of William P. Sampson, S.J." (manuscript in possession of author, August 3, 2000), p. 3. Cioffi was from Brookland, New York. Because he had not studied Greek, the New York province would not admit him to their novitiate. Maryland was more welcoming. See Walsh, "Interview," (August 26, 2012), p. 5.

had a much more austere life than we had, they were shocked at everything we did.³⁶

The obstacle which competition posed to God's love was a theme that Bill raised in a number of his later writings. In one such discussion of the obstacles to God's love, he wrote as much about himself as about others, "We are so competitive, so judgmental. Resentment finds a ready welcome within us. We are anxious people. We are unforgiving. These words are not meant to describe other people. They are for us, each of us. As we grow in holiness, we become more able to see this truth. Our unlikeness to God starts to come out of its hiding place. He has such intense desire to bless us, and we are so little willing to have Him come near. He has such love for the poor, and we are so cold to them. He identifies with our enemy: the very person who is so unfair to us, who infuriates us – or for whom we have nothing but indifference, or (a more honest word) contempt."³⁷

The less competitive Maryland atmosphere was one of the factors that caused Bill to find ways to remain within Maryland's jurisdiction for most of his life. During the philosophate, besides studies, he liked to play bridge. His classmate Francis Schemel remembered, "In my first year at Woodstock I started to develop my bridge skills. I lived next to Bill Sampson, my great friend until his death, who got me going on the game. Woodstock had little cabins in various locations on its 100 acres of woodlands. On Thursdays, the day we didn't meet for classes, four of us would bring food for lunch and play bridge in one of the cabins from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. week after week. This is what I remember from philosophy more than vast interrogations into the depth of being."³⁸

³⁶Schemel, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuit*, p. 8.

³⁷Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, p. 81.

³⁸Schemel, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuit*, p. 9.

Because Woodstock was becoming too crowded, the philosophers spent their third year (1952-1953) at a former hotel which the Society had purchased on Lake Champlain. It had 14 surrounding cottages which a group of the students adapted to be like the cabins at Woodstock. A classmate remembered that in one of them an older classmate gave instruction in oil painting. The hotel had a toboggan run for the winter and swimming facilities on the lake. One student had an inflatable raft that held four. They would paddle out to the islands in the lake, but they had to be careful not to let the rector or minister know, as they would not have allowed this. Francis Schemel recalled, “Everyone kept quiet until an Irish brother asked to borrow the raft. I warned him, ‘You can’t afford to let anyone see it because all these New Yorkers are very stiff.’ He told me not to worry, rolled up the raft and put it on his shoulder. The first person he met was the rector, who inquired as to what he was carrying. The brother replied, ‘Not a thing, Father, not a thing,’ and kept on going. He saved the raft. We had great times at Lake Champlain.”³⁹

The story about the raft and the rector reflects a philosophy about issues of justice, the vow of obedience and living in society that Bill shared. The Jesuits have a reputation of being the church’s shock troops, emphasizing military discipline and obedience to the chain of command.⁴⁰ But these concepts sometimes have different interpretations, depending on

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁰The Jesuit founder, Ignatius Loyola, was a soldier who stressed in the Society’s *Constitutions*, adopted in 1554, obedience to the pope and religious superiors. Nicholas Patrick Wiseman in “The Jesuits: French Religious Liberty,” *Dublin Review* (June 1844), vols. 16, p. 433, available on-line at <http://books.google.com/books>, notes that Ignatius used the phrase *perinde ac si cadaver essent*, in the preface to the Rules and in the 5th and 68th

whether one is hierarchy or rank and file. In his “Rules for Thinking with the Church,” Ignatius gave the hierarchy’s interpretation, “I will believe that the white that I see is black if the hierarchical Church so defines it.”⁴¹ The brother’s interpretation turned this admonition on its head, with the visible raft being blacked out. This way of viewing authority for the seminarians was summed up in the Greek principle of *epikaia*. Fr. Sampson, in a discussion with a friend in about 1970, mentioned this concept and its popularity in the seminary. Although Bill did not bring it up, St. Thomas Aquinas himself spoke of the virtue of *epikaia*, or equity, where sometimes the letter killeth and true virtue is to bypass the law. As noted the more egalitarian nature of the Maryland province was one of the things that led Bill to officially or unofficially transfer himself southward.⁴²

Regency (1953-1956) and Theologate (1956-1959). In the fall of 1953 Bill began a three-year teaching stint at [_____]. Called regency, this was a period that allowed the seminarian to be fully involved in apostolic work and community life.

After his regency Bill came back to Woodstock College to study theology for four years. One of Bill’s classmates described the program:

I found theology more interesting than philosophy. I got more involved and wasn’t looking for so many distractions. I found it wonderful, getting out theses, knocking the opponents down. We were really Thomists. Most of our professors were excellent. One of the best teachers I ever had was Fr. Gus

chapters of the *Constitution*. He translates the phrase, “let us be led by Divine providence like dead bodies.”

⁴¹The “Rules for Thinking with the Church” are included in Ignatius Loyola’s *The Spiritual Exercises* (trans. Anthony Mottola, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 140–141.

⁴²Edward Terrar in *Liberation theology along the Potomac: labor’s golden rule in early American Catholicism* (Silver Spring, Md.: CWP, 2011), traced the more relaxed atmosphere back to the Society’s earliest days in Maryland and the reasons for it.

Weigel in introduction to Ecclesiology. Fr. Joe Fitzmyer taught New Testament and was great. Fr. John Courtney Murray gave our retreat. As time went on, I did a private course in canon law with Fr. John Reed, my spiritual director.⁴³

Another classmate, Paul Cioffi, complained that the course given by Fr. Vincent O’Keefe, S.J. (1920-2012) was boring. Bill replied that what O’Keefe was teaching was so explosive, it had to be down played.⁴⁴ O’Keefe went on to be a senior aide to the order’s superior general, Pedro Arrupe. In 1981 after the general suffered a stroke, the Jesuits nominated O’Keefe to run the order until a successor could be found. The pope rejected the nomination. He did not like O’Keefe’s liberation theology. That Bill profited from his studies and knew Thomas Aquinas and Augustine in depth was reflected in the frequency that he quoted them in support of liberation theology in contrast to the hierarchy, which quoted the same figures to support the established order.

Bill was ordained after his third year of theology on June 21, 1959 at Woodstock. The following Sunday he presumably celebrated mass for his brothers, sister and their families at St. Raymond’s, his home parish. He then spent the next year finishing up his theological studies.

Delayed Tertianship. Most of Bill’s classmates after the theologate moved on to tertianship, which lasted a year and was the final period of formation in the Society. An individual stepped back to critically assess his experience of living and working in the

⁴³Schemel, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuit*, p. 13. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. was ordained in 1951, did his tertianship in Austria in 1952-1953 and studied for his doctorate at Johns Hopkins University from 1953 to 1955. Others who taught in the theologate were George Gleason who taught Old Testament and _____ Clark, who taught cosmology. See Walsh, “Interview,” (August 26, 2012), p. 6.

⁴⁴Walsh, “Interview,” (August 26, 2012), p. 4.

Society and whether this was, the life to which he was being called. While the individual bound himself to the Society with the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience after the novitiate, it was only after tertianship that he made his final vows and that the Society made its formal commitment to him.

Bill skipped tertianship and final vows. To have done tertianship would have meant returning to the New York province. The official reason he did not return was that he was seeing a psychiatrist while at Woodstock. It would not be advisable to interrupt these consultations.⁴⁵ There are several possible explanations for Bill's extended psychiatric consultations. One is that they were a way for him better to understand himself. One of his classmates commented, "This was the 1950s, when Freudian and other psychological theories were all the rage."⁴⁶ Bill was always free from the jargon and concepts associated with Freudianism, but there were other analytical traditions he might have found useful. Present-day psychiatry focuses much on pathology, such as mood and personality disorders. If Bill had such a diagnosis, his colleagues would have been aware of it. Jim Walsh mentioned that in 1965 while living at Boston College, Bill was having migraine headaches.⁴⁷ For this he underwent shock therapy. This therapy was also used for depression, but Bill did not have this problem.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 3. The first the author heard that Fr. Sampson had skipped tertianship because he was seeing a psychiatrist was years later in interviewing Bill's colleague, Jim Walsh, S.J., as part of writing this sketch. Jim did not know the name of the psychiatrist or the reason Bill was seeing him. It probably was not standard for Jesuits to see psychiatrists, except as an admission requirement to screen out those who were unsuitable.

⁴⁶Schemel, *Lives of the Georgetown Jesuit*, p. 8.

⁴⁷Walsh, "Interview," (August 26, 2012), p. 3.

An alternative explanation for the psychiatric consultations was that Bill's superiors required them because of his "attitude." If they wanted to expel him from the Society, the psychiatrist could give evidence against him. If that was the plan, it was undermined simply by avoiding tertianship. Bill finally did complete tertianship and make final vows, but it was by accident and 25-years later. In 1983 the Maryland provincial was Fr. Charles M. Whelan, S.J. (1927-2012). It was customary for the provincial to meet annually with each member of the Society. In the course of the interview, Whelan noted he did not have the date of Bill's final vows. When Bill said that he had not taken them, the provincial asked why. Bill answered that no one had ever asked him to do it. As a result, he did an informal tertianship under the guidance of Fr. Thomas J. Gavigan, S.J. at Holy Trinity Parish in Georgetown. Then he took the vows in India, where he was doing retreat work. Officiating was an Irishman, Fr. Cecil McGarry, S.J. (1929-2009), who was a general assistant to the Father General from 1975 to 1983. McGarry remarked in a strong brogue that it was strange that Bill was taking final vows after being 37 years in the Society.⁴⁸

In the early 1960s Fr. Sampson explained to a student-friend that while he was from the New York province, he had transferred to Maryland. He mentioned that this was due to "difficulties" he had with the New York officials. He did not elaborate. However, in later discussions he mentioned some of the problems he had with the Society, such as its bureaucratic nature. In this connection, after Gonzaga a student-friend entered the Trinitarian Seminary, which was part of a religious order called the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. The friend's first choice would have been the Jesuits. In the process of deciding what order to enter, Fr. Sampson kept his distance. He did not want to impose

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 7.

himself. But he did mention the disadvantage of a large bureaucratic order such as the Jesuits. The friend had been involved during high school in various social-work type projects, such as a summer of working at a day camp for Puerto Rican immigrant children at the Jesuit's Nativity Mission Center on Forsyth Street in the Bowery section of New York City's Lower East Side, which was across from the Catholic Worker House on Chrystie Street. The Trinitarians focused on similar ministries, were small and perhaps less bureaucratic.

Another criticism, besides bureaucracy, that Fr. Sampson had against the Society, at least in the late 1960s, was its collective failure to observe the vow of poverty and its accommodation to the established order. For that and other reasons, as will be discussed, he moved out of the Jesuit residence and lived in a low income apartment by himself for five years.

CHAPTER 3

Early Apostolate (1960-1966)

Instead of going to tertianship, Fr. Sampson in September 1960 began teaching at St. Aloysius Gonzaga High School. Work assignments and advancement in the Society tended to be correlated with one's academic performance. Bill had done well in his studies. His friend, Paul Cioffi, who had done less well, but spent a lifetime as a university professor, remarked that it was an anomaly that he and not Bill was the professor. Fr. Sampson intentionally took the ostensibly less distinguished path. The gospel-based ideas about work assignments and advancement that he followed were not necessarily shared by his superiors.

Gonzaga High School at Washington, D.C. (September 1960- June 1964):

Downward Mobility. The school, residence and parish to which Fr. Sampson came and with which he was associated for the rest of his life was in a slum. The students and parishioners were workers and children of workers, although the system gilded this truth by calling them "middle class." During his time at Gonzaga some of the students were aware that their Jesuit teachers were overly qualified. It made no sense from the perspective of the capitalist system for a man with fifteen years of advanced education to be teaching low-level subject matter to working-class youth. But the students were veterans of Catholic education. What it taught, mainly by deed, was that God had His own system and it turned capitalist values up-side-down. In the Catholic system the nuns and priests worked without pay or

profit. Their evangelical councils of perfection (poverty, chastity and obedience) were a blasphemy to the established order. In the context of God's system, Bill's association with Gonzaga and the fruitful life he led was not a mystery.

To a question about ambitions and influence, Fr. Sampson commented:

I feel now that the question of effecting other people is totally depressing. (I just thought of an item I read somewhere. It gave the reaction of a high-school student to his history book. He said he didn't like it because nobody lasts more than two pages.) unless it is given a qualitative (personal) basis. Even Christ only lasted two pages. In an occupied country of despised people. And thirty years of that 10/11, in a farm village. Also, I feel that all the advice that you get the opportunity as psychiatrist, sociologist or priest, to give too others is totally ineffective (a superb exaggeration). They must see you in act. If you display courage, faith and love in action you will impress them, you will make them wonder about the way of their life. Your biggest glory is to turn yourself - a being with a personality, naturally self-centered, desirous of increasing your own joy and avoiding pain - to turn yourself, under God's invite and with His help into a son of His. That is, a person who goes around acting as if God were His own father. And, I feel, this will have more effect on those around him even if in God's will, he is destined to die in an auto crash at 18, or live until he's 90 as a blind, cripple, or as a dish washer etc. than if he does become President - maybe even our first Priest-President with a degree in psychiatry.

I have a suspicion I heard all this for the first time many years ago, but it meant nothing to me. . .

You say, "Is there any chance that I could work and make myself great. . ." Do you mean get your two pages in the history books? Then, yes. But I don't identify that with greatness. Why do you want to become the best son in the family, thus concentrating on your relative standing with respect to your brothers? Why not try to become a good son and concentrate on your relation with your father and just be glad that the others, who may be ahead or behind you, are not competitors but your brothers?⁴⁹

⁴⁹Sampson, "Letters," (Boston College: May 6, 1965), pp. 19-21.

As a teacher at Gonzaga, the subjects which Fr. Sampson taught in his first years were religion, English and French. He lived next door to the school in the Jesuit residence. He took teaching seriously, put much time into it and experimented with new techniques and strategies. In later years, if not earlier, he required that students in his senior year English class to have a copy book and to write a page each evening. In the morning he would collect, correct and return the books by the afternoon, so that they received feedback five days per week.⁵⁰ His holidays involved correcting tests and compositions. He wrote about his 1963 Christmas holiday, “I have about 7 sets of tests to correct but 8 days to do it in.”⁵¹



Figure 3-1: Fr. William Sampson at Gonzaga High School in 1963.⁵²

Fr. Sampson liked matching wits with his students and was fairly demanding in his expectations. One of his students in the early 1960s was Chris Leyes. He recalled that during

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁵¹Sampson, “Letters,” (Washington, D.C.: December 28, 1963), p. 1.

⁵²Anonymous, *Aetonian Yearbook: 1963* (Washington, DC: Gonzaga High School, 1963), p. 12.

his time at Gonzaga, he had been in a continual depression. He performed in a mediocre manner. He found that of all his teachers, Fr. Sampson was by far the most clever at sarcasm toward him.⁵³ Leyes did not hold this against him as the sarcasm was freely directed at anyone who Fr. Sampson thought was not doing his best. In more recent times, as the parent of a teenage daughter who sometimes has motivational problems, Leyes has come to appreciate the role of teachers who deal with these concerns.

In addition to his academic activities, Bill served as the moderator of various extracurricular activities. In his first year at Gonzaga, he co-moderated the band with Fr. Joseph Cosenza, S.J. Starting in his second year in the fall of 1961 he helped form and moderate the Literary Discussion Club. That year they discussed works by Balzac, Dostoevsky, Conrad, de la Fayette, James and Dickens.⁵⁴ He continued as moderator of this group in later years. He also moderated the French Club in his second year. The following year, 1962-1963, he helped establish and moderate the Chess Club and the Current Events Discussion Club, which took a trip to New York City from June 9 to 13, 1964.⁵⁵

As noted, he also as a spiritual guide. In this he was generous with his time. The one-on-one meetings were free-wheeling, egalitarian discussions rather than guidance. They took place every few weeks or monthly on Saturday mornings in the parlor of the Jesuit residence. They were exhaustive, often running with non-stop, excited talk from 9:00 a.m. to noon. The approach he used would probably be called non-directive counseling or just plain

⁵³James Christopher Leyes, "Interview with Author," (Washington, D.C.: August 20, 2012), in possession of author.

⁵⁴Anonymous, *Aetonian Yearbook: 1962* (Washington, DC: Gonzaga High School, 1962), p. 124.

⁵⁵Sampson, "Letters," (Washington, D.C.: December 28, 1963), p. 2.

friendship. The prayer-life of students was not complicated. Following the Ignatian approach, Fr. Sampson passed on skills and tricks that he had learned. Topics discussed included controlling emotions, passions and ambitions, making decisions, studies, social life, vacations, literature, history and politics.

One might complain in the Saturday meetings about the emotional ups and downs of prayer life. He always wanted God's happy consolation. Borrowing from Ignatius, Bill observed that emotions were like a team of horses. If the individual kept them under control, the person could use them to take them where the individual wanted to go. But if they were not under control, they would pull the person in every direction and the individual would go nowhere. The bottom line was not to let emotions dominate.

Another issue that came up repeatedly was decision-making. Students had decisions to make. Bill recommended an Ignatian approach to decision-making or discernment of spirits. This meant that during an hour-long mental prayer one might spend half the time listing in writing the reasons to make a particular choice. In the second half the reasons against making the choice would be listed. This clarified the issue and often made the choice easy. When clarity was still lacking, the discernment process could be extended.

An Ignatian ideal in decision-making was to find God's will and do it. What Ignatius did not mention but which Bill picked up on was that God's will more often than not was that one use their own will and intelligence to make decisions. About such decision making Bill later wrote in answer to a question about college majors:

As for choosing a major, I have experienced that feeling of frustration at not being able to be more than one human. Lately I have been in quite a few long conversations on the question of changing the lives of others. I wonder if this is a universal principle (probably found already in many spiritual books) or if it is only true in my life now. It seems to me that I spend or want to spend a great deal of

time determining what it is that God wants me to do in big areas of my life where I am, at present, doubtful. It seems to be a very good (if not necessary thing) to find out God's will in these areas.

Meanwhile, I do very little with the energy I have left after these fruitless reflections. There are many small areas, well within my capacity, where I know just what God wants. But since they are apparently less important and it is hard to accept that God wants me to center my attention on such small, undramatic concerns, I find it very hard to attend to them.

Some speculations: these doubts as to what is God's will in major areas cannot be cleared up. It is God's will that the area be doubtful. (This, I feel, leaves the person free to do as he wills—as long as he desires that it be God's will.) Reflection will not reveal God's will, So, focus your attention on the small areas in your search for God's will and relax in the big areas. Learn how to live in the doubt that allows you to choose as you please. Make plain to God (and to yourself) which side you are on by doing God's will where it is clear, no matter how unimportant an area of life e.g. even just saying hello to somebody, etc.⁵⁶

In addition to academic and extracurricular activities, during summer vacations while at Gonzaga, Bill worked as a chaplain at Camp Calvert on the Potomac River in Leonardtown, Maryland. Aside from saying daily mass, he was able to spend most of his time reading and swimming.⁵⁷

⁵⁶Sampson, "Letters," (Boston College: May 6, 1965), pp. 18-19.

⁵⁷Sampson, "Letters," (Boston College: June 29, 1964), p. 3.



Figure 3-2: Fr. Sampson at the top left was moderating the band in 1960-1961 school year.



With a mighty 171 leap and a danger flick of both, Eugene Sampson is able to outkick Mr. Gene Buckingham's shorter jump, as the latter watches, unable to make a possible comeback.



Figure 3-3: In the picture on the bottom left Bill was playing handball with a fellow Jesuit Eugene Buckingham. Figure 3-4: On the bottom right in the 1962-1963 school year he was moderator of the chess club.⁵⁸

⁵⁸Anonymous, *Aetonian Yearbooks: 1961-1963* (Washington, DC: Gonzaga High School, 1961-1963), Fig. 2-2, pp. 110-111 (1961), Fig. 2-3, p. 11 (1961); Fig. 2-4, p. 104 (1963).

CHAPTER 4

Pilgrim: 1964-1971

Bill believed that just as in marriage, so in the Society, one had to keep finding or inventing reasons for one's vocation. What brought him into the Society at age 18 was not sufficient to permanently sustain him. He had to keep growing. Such was the context of his experiments and projects over the course of the years from 1964 to 1971

Massachusetts (July 1964 – July 1965): Human Ambition. Between July 1964 and January 1965 Bill was at Wellesley, Massachusetts.⁵⁹ There he was involved in self-directed study that included Zen Buddhism, existentialism and the history of almost any era and county. He liked William Barrett (1913-1992)'s *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (1958).⁶⁰

Following the year at Wellesley, Bill lived at Boston College from January to July 1965. While there he and some of his fellow Jesuits from Gonzaga who were also in Boston would go on excursions together. These friends included James "Jim" Walsh, S.J., who was working on a Ph.D. in biblical studies at Harvard and Dominic "Dom" Teti, S.J., who was studying theology at Weston, which was part of Boston College. An outing with them to the

⁵⁹William P. Sampson, S.J., "Letter to Former Student of Mine," (Quito, Ecuador: October 18, 1966), p. 41.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, (Boston College: July 1, 1964), p. 7.

Prudential Building, which was a skyscraper that had been completed in 1964, inspired Bill to write a poem about the folly of human ambitions:

His Seat at Heaven's High-Council Table

There we were, Jim, Dom and I
 With nothing above us but the sky,
 Five hundred feet above the street --
 Only fifty cents: what a wonderful treat.
 All of Boston huddled below,
 Crumbling red-brick row on row
 Like an endless brickyard falling to dust,
 Losing its sharp lines, crust by crust.
 "How nice of these Prudential People" --
 "Hey, over there's the Old North Steeple!"
 "Rising above the nearby rubble!
 The elevator ride wasn't worth the trouble."
 I drifted away from Dom and Jim
 And leaned far out on the railing rim,
 And looked straight down at an intersection
 Where ants were speeding in every direction.
 A subway exit belched forth waves,
 Streams of ants rushing from their caves.
 Not one of them alive tomorrow
 And only fellow ants would sorrow --
 And everyone of them sweating to be
 The biggest ant in captivity.
 And I followed one as she nervously strode
 with a quickened step across the road.
 Where is she rushing - for destiny?
 Within that woman a world is weaving
 Pain enough for an empire's grieving,
 Joys that could darken a hydrogen blast
 With intense flashes incredibly vast,
 A mural that all the walls in the world
 Could never contain, if fully unfurled,
 A richness of identity
 Dwarfing all other reality.
 There she hurried, one in a horde,
 From fifty floors, the views of the Lord.
 She was one of many in an army of ants
 Hardly deserving a separate glance.
 They called, and we formed our trinity,
 But the first car didn't have room for three
 So I reached the earth and waited alone
 And I walked to the street and I knew I had grown

As small as an ant; and it puzzled me --
 Would I have descended, had I been free?⁶¹

If Bill wrote other poetry, he does not appear to have published it. He complained in a fund-raising letter written several years later from South America in a joking manner but which may have contained some truth, “Now you may say, ‘Why don’t you sell your poetry to the national magazines?’ You can’t imagine what a second-rate group of poetry critics are now entrenched in all the magazines. I will have the last laugh when, after my death, they fight for publication rights.”⁶²

Cleveland, Ohio and New York City (July 1965 – July 1966): Priest-Worker. In July 1965 Bill went to Cleveland where he took a factor job for six months and learned to drive a car for the first time.⁶³ He had a class-conscious appreciation of the priest-worker movement. In his view the economic insecurity of working people gave them a vision of Christ’s call that was lost on the wealthy. He summarized:

How many of Vatican II’s bishops live in economic insecurity? How can they but distort Christ’s call? I think the worker-priest movement will be found to have done more for the church than councils. Councils never reform; saints do – guys who are willing to risk their lives in following Christ’s call to an insecure life – to walk on the waters.⁶⁴

⁶¹William P. Sampson, S.J., “His Seat at Heaven’s High-Council Table,” (Boston: 1965) (manuscript in possession of author).

⁶²William P. Sampson, S.J., “Letter to Friends and Relatives,” (Quito, Ecuador: March 15, 1967), p. 52 (manuscript in possession of author).

⁶³William P. Sampson, S.J., “Letter to Former Student of Mine,” (Quito, Ecuador: October 18, 1966), p. 38 (contains a chronology for this period).

⁶⁴Sampson, “Letters,” (Quito, Ecuador: December 6, 1966), p. 46. From the worker’s perspective, the hierarchy at Vatican II ameliorated its traditional sectarian policy toward the Protestants, Orthodox, Jews and Muslims to adjust its on-going struggle against

Bill obtained a two-year leave of absence from the priesthood in order to undertake what he described as a pilgrimage. Obtaining permission for this from his superior had not been easy. This was because his motive for doing it was based more on instinct or an act of faith than on logic. He wrote in January 1966 of the difficulty this had presented to his superiors, "I had just been through a period of decision-making in which calculation was not very useful. But I had reached a certitude on what I was to do (much as one reaches the certitude of Faith) and because it was so uncalculated, I had a very hard time getting others to see that it was even reasonable."⁶⁵ He continued:

As for myself, I am no longer at B.C. [Boston College] nor am I in Tertiarity. I requested my Provincial a few times over the past few years to be allowed to live independently of the Society and the priesthood for a year or so. For me it was to be like a pilgrimage (which was once a required part of Jesuit training), a testing. And unbelievably enough I was finally allowed to go.⁶⁶

Bill found his worker-priest experiment and the opportunity to assist those in need to be positive from the start. Using class-struggle terminology, he described his experience:

working people. The Catholic potentates in Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary and East Germany had been leveled by the workers following World War II. Their counterparts in France, Italy, Belgium posed a similar threat. The capitalists established the Marshall Plan to subvert the workers economically. Vatican II ecumenism subverted them religiously. The Catholic hierarchy had more in common with Protestant and Muslim landlords and capitalists than with the Catholic rank and file.

⁶⁵Sampson, "Letters," (Cleveland, Ohio: January 11, 1966), pp. 23.1-24.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24. Bill's difficulties in obtaining approval of his pilgrimage may have also stemmed from the fact that the hierarchy in the 1950s had outlawed priest-workers. The movement took the wrong side in the class struggle which the hierarchy was helping to wage.

So in September [1965] I came to Cleveland, got a job as a blueprint-folder and a room by myself. At first it was intensely exciting, a real close shave with starvation, but gradually my wealth grew and my personal contact, and now I am a real bourgeois.

I am trying to decide now whether to move into the Negro section of town and get a job there. I find the people I am now in contact with are quite Christian and though not wealthy are not destitute either. But I am not sure I can with charity break with some of them who are in real need of help, even from me whom they do not know to be a priest. . .

It has been very profitable for me. I'll keep you informed of where I will be, as I learn about it myself.⁶⁷

While he found his Cleveland work valuable, Bill also wanted to include in his pilgrimage some missionary work in Latin America. In anticipation of this he took a Spanish course. When a missionary opportunity opened up, he cut his Cleveland stay after six months, as he summarized to a friend:

If you remember the first letter, you will recall that you were very enthused with the idea of a Christian's freedom. Anything he chooses to do is free with God; God has not written the script beforehand. As I mentioned in my reply, I found that part of your letter a timely reminder for myself.

I was trying to decide what to do with the rest of the stay in Cleveland, what to do after returning to the Society, and when to return to the Society.

I tried moving into a poorer neighborhood, after quitting my job, but I was slowed down through some misunderstandings. Twice I had a room all arranged for, only to arrive with my baggage and find it gone through some unexpected confusion.

By the then I was informed that I stood a good chance of being sent in June [1966] to a superb mission in Ecuador. As a result I started to study Spanish, a language I had last seen in high school.

Now I am to return to the Society on Monday and to be stationed at Nativity Parish, a Puerto Rican parish the

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

Jesuits have in lower Manhattan. It will give me plenty of practice in speaking Spanish as well as in working in a poor area.

As for Ecuador in June, I will have to discuss it with the Provincial but the chances seem about even that I will be going.⁶⁸

Leaving Cleveland in late March 1966 Fr. Sampson moved to the Jesuit residence in New York's Lower East Side and helped out at the Jesuit's Church of the Nativity on New York City's Lower East Side at 44 Second Ave.⁶⁹ In a letter written in June 1966, he commented on his preparations for going south, "As for the Spanish, I have 'graduated' and am rapidly forgetting it all. I will be studying it again in Quito when I land. I think that the purpose of the high-school course is mainly a reading knowledge. The conversational element is thrown in for the sake of achieving this reading skill in a more pleasant way. I think a course in high-school solely aimed at speaking would be quite useless, because the skill disappears so rapidly when you don't use it."⁷⁰

In the same letter, Fr. Sampson answered a number of questions that the author had asked and summarized his current reading. He wrote:

I'm also reading Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* and I really like it. I'm sure you would, too - it's the *Imitation* [of Christ] without the monastic physical separation. I left my copy in my confessional last Saturday and someone stole it. They're going to be surprised.

Also McKenzie's *Power and Wisdom* as the personalist interpretation of the NT which I find as close to the gospel as you can come.

Other than these - history, as usual. Acton, Council of Constance, Spain in the 16th Century, and Huxley's *Grey*

⁶⁸Sampson, "Letters," (New York: March 26, 1966), pp. 25-26.

⁶⁹Sampson, "Letter to Friends and Relatives," (Quito: March 15, 1967), p. 52.

⁷⁰Sampson, "Letters," (New York City: June 13, 1966), p. 30.

Eminence. None of these is the perfect work - recent, Anglican, limited in time, from original sources, on a religious figure, etc. - but they all approach it enough.⁷¹

One of Fr. Sampson's young friends, who by then was a college junior, had commented on his dislike of Franz Kafka (1883-1924) and the academic study of the Bible, among other things. Bill disagreed:

Your reaction to Kafka was just the opposite of my own. I liked the incomprehensibility of the court as a superb literary image of the great gulf between the finite and the infinite. He has a way of portraying the uselessness of human effort that I find a great reflection of the teaching of Christ. If you want to get more depressed, try *The Castle* and a short story "The Great Wall of China." I can still remember how much I liked them, though I read them many years ago.

He rejects all attempts at building up the city of man - - he makes it plain that this goal is a waste of energy, a light beckoning to us from a swamp; if man's life makes

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 31. The books Fr. Sampson referred to included Aldous Huxley's *Grey Eminence: A Study in Religion and Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), which was a biography of François Leclerc du Tremblay (1577-1638), the French monk who served as Cardinal de Richelieu's advisor concerning the intelligence operations of the French state during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648); Thomas à Kempis' (1380 -1471), *The Imitation of Christ* (New York: Doubleday, [1441], 1955); Dietrich Bonhoeffer's (1906-1945) *The Cost of Discipleship* (London: SCM Press, 1959); and John L. McKenzie, *The Power and the Wisdom: An Interpretation of the New Testament* (Milwaukee: Bruce Pub. Co., 1965). John Dalberg-Acton (1834-1902) was an English Catholic historian and politician. In opposing Vatican I's decree concerning papal infallibility, he compiled a history of papal inconsistency (fallibility) on dogma and morals. The Council of Constance (1414-1418) ended the Three-Popes Controversy by deposing or accepting the resignation of the remaining Papal claimants and elected Pope Martin V. It also condemned and executed Jan Hus, and ruled on issues of national sovereignty, the rights of pagans, just war in response to a conflict between the Kingdom of Poland and the Order of the Teutonic Knights and on the relationship of ecclesial Conciliarism and Papal supremacy.

sense, it doesn't consist in being part of a great human accomplishment. I agree with this so I like to read him. "The Great Wall of China" is rather short and I think he is here at his best.

Also my reaction to the historical study of the New Testament was obviously different from yours. I found it a tremendous stimulus and inspiration, but I think this is more than can be handled in a letter. I have kept up my reading in the area. Perhaps I reacted differently because before my study of it, the Bible had never held much appeal to me.

If I do get down to Washington, we could go into that as well as your 'mystical or intuitive certitude of Jesus' personal interest' which is a closely related subject.

This past year has given me much time to do a lot of thinking about those two problems which are somewhat (?) central.

If you can get up to N.Y. don't hesitate. I should have time. But if you can, warn me on it.⁷²

Because a friend had shared his enthusiasm about John Henry Newman's *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870) in an earlier letter, Bill gave his observations, which were not as enthusiastic:

As for your lines on not being able to prove Christianity from history or philosophy, etc. would you also hold that one cannot know from history etc. that Christianity is the true faith? When a man reads history with perfect objectivity, will he reach no conclusion one way or the other? Will there be a more probable opinion - or are the facts themselves absolutely neutral? Is he really getting at neutral facts anyway - isn't history written by partial human beings?

Or do you hold that what I cannot prove, I do not know?

As for our conscience - do you feel that we can safely presume that our conscience is always correct? If not, do you

⁷²Sampson, "Letters," (New York City: March 26, 1966), p. 26. The writings to which Fr. Sampson referred included Franz Kafka's (1883-1924) *The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946) and *The Castle* (New York: Knopf, 1954).

feel that we can follow it anyway whether it is misguided or not? Or by following one's conscience do you include the advice of others, the experience of others, history philosophy etc. - in other words, man's best? Or do you also see a need for a gift of light from a source over and above man's power?⁷³

In his June 1966 letter from Nativity, Bill praised an article about poverty by Sister Charles Muckenhirn, CSC. He commented, "There's a fine article in the *N.C.*[National Catholic] *Reporter* - left-wing Catholic weekly from about June 1st [1966]. It's on the inside of the back cover and it is written by a nun. She very carefully discusses poverty and religious and she makes some general suggestions that sound like the future of Nativity parish - if all goes well."⁷⁴ The nun described the paradox that Bill had been living during his life as a Jesuit. She used class-struggle terms. The religious communities had started off as immigrant, working class organizations engaged in doing the works of mercy, such as teaching, nursing, running orphanages and old-age homes and ministering to prisoners. They worked for free or subsistence. Overtime, however, they had been co-opted by capitalism, so that their schools and hospitals now focused on servicing the rich and fleeing from those who could not pay. This was complemented by the hierarchy interpreting vowed poverty to be satisfaction with the status quo and without reference to the needs of the poor. Religious superiors were little more than bureaucratic, security-oriented landlords. Their official legalism was professed poverty and lived affluence with hatred of the weak and poor.

⁷³Sampson, "Letters," (New York City: June 13, 1966), pp. 29-30.

⁷⁴Sampson, "Letters," (New York: June 13, 1966), p. 30. The article referred to was: Sr. Charles Borromeo Muckenhirn, CSC, "Poverty and Property in Religious Life," *National Catholic Reporter* (Kansas City, Missouri: June 1, 1966), p. 11.

As described by Sr. Muckhirm the religious leadership were fighting their own members because they (the rank and file) were resisting the principalities by establishing individual and group-decision making to obtain economic insecurity in apostolates, housing, dress, transportation and education. Some of the poverty goals listed by the nun which were guiding the religious were:

The new poverty will be intimately related to the local surroundings of the religious persons. Its style will be imitable by those who see it and in this sense it will be a pedagogical poverty. How can one be poor, yet self-respecting, personally clean, and inwardly disciplined? How does one create beauty through simplicity and arrangement rather than through acquisition of more things? Such questions will bring forth answers which will enable religious and those they serve to work for improvement of the economic life level, while not identifying happiness and human refinement with more acquisitiveness. . . .

All these human contacts proclaim a desire to share, to give, to make known the joy, love and peace of Christ as well as his strength and courage and the meaning of suffering in Him. This quality of accessibility, of disposability, is an entire asceticism in itself. On no point does the new stress go more directly against the grain of the old withdrawal and privilege notions.

Religious will find ways of making it known that they are poor, that they have given up marriage freely in order to tell men about an even greater love, to proclaim the kingdom of Christ. This deeply religious and yet incarnate sort of Christian witness is precisely what is missing in the affluence and organization of present day communities. To tell the poor that God was like they are, that there is joy forever for every man, religious must live the spirit and seem sustained by the goods of some other than merely material nature. Relevant forms of poverty will be the sign to which the gospel pointed. For the poor who are preached to, it will be a sign of hope. For the rich, who are poorer than even they can guess, it will be a sign of scandal unto conversion.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Muckenhirn, "Poverty and Property," p. 11.

Quito, Ecuador (July 1966 - June 1967): Pearl of Great Price and God's Joy. In

July 1966 at age 38 Bill continued his pilgrimage by taking off for a year of working in Latin America. He had studied up on the Jesuit program to which he was going. He anticipated difficulties. As he put it, "Naturally, I have been reading up on the set-up there, and it is in a very splendid mess. After many years of effort things seem much worse now than when they started."⁷⁶ Bill joined Fr. John Halligan, S.J. (b. 1930), who was also from the Bronx, N.Y. Fr. Halligan had come to Quito in 1964 soon after being ordained. He began a program which provided lunch, friendship and vocational training in carpentry and shoemaking to a group of shoeshine boys who supplemented their family's income by working on the streets of Quito. The program, which came to be known as the Working Boys Center (WBC), attracted 250 boys within a few weeks. Fr. Halligan commented that it did not take him long to realize that poverty was more of a spiritual problem than an economic issue. The program and Fr. Halligan are still operating 46-years later.⁷⁷

Fr. Halligan found that the street children were living a gospel way of life:

⁷⁶Sampson, "Letters," (New York: March 26, 1966), pp. 27-28.

⁷⁷The program has changed over time, evolving into a comprehensive approach to help entire families, serving 400 of them at two sites. They are housed, fed, receive health and dental care, and have access to a variety of social services. In return, adults spend long days learning a skill in one of 11 vocational training programs, children attend school, and each family is required to save toward the purchase of a plot of land on which other WBC families help them build a home. Both adults and children join in prayer each day to celebrate their faith. One thousand volunteers each year from the United States and Europe assist in the training and educational programs. See Anonymous, "Fr. John Halligan, S.J.: Working Boys Center," <http://www.workingboyscenter.org/fr.-john-halligan-sj>, accessed August 25, 2012.

Time in the streets is bound to have its affects on them; and probably a lot of them will turn out to be rather mean and selfish types. But, right now, they all have something precious which the world will gradually take away from them unless we all step into the picture.

I'm talking about their pity for those who are weaker than themselves. The best examples of this are the "brother-and-sister" acts that go on at the Club everyday. At lunchtime there are always a half dozen or so kid sisters and brothers (ages one to three years) who have been brought in through the underground by their big brothers and collaborators. It's no exaggeration to say that the tenderness with which these worldwise shoeshine boys treat their smaller friends is comparable to that of any loving mother. They have found that the Club is a good place to eat and relax and clean up. And they have remembered their younger brothers and sisters; and they do what they can to share with them the good things they have found.

Of course, it's all "in the family" so far. It hasn't crystallized into a Christian charity - or a love for one's neighbor based on the realization that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. But it's a real beginning because it is a real and honest relationship. We like to think that if we all stay together in the Club long enough, there will be a gradual realization in the minds of all present that we are all brothers and sisters. Then, maybe the natural goodness of these kids which has given them a strong sense of pity for the weak will become a more conscious love for the weak. The jump from love for the poor and weak to love for the rich and strong is a big one. But it can be made if everybody keeps in mind that we are all brothers and sisters. Thanks to the way God has created us, these kids already know what it means to be brothers and sisters. So our Club has something precious to work with as it tries to show the shoeshine boys the feet of Christ hidden inside the shoes they shine on the streets of Quito.⁷⁸

After a short time in Ecuador, Fr. Halligan had Fr. Sampson working on weekends as the pastor at a small town called Guangopolo, literally "Pig-tail Junction," which was one-

⁷⁸John Halligan, S.J., "The Riobabma News," (Quito: Christ of the Andes Mission, 1966)" (manuscript in possession of author).

mountain east of Quito.⁷⁹ It had not had a resident priest in 80 years and consisted of 1,000 Indians. The priest who visited occasionally was paid \$15 a visit. Since the top wages for a worker were \$3, they could afford few visits. Bill lived in a three-room house with a Peace Corps volunteer from Kansas. The Kansan was running a number of entrepreneurial programs aimed to help the locals, such as market-based chicken and hog-raising and a cement block-making business.

Unlike the Peace Corps volunteer, Fr. Sampson's interest was not entrepreneurial. After about six months in the county, he wrote a letter on Tuesday December 6, 1966, explaining his philosophy and his circumstances. His point was that he had something better than economic improvement. For him economic insecurity was a necessity in being near to God. What he wanted was God's joy. The letter was in answer to a list of questions concerning ambition, class struggle and envy, which one of his friends had sent. Bill noted that his letter, which went on for eight pages, was just like the lengthy discussions they had had in earlier times. He wrote:

Dear Ed,

I am going to try to answer your letter before all your questions become impertinent to you, but it isn't easy at present. I have the grippe; last week at this time I was just getting over a week of dysentery. The good health I have had for years seems to be vanishing.

Yesterday I stupidly watched a huge parade because there was a float with out shoeshine boys. Today is the Quito feast but everything is nice and quiet. They prepared for it with a week of drinking so today everyone has a headache.

⁷⁹Guangopolo is part of the Los Chillos suburb of Quito. See Anonymous, "Municipality of Quito," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipality_of_Quito, accessed August 25, 2012.

There had been an article of poverty in the Jesuit yearbook. I got me so mad I wrote the author, and the same day your letter arrived, his response came.

Being down here and living in the Indian parish on weekends - (I rent a room \$5 per month), next to the only other non-Indian - a peace-corps member) - has not changed my approach any. I think my approach is experience-proof in that it is so theoretical.

I feel that a man helps another by offering him the best he has. Whatever he considers his best, he gives this. If he has nothing in his own life better, then he has nothing to offer. And the solution isn't just to offer them anything you can lay your hands on - maybe because they will be so glad to get it - but the solution is to try and see if there is anything in life worth offering another man.

I feel that in addition to food and education and clothes, I have other much more demanding problems. That food etc., does not touch these greater problems - pain, loneliness and death; and can't touch them since they (food etc.) refer to better ways of spending our admittedly limited time here.

I feel that if I spent my time offering food, etc. to other men, it would be essentially an action without consequences - an action that death strips of all value. If I cannot offer to my neighbor answers to pain, loneliness and death, I cannot do anything really valuable; I am reduced to dealing with him on a relatively superficial level (though he may not care).

Where do I get these worthwhile gifts, and how do I give them? If a man came to me with these gifts, but kept them, and instead gave me food etc. he would not be my friend - even though I begged him for the lesser gifts. And maybe if this man gave me the lesser, he could never give me the greater; if so, it would be an act of friendship to refuse me the lesser, so that I had a chance for the greater. I think that Christ was in that situation. He could have given man the Kingdom on earth - they thought he would, and they begged him to - but he refused. When he saw their misinterpretation, he went to great lengths to clear it up. Like babies we wanted the shiny penny, and he was determined to give us the mud-encrusted pearl of great price.

What actually was the treasure in the field? I think it was the experience of the power of God in the midst of insecurity. He called men to lead insecure lives - to break with men's common-sense values - to give away their money -

to make purses that never grow old. And few jumped at the call because it is terrifying to consider. (and still is and always will be). To just throw aside everything that supports me and take my chances in this world of dog-eat-dog. But he said - do it! And he did it. And some followed him. And he + they and anyone who has tried it since finds the pearl - the powerful hand of God in the events of everyday. That he can live happily and more fully than he had ever experienced before - more joyfully in his body and soul - in pain or whatever comes - when he appears to himself and to others to lack all visible means of support. He seems to have no reason for intense joy yet he experiences it - like Christ in death itself. And he knows that this joy which stays with him in pain and insecurity is not going to leave him in the insecurity of death. It and only it offers a way through death.

(I'm gong to get a cup of hot tea and a strawberry jelly sandwich. Be right back).

This Christ knew. And he died to show that even in ultimate insecurity as man could so powerfully be aware in his bones that God was His good Father, that he could forgive his enemies and trust his Father. 'Like' some of the martyrs sang; the experience of God's presence is equally joyous and blots out the lesser fears.

So if a man has not tried to live in economic insecurity, because it's there where the chips are on the table - as Christ plainly emphasized - then he's depriving himself of ever experiencing the might of God in his life. He can (and probably will) say - I can experience moral insecurity - e.g. who know if today I'll be hit by a car and hospitalized etc. etc. but it's all words. The call is terrifying and we wiggle to get away from it. We think of superb reasons for - 'using my money charitably; wearing purple clothes etc. etc. all in the name of Christ - even making more money so that we can further his work-schools-churches-etc.! He doesn't need our money-making abilities - he asked people to leave them and left his carpentry. I think we will in years to come - see that our school-building-church-building-university building - communications etc. etc. is just a modern form of crusades and the inquisition. Using current means and being corrupted by them.

Lateran IV [1215] voted in the Inquisition and a Crusade and decreed that no new rules of religious orders were to be allowed. But the Franciscans and the Dominicans with their

attempt to embrace insecurity some how got approved and the Church was brought back to Christ by them, not the council.

How many of Vatican II's bishops live in economic insecurity? How can they but distort Christ's call? I think the worker-priest movement will be found to have done more for the church than councils. Councils never reform; saints do - guys who are willing to risk their lives in following Christ's call to an insecure life - to walk on the waters.

So it isn't a question of giving so much time or money to the needy. They are humans like you - they need answers for their loneliness and pain, and the ghastliness of death - so awful it is almost impossible to think about it realistically. It is a question of finding values in life worth communicating. (It's similar to a fellow entering a remote village somewhere. By some special ray used on them by their enemies, they have completely forgotten about sex. They also need houses etc., and the social workers try to get the fellow to help them to build houses. And he just can't get too interested. He has a possibility of joy for them far greater than housing. He has a source of joy in himself that he wants them to experience, a source of joy that surpasses and dwarfs everything in their lives. How can you expect him to spend his days making windows? How could you expect Christ to concentrate on food and housing? He just can't.)

Christ invited us to share his insight - God can support a man as nothing else can, and only does so when nothing else does. As long as we cling to insecurity we are building in sand - and death will show up our foundations.

Now I'm going to reread your letter and see if I've completely missed your point.

So, I don't try to give anyone middle-class values. I don't try to build the city of man. I don't expect to see results. I don't need results to 'keep me going' - what keeps a man going is his experience of joy - that the pain and insecurity he has freely embraced was the will of His Father and the great joy that this realization brings. Results have to be presumed. It's all qualitative - not how many baptisms or doctorates or dollars sent to the missions - (aside: Christ warned - in the matter of donating don't you - my follower - let your left hand, etc. - not only let no one else know - so that they won't give you credit, but don't even think of it yourself. So he calls - give away your money! - but make sure nobody thanks you for it!! Then you will feel God's reward - because you have contradicted everything involved in human values).

But while it appears frustrating, it is not because of [the lack of] the great joy. So lack of results is a real test of faith. Either you are in it, and you don't look for results, or you're out of it and lack of results wipes out all reason for your work. To look for a results, for a person who believes, is a blatant contradiction. You know you're doing the right thing from other sources of certitude.

As for the sacristan of 50 years - its just a question of could God really be calling him to that? It's not my problem. God's calling me to be me - (aside: - to be insecure - that is why people enter religious orders. But with great agony the orders moved away from the insecurity insisted upon by their founders - e.g. Jesuits houses, our ideal - even if we only have 2 left. And now who is more sure of his next meal than a religious? Ah! But how else could we run a Catholic University ((read: crusade)). Well, even granting, which I don't, that it's one or the other - am I to sacrifice my experience of God in insecurity to which Christ called me, - for the means of Catholic universities. If insecurity is not involved in the lives of Catholic professors - they may be professors, but what is their connection with Christ? It's just another university run by business-men and professors and we'd be better off eliminating the pretended link with the carpenter.)

So it's what is God really asking you to do, Ed, before your death? Think of the most frightening (good) thing imaginable and ask God to make you capable of wanting to do it, if it really is His will. He may want it - He may not, but at least you'll not be choosing what your fears dictate, when you do plunge.

--- Your ambition to succeed is just part of your make-up. And it isn't going to lose its force until you experience more important values. But these values can make you lose your ambition for a great name. Will power comes in - if you deliberately don't push your excellence on other, you will find a great freedom from their judgment - but it isn't easy to let ourselves be overlooked.

--- Why seek out poor people? Well, Christ did and he was definitely prejudiced in favor or preaching the gospel to them. "He was never poor enough to starve." - he didn't starve but wasn't that because though he was poor enough - God helped him. Actually he was poor enough to get crucified, but only when his faith was so great that [he] could accept it. He didn't have [a place] where to lay his head, but I suppose he rarely missed a good night's sleep. But that was

God watching over him until he was capable of laying his head on the cross - in God's will, too - just as had been his previous sleeps.

I don't think that it's just 'some Christian writings' that reveal a prejudice for the poor. I think a man reading the gospel for the first time would be overwhelmed by Christ's prejudice for them. The rich were just not a very likely group for Christ's message. They have natural supports and it's not likely that they will be too interested in risking the bird in the hand. They will probably try to hang on to what they've got, and get to heaven, too. And Christ couldn't be clearer on the folly of that method.

In the OT too, the widow and the orphan are God's care in a way the rich aren't. 'The poor have the gospel preached to them' was one of the signs that Christ used to prove he was the King of God's Kingdom. I think, in essence, it's an indication of the contradiction of the world's values. We slobber after the rich and powerful - we try to become rich and powerful. It's only natural, but as Christ assured us, shortsighted. Death levels them all.

--- organized charity - raising poor to middle-class values - this may be good or not - but it is on such a low level of human life - I am not interested. All the crucial issues are bypassed. (but these people have to be raised economically if they are going to be able to preserve these spiritual value: - hokum. The middle-class is no great follower of Christ. It's values are not one step closer to his, if not farther. The middle-class has the wherewithal to forget (so to speak) death and to water down Christ's challenges. The poor are delighted to hear (from a poor man - Christ - not from a secure priest who, contradicting Christ's challenge of this world's values in his life, makes the whole message and challenge a piece of confusion) that there are values of more intense reality than the wealth they don't have. (a bit overly optimistic).

--- Don't you think that God can make you so happy (= real, human, valuable) that you will not envy Winston Churchill? Why won't life turn out the glorious thing you once envisioned. I think it will, if you've got it in you to take every risk that Christ calls you to. (Bonhoeffer: Peter got out of his boat and walked the waves; only he knew what it was like. If you keep your fingers closed tightly over your life, you will never run up against glory. It just isn't the method. The grain of wheat, etc. If you don't fling your life to the winds, you end up an old man with all the seeds

you began life with - but if you do risk it all, you end up with a garden, a new form of existence unintelligible to and never to be known by the old fellow with the handful of seeds.

--- if a man has the answer to his deepest concerns, it is not too important where he spends his time - teaching, building, sawings [?], - just as long as his choice does not endanger his insights, as a life of security would. He can pick his field in accord with his urges + talents; he will help those he meets and he won't be able not to help them, in ways he will never realize. For he will be bringing them good news.

Well, I hope, I have clarified my ideas somewhat. I am filled with this question, as you know, and I don't mind writing on it. For the moment I haven't any idea what your contribution will be used for - maybe to help build a new dispensary, now underway, or help get our chicken-cooperative rolling - the chickens are due the day after tomorrow. Needless to say it is greatly appreciated. The only other response I have received from Gonzaga was a crisp one-dollar bill.

If I found [formed?] a monastery down here with your contribution would you be willing to come down and live in it? I keep poor Halligan (the other SJ) terrified by talking of starting a monastery. He feels this would give our work a bad reputation.

Well, Ed, thanks very much for the letter. It was really enjoyable to read it - like one of those 10 hour conversations.

Your friend - Father Sampson⁸⁰

As a missionary Fr. Sampson found that the gift he had to share was not so much economic development as the economic insecurity that brought believers into God's presence. In later years he carried with him the images of God's kingdom which the Quito Indians had left with him. In his first book he mentions one of the images:

Years ago, I was living in a small village in the Andes. The big event of each day was the coming of the bus. Everyone who could came to the plaza to watch. One day I saw a woman

⁸⁰Sampson, "Letters," (Quito, Ecuador: December 6, 1966), pp. 43-49.

get off the bus with a suitcase. It was a neighbor. Her little son, Jonson, followed. He was about four years old, and she worshiped him. Though she was poor, he was always carefully dressed.

She picked up the suitcase - probably purchases she had made that day - and took Jonson's hand in hers, and began to walk toward her house. But, after a few steps, Jonson pulled his hand free, and ran to the other side, and put his hand up on the handle of the suitcase. He wanted to help. His mother smiled, and they walked on. But, after a few more steps, Jonson began to strike her hand. He did not want her help. He wanted to do this for her. She kept saying, "It is too heavy for you." He began to cry.

She put the suitcase down. She looked so sad. Jonson reached up, determined. But he could not lift the suitcase. He struggled a bit and then began to bawl. She picked him up in her left arm and held him against her, and reached down and found the suitcase handle with her right hand. She walked the rest of the way with both burdens.

Jonson was not willing to be a child. His mother paid the price. God invites us to be children. What has to be done, only He can do. We constantly forget that. We must allow the Lord to do what we need. We must let Him save us.

We must accept the fact that our spiritual growth is hidden in Christ. Loving as Christ loves has nothing to do with seeking to locate God's successes within me. "How am I doing?" In the sight of the wretched of the world - those who so desperately need bread, those who even more desperately need forgiveness - with my eyes newly opened on this, I will find concern for "how I am doing" out of place.⁸¹

Fr. Sampson's love for those he served did not extend to their religion. He described it, "They have been Catholic ever since their ancestors were offered the alternative of being killed. They know little or no Catechism. They have various devotions which center around Jesus of Great Power and Our Lady of Quinche. It would come as a great shock for them to be told that one was a carpenter and the other his mother. The sacraments play little part in their life. They have been priestless and sisterless for centuries. Their religious life depends

⁸¹Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, pp. 102-103.

on outsiders once from Spain, now from America. I don't think money is the answer to this problem."⁸²

Bill's interest was in spirituality, but for him this had a material dimension. He wanted to help establish a dormitory and vocational training center for youth aged 14 to 18, who otherwise would be forced to move to urban areas for employment. They would also have the opportunity to learn more about their faith and about new approaches in liturgy. He commented, "When an Indian sees a 'white' do something effective, he is not surprised or stimulated to do the same. . . . But when he sees his neighbor with money in his pocket, or joy in his heart, he knows he can have it too. I am mostly interested in putting joy in his heart, in letting him realize Christ's answer to the world's hypocrisy, to his own sin and despair, to our terror of pain and death. The village will be solving its' problems when people have the courage to step forward and work for their neighbor. If they will just stop putting satin robes and shining crowns on their statues and start putting shoes on their children's feet. But for them this is God's desire: that they waste their money on dead images, while Christ walks among them alive and barefoot, a little black-eyed ragamuffin."⁸³

Bill minimized the role of money in his own life as well as in his dealings with the Indians. The Society was not funding his missionary activity.⁸⁴ He observed that, "If I could eat the Indian meals, it would help tremendously. But my experiments over the past 6 months have made it plain that I can only avoid intestinal infections by being very careful

⁸²William P. Sampson, S.J., "Letter to Friends and Relatives," p. 51, (manuscript, Quito: March 15, 1967), in possession of author.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁸⁴In *ibid.*, p. 52, Bill explained, "Our peculiar set-up with the society is that since we wanted this type of work, we would have to support ourselves."

about what I eat. Even at that I rarely spend \$2 a day on everything.”⁸⁵ In a fund-raising letter that was probably not very logical, he commented that sending money would do no good. As he put it, “Recently *America*, the Jesuit weekly published an article by a Monsignor Illich who raised the question of whether it was doing S.A. any good, to send all this money to them. He stressed that much of this is being wasted, which, judging by the little I have seen and lot I have heard, seems to be true, not only of the Church programs, but even of U.S. foreign aid.”⁸⁶

Loyola High School, N.Y. City: September 1967- June 1968. In the summer of 1967, Bill’s year in Ecuador came to an end. He spent the following year teaching Latin and religion at Loyola High School, located at 980 Park Avenue on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. The school was established in 1900.⁸⁷

Hamilton Junior High and Bank Teller: July 1968 – July 1969. After a year in New York, Bill returned to Washington, D.C. and formally or informally took a leave of absence from the Jesuits. This was a time when many of his colleagues were leaving the priesthood and marrying. Their initial reasons for joining the order were no longer enough to sustain them. As noted earlier, Bill believed that whatever one’s vocation, the person had to

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 52. Ivan Illich (1926-2002) was an Austrian-born priest. By the 1960s when Fr. Sampson quoted him, he had established a center at Cuernavaca, Mexico to offer language courses to missionaries from North America and volunteers of the Alliance for Progress program, the Peace Corps and others bankrolled by wealthy nations and foundations.

⁸⁷The *Loyola High School Year Book: 1967-1968* (New York: 1968), pp. 15, 25, <http://www.loyola-nyc.org>, accessed August 25, 2012, has Bill’s picture and a description of his work.

keep growing, keep finding new reasons to sustain it. The alternative would be a withering away of the vocation.

During his leave Bill lived in a five-story apartment building at 49 Eye Street, NW, which had about 30 families in it. This was next door to Gonzaga. He was the only white. Fifty years earlier the neighborhood had been Irish, Italian and German immigrants. By the 1960s it was Southern black. He ended up living there for five years and adjusted to his neighbors. For example, he had a fan that was broken. The only thing that worked was the motor—it made a steady noise, which he turned on at night when the neighbors were having a party. That noise drowned out the party noise, so that he could sleep.

On the author's visits to the apartment he saw various the children and parents who knew and liked Bill. They appreciated that unlike some of their neighbors, was not a drunk or crazy. The building had vermin and not a place for folks who could muster enough money to live elsewhere. But Bill preferred it to the chaos in the Jesuit residence, where there were factions with one group not talking to the other. The Vietnam War accounted for some of the contention. Living there also helped answer the call to the evangelical councils of perfection, which he cherished. Bill “embraced poverty,” as one of his friends put it, in preference to the Jesuit community's bourgeois life-style.⁸⁸

During his initial leave of absence Bill taught at Hamilton Junior High, a public inner city school not far from Gonzaga. It was located across from the Farmers Market at Florida Ave. NE and New York Ave. He was a professional teacher, so he knew something about command discipline, but Hamilton was not Gonzaga and the students were not as fearful. He

⁸⁸Walsh, “Interview,” (August 26, 2012), p. 3. Fr. Sampson also used the term “embrace insecurity.” See Sampson, “Letters,” (Quito, Ecuador: December 6, 1966), pp. 43-49.

commented about the difficulties in a letter written on Tuesday December 10, 1968 to the author, who was also teaching in a black junior high school in rural Alabama as part of the Teacher Corps Program. The program provided a way for the author to dodge the Vietnam War draft.

Bill's letter included a response to a young friend's earlier letter in which he described the Alabama program. The friend had a prejudice against the tendency of professional education, with its focus on academic and athletic competition, to reflect and promote the capitalist system. This contradicted the gospel. The bulk of the students, like their counterparts in American society, had to adjust and rebel. Preferable was the Soviet ideal, which viewed education as an arm of the state and looked for it to wither away, just as the state should wither away.⁸⁹ Bill, as a professional, did not think much of his friend's preference for learning on the job, vocational education, and home schooling. He commented with sarcasm:

Dear Ed,

It is always joy to hear from a crusader. It's so pleasant to have everybody else's faults pointed out by such a clear-eyed savior. You say, "This a very important truth - to be continually in rebellion" - almost as important as the other plank of your policy - 'to be continually well-fed'. You can keep eating from the host's table as long as you keep insulting the host. It's sometimes known as having your cake and eating it. You enjoy the best the world has to offer - what it offers to only about a tenth of the race - and yet you have no sense of guilt because you verbally separate yourself from the 'bad guys'. "Discipline can be forgotten, it will come of itself, when more important truths are sought

⁸⁹An account of the Alabama Teacher Corps program is given in Toby Terrar, "The National Teacher Corps and Resistance to Professional Education in the 1960s," *Race, Gender & Class* (Southern University at New Orleans, University of New Orleans), vol. 16, no. 3-4, (2009), pp. 218-247.

by our students. They will discipline themselves - only they can let themselves be free, which discipline is meant to do - they only can choose freedom."

How simple and beautiful! How good man is and how capable! Is there no way one man can help another to be free? No. All he can do is let him be free. If he is only let alone he will be free. When he wants to learn to read he will willingly undergo the necessary discipline - this is pretty well confirmed by adult - education programs. And so on.

Now it is much later in the day. I am sitting quietly waiting for my next class to begin. We had headlines again yesterday: two more teachers quit.

As for me I was ready to quit back in November but I hung on , using up all my days of leave. I wasn't too well and even when I did come in I just tried to be friendly. It worked because now I'm more energetic and I'm certain I'll make it to Christmas (7 teaching days to go!). During Christmas I'll decided on the future. I am enjoying the kids though not succeeding in teaching them anything. I could just take off ½ a year. Or move into the neighborhood, and tutor - the lease is up Jan 31. Or go off to Berryville for a month or two (Trappists), or write. etc. etc. . . .

Well, now at home, I hesitate about sending this but I will anyway. . . .

Your friend,
Fr. Sampson⁹⁰

While at Hamilton Bill was dating a fellow teacher. He was 40 years-old and this was something he had not done since high school. She was black, and black-white dating was a novelty. During a period following Hamilton, he worked as a teller at a bank in the Glen Echo - Palisades area. He did well there and they offered him a promotion. But instead, he quit in order to go back to teaching.

⁹⁰Sampson, "Letters," (Washington, D.C.: December 10, 1968), pp. 57-61.

Berryville, Virginia, which was about 65 miles from Washington, D.C. was the location of a Holy Cross Abbey, a Cistercian Trappist Monastery.

Gonzaga (September 1969 – June 1971): “What I Have to Offer.” After his year at Hamilton and the bank, Fr. Sampson came back to Gonzaga for the two school years between 1969 and 1971. He was still discerning what path to take. He wanted a set-up where there were those who wanted to share the gift which he was offering. That gift he variously called the gospel or God’s joy. Teaching at Gonzaga was not the best set-up, but it provided him a better base to keep searching than public-school teaching or banking. He reflected on his ambitions at the time:

I would prefer to be in a set-up where I offer my services only to those who want what I have to offer. I don’t want to have to ‘sell’ my stuff. I think that distorts what I’m selling. And anyway I’m not really selling, I’m absorbing into myself (I’m selling it to myself). Why should I try to persuade other to grasp these values that I myself do not fully grasp; I can produce an adult human in me – how can I pretend to be interested in the production of adult humans, if I ignore the one that I can directly influence.

I think I should guarantee that I be – out of esteem for human life. I cannot pretend to be really interested in the value of human life – only in others! This seems to me to be the most common temptation – to spend yourself getting others to achieve values that you do not achieve yourself, selling what you do not embody. Anything worth giving to others is worth having: it isn’t like giving material things away – it’s more like God – what you give away you preserve ever more surely. You give it away but it becomes more yours than it was before. It’s a quality of life that really you can only have others share – you can’t actually give it away anymore than God can give away being. But if you don’t have it, how can you share and benefit others – you have, the more you share and benefit others – but you can’t benefit them at your own expense.⁹¹

While Gonzaga may not have been the situation he was looking for in the long run, he did have students in the late 1960s that shared his gifts. One of them later remembered that he (the student) had a belief in the “Big Picture,” that is, that there was more to life than

⁹¹*Ibid.*, pp 59-60.

day-to-day existence, despite an environment that was contrary to this. He was grateful to Fr. Sampson for supporting his belief. He found Bill approachable, willing to listen and not condescending. He summarized his sharing with Fr. Sampson as follows:

I was at Gonzaga from 1967 to 1971 and it and the world were very different from when you [referring to the author] were there. In addition to the vices [alcohol and nicotine] you mentioned there were the additions of marijuana and sex. I don't recall it as being a very religious or even theological place. If there was a Sodality that met on Saturday I didn't know about it.

The Gonzaga I went to was a school in decline in a neighborhood and city in decline. Enrollment was down and the place was physically falling apart. One day in my sophomore year the ceiling in one of the classrooms I was in collapsed. I probably got into the school because the number of applicants was down. I was wait listed.

I had never heard of Gonzaga or the Jesuits before taking the entrance exam in the eighth grade. Proctoring the test were two older priests Frs. Clements and Bellwoar. They seemed almost comical and out of place in a world of computer answer sheets, especially in comparison to the nuns I had in elementary school who projected an image of serene perfection.

My first year was somewhat difficult especially Latin and Religion. The English and History teacher was the football coach Hank Lilly who was at Gonzaga when you were there. Suffice it to say he was a better football coach than teacher. He left before the school year ended so there was little continuity in the instruction. It seemed to me the school was a confused and unanchored place. I chose it because I knew I would have problems at St. John's which is where most of my classmates from St. Thomas Apostle school went. I had a tendency to be late and be a bit sloppy so I was leery of a military school; plus I had heard Gonzaga was a "better" school.

Religion class was a strange mix of biblical history and social/political advocacy. This was confusing and sometimes upsetting to me. Religion which had been about behavior and prayer now became about politics. I came from a somewhat blue collar background and had lived east of Rock Creek Park so I didn't always agree with what I was being told as far as social issues were concerned. I felt the teachers were naive

or uninformed about many things they espoused. I could have told them that the *Sursum Corda* housing development would have a bumpier history than they predicted. (I doubt anyone could have predicted that in its last years The Nation of Islam would be providing security and serve as a moral authority). The result was that religion not only became less important in my life (as it did for many if not most high school students) but also seemed to be more about politics than spirituality or self-betterment. I would pray in times of duress (before tests or when late for school) but otherwise it didn't seem to be very relevant. This was also the time of the *Humana Vitae* encyclical and several priests made public their opposition to it. I didn't know anything about birth control, didn't know it was officially prohibited and had no need for it.

The result was that Gonzaga seemed a muddled and confused place. Of course the country was becoming a muddled, confused place as well. The Spring of my freshman year was the Spring of assassinations and riots and that too produced a sense that everything was falling apart and there were no easy solutions. Fr. Sampson was not at Gonzaga in my freshman year.

Things got better during my sophomore year. I figured out how the grade system worked and how best to study. I took Spanish (which I now speak almost fluently) and biology which was more of a real world subject than Latin or religion. Latin became a class one could pass if they made a minimal effort; its importance had been devalued. My geometry teacher was a young black Gonzaga alumnus, the English teachers were two young Jesuit scholastics and the History teacher also was a young scholastic. It was a relaxed environment in tune with the spirit of the times. One English teacher allowed students to award grades to themselves.

If Gonzaga was not a particularly religious place it was, for those looked for it, a somewhat philosophical place. Existentialism was emphasized in my third year religion classes. [Sampson taught this class.] One could have long hair and say just about anything in class. In that respect it wasn't too different from most prep schools in the Northeast at the time. I had no sense of it having a traditional Catholic culture or identity. I once told someone only partially in jest that the goal of the school was to be a Kennedy. John Lennon was more of an influence on most students than Ignatius of Loyola. I don't think he was every mentioned in any class I took at Gonzaga. I had never heard of Ignatian Spirituality until years after I left.

Of course 1968 was a tumultuous year in American history and the presidential election year was divisive as well. Relevance, revolution, freedom were all buzzwords. There was a big emphasis on dissent and freedom of conscience. These are not bad things of course but it seemed Gonzaga was running away from its own history and philosophy. Most of the Jesuit faculty seemed ignorant that freedom of conscience to most students meant freedom to do whatever they liked which for many was "sex, drugs and rock and roll." Nevertheless after two years I had found my place at Gonzaga, enjoyed it, but realized it wasn't what it had been even five years earlier.

It was in my third year that William Sampson entered my life. I had him for English and also for religion classes in my third and fourth years. I found him always willing to listen to the opinions and thoughts of others. He projected a certain other worldliness and yet was approachable and never condescending. In a time where politics was seen as the road to salvation he never mentioned politics. He never talked about specific candidates or issues.

He had academic standards, in a time when standards were downplayed, yet on several occasions he allowed us to pick books to read. (He had the final say and I remember him once asking whether a book was "vulgar" before he would approve it.) I kept a journal for one of his English classes and I valued the comments he made. He taught us how to read a book critically and I think today I'm a pretty good judge of literary worth because of what I learned in his classes.

I never saw him participate in any religious ceremonies while I was at Gonzaga and I wondered what he really believed. This was a time of unorthodoxy. While I was there he lived for a while in an apartment building adjacent to the school. He also once made a disparaging remark about the cloister where the other priests lived. I suspected he might not be in tune with the other Jesuits but again it was a time of not being in tune in general. I never asked or even thought to ask him why he lived apart.

I had a few conversations about religion with him. (Again Gonzaga in that time was not a particularly religion oriented place) I remember a conversation with him about the Jesus Freaks (after doing some research he didn't think they were for real). Once in a class he asked what would be the consequence if there were no God. His answer, we had to come up with one on our own, was people would be free. This was in the context of an existentialism/religion class. Once the

topic of the secret of happiness came up (I don't remember the context) and he said he thought there were three things: Fundamental generosity, humor, and an ability to take risks. I've always remembered that. He had opinions on many things but was never dogmatic or pompous.

I think what most affected me then was his sense of what you might call the "Big Picture," the idea that there was something that transcended day-to-day politics and even day-to-day life. But he never specifically spelled it out. I got the impression he felt people would have to discover that for themselves. Once he cited the biblical verses concerning the lilies of the field, birds of the air and Solomon's cloak (*Matthew Chapter 6*, I think) and I've always considered them a great comfort.

I know there was a side to him that was interested in war games and his home room (which I wasn't in) had a parliamentary system of class government that was always falling and provoked comments about anarchy in the school paper. I wasn't involved in any of that.

After I graduated I never saw him again. However once while browsing books in a B. Dalton store I saw a book titled *Meeting Jesus* with his name minus the SJ on the spine. To my astonishment it was by him. He also was still a Jesuit. (I suspected he may have left when I noticed his name was never in any of the alumni newsletters I received). I read it and found it interesting. He had written another book which I went up to Fordham University to photocopy. I also read the book he co wrote with Paul Cioffi which was published after his death.

I saw his obituary in the *Post* and went to his funeral. I think I have a copy of the eulogy that Paul Cioffi delivered. I thought about contacting Cioffi but never did. From time to time I would search Fr. Sampson's name on the internet and that is what led me to you.

I would say the reason Bill Sampson's memory and impact has stayed with me for so long was because he greatly affected me in a positive way when I was young and somewhat drifting (again it was a drifting time). He seemed certain that there was something bigger than our everyday world and consequently one should never lose hope or ever despair.⁹²

⁹²Anonymous, "Letter of Former Gonzaga Student," (January 17, 2012), (manuscript in possession of author).

CHAPTER 5

Spiritual Guide: 1971-1990s

Fr. Sampson's vocation, as he sometimes put it, was to work at or at least let God work at absorbing the gospel and sharing it.⁹³ His insight about how to do this evolved. Being a teacher, worker, missionary and low-income housing tenant had helped provide an insecurity that was spiritually nourishing. But overtime he found these were limited in allowing him to share. An opportunity to expand his outreach came in the 1970s with his involvement in the retreat movement.

Retreat and Spiritual Director/Guide: 1971-1990s. The *Spiritual Exercises* were Ignatius's legacy to his order. In the post Vatican II period there was a renewal in how they were done. Over the centuries the practice had been to replace the original individually directed 30-day retreat with a preached retreat to a group of retreatants. In the latter the retreat master preached for an hour at four different times each day on the assigned subject for that time. The retreatants would then meditate after each sermon on what had been said.

⁹³Sampson, "Letters," (Quito, Ecuador: December 6, 1966), pp. 59-60. David L. Greenstock in *Be Ye Perfect* (St. Louis: Herder, 1952), p. 2, said the same thing, "We need to understand that the faith is something which has to be lived and not merely known." Similarly for those on the left, communism is more than speculation about ideology, it is something that has to be lived.

In the individually directed retreat, there was no preaching. The retreatant and God did the bulk of the work. A beneficiary of the renewed approach summarized:

Ignatius' method was a minimum of explicit guidance from the director, or better, guide, of the retreat and an emphasis on the one making the *Exercises* experiencing the guidance of God. So important was this encounter with divine leadership that Ignatius counseled the human director or guide to support the encounter without offering too much advice. In other words, allow God to become the true director of the retreat.⁹⁴

As he became involved in retreat work and the allied ministry of spiritual directing, Fr. Sampson spent increasingly more time on the road. The Jesuits and other religious orders had retreat centers in rural areas. The Jesuits' Maryland province had centers at Faulkner Maryland and Wernersville, Pennsylvania. The latter was also the site of their novitiate. The Sisters of Bon Secours, with whom he often worked, had a center west of Baltimore, not far from the Jesuits' old seminary at Woodstock, Maryland. It was called the Marriottsville Spiritual Center. The Religious of Jesus and Mary (RJM), another order of nuns with whom

⁹⁴Fr. Howard Gray, S.J., "The Retreat Master Is – God: The Ignatian Spiritual Heritage Reanimated for Today's Higher Education Challenges," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* (New York: Fall 2012), No. 42, p. 42, accessed November 3, 2012, <http://www.ajcunet.edu/ajcunet/files/ccLibraryFiles/Filename/000000000984/Fall%202012%20Conversations%20PDF.pdf>. Fr. Gray goes on to mention how the directed retreat movement had an impact beyond Jesuit circles, touching the lives of religious women and men, diocesan priests and the laity. He writes, "The direct experience of God, while not exclusive to Ignatian spirituality, became at once the touchstone of the way Jesuits interpreted the Vatican II mandate for personal religious renewal and for renewed apostolic energy in their various apostolates. The greatest gift Jesuits could offer their colleagues was the opportunity to experience the direction of God in their own lives through the *Spiritual Exercises*."

he collaborated, had centers at Bethany, New York and Guelph, Ontario.⁹⁵ The retreats lasted three, seven or thirty days. He stayed at the centers during the retreats. It was at Bethany in October 1980 that he directed the 30-day tertianship retreat for his friend, Jim Walsh, S.J.⁹⁶

In addition to directed retreats, Bill gave preached retreats. He commented about this in May 1974 in which he also mentioned Jim Walsh, “I’m going to direct Jim Walsh perhaps starting on the 2nd somewhere in the New York area. He’s working out the details. It will give me time to prepare a preached [retreat] I must give and baptize a grand-nephew (or niece). I’ll be seeing you soon. Say hello to your parents.”⁹⁷

In 1974 Fr. Sampson started making regular visits to India to do directed retreats and teach the new methods so that the local religious could take over. It was at this time that he gave up the apartment next to Gonzaga that he had lived in for five years. The immediate reason for this was that it had been broken into while he was gone. He did not want to spend the several days it would take to fix the door. He commented in a letter on dropping the apartment lease and plans to work in India, “I wasn’t tired of being robbed so much – after all, it had been four years ago when it last happened – but I had to be going away and it would have taken a few days to get the lock fixed. It was Friday night. I didn’t want to leave the place unlocked. And also, I am all but finished in Washington anyway. I will be away so much all summer and in September I will, I hope, be heading for a stretch of directing in

⁹⁵Walsh, “Interview,” (Washington, D.C.: August 26, 2012), p. 2.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁹⁷Sampson, “Letters,” (Marriottsville, Md: May 3, 1974), p. 69.

India. In Kerala. Everything depends on the visa and its being renewed every 3 months. The Kerala Jesuits are confident; the American expert thinks I'll get maybe 6 months."⁹⁸

During his first trip to India he managed to spend a week in Israel on the way, including three days in Nazareth. He wrote in September 1974, "My week is almost up. I have seen everything. The weather's been great. The day after tomorrow I fly to Bombay and see if India will take me. – Soldiers everywhere and a lack of tourists helps. Today I bused over to Galilee. A quiet time."⁹⁹

Like his pilgrimage to Ecuador, Bill found that his life in India enriched his ministry. The Indian liberated by Christ from the Hindu caste-system found a consolation similar to what Bill himself was ever experiencing or seeking to experience. He wrote of an Indian convert:

Shivadas is a Hindu in a small village in India. He is low-caste. He must get off the path when he sees a man of a higher caste coming. His religion assures him that his humble station is due to previous existences, and he is now paying off his spiritual debts. His hopes are directed to his next incarnation, when he will be higher in caste – provided he accepts his present existence. His son is also his father's cast. He, too must get off the path when he sees a member of a higher caste coming. When they go to worship, Shivadas cannot go into the temple. No. About two blocks away, there is set up a small altar, and a low-caste priest will say the prayers.

One day a cousin visits at Shivadas' hut. This cousin has been converted to Christianity. After a long conversation, he leaves. As Shivadas goes through his day, he is drawn to wonder, what if my cousin is right, and the facts about my life here on earth are very different. What if God wants to adopt me as His son – me and my boy. What if He wants to invite me into the temple, even in the sanctuary, the holy place.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁹Sampson, "Letters," (Galilee, Israel: September 6, 1974), p. 70.

What if Shivadas were to enter into a full faith in the gospel message. Notice the change that would take place in his self-image. He would see himself as co-heir with Jesus, and all things would be his. He would see himself sitting at his God's table, eating his God's very flesh, and drinking his God's very blood, being breathed into by God himself who would pour His spirit on Shivadas. Christ's history would become his own. All his guilt would be washed away by Jesus' dying. His self-image would be filled with a dignity surpassing even the highest cast.

What is the inner experience that would accompany such a conviction about himself? Obviously, great joy. His new assurance about himself would fill him with happiness as he entered into a relationship of great intimacy with his creator, a father-son relationship, where the father wants to share all he has with his son.

Shivadas would be experiencing the God Jesus reveals to us touching his life. And it would be remarkably good news. And this is the fashion that God's touching *always* takes in our consciousness. He comes to us as remarkably good news. Whether we are beginners or mystics, God's coming to us is always news, and always unexpectedly good news. This is not just the way He comes to unbelievers, or to sinners. No, it is the way He comes into any human life, no matter how far advanced that person may already be.¹⁰⁰

The retreat work in India and at home increased Fr. Sampson's opportunity to share the gospel. Most of those he had dealt with as a teacher, worker and missionary had limited interest in the kingdom of heaven as lived in the evangelical councils of perfection (poverty, chastity and obedience). Gonzaga was called a Catholic school, but as Bill noted, such institutions were more often "a modern crusade and inquisition," a cog in the city of man that "slobbered after the rich and powerful."¹⁰¹

But even in sharing the kingdom with those who were vowed to the evangelical councils, there were barriers. When one of his priest-friends gave a directed retreat in 1981

¹⁰⁰Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁰¹Sampson, "Letters," (Quito, Ecuador: December 6, 1966), pp. 43-49.

to six nuns at the Visitation convent in Washington, D.C., he consulted with Bill who advised him that every time he (Bill) directed an eight-day retreat, at least one of the retreatants would attempt to hang himself or herself in the shower. As the friend remarked, these folks were not happy with having the scales fall from their eyes.¹⁰² They preferred to resist God and would not even pray from their resistance. They would “think” but not pray.

Fr. Sampson commented in 1979 on the obstacles:

We choose the darkness. We are not lost sheep; we are sheep busily engaged in losing ourselves. When faced with a chance to love, we resent. We are jealous. We judge others. We can spend the whole night hating, as Bismarck said. We cling to the reasonable, the dark, and we find loving easy to reject. We dwell in a far country. Like the prodigal, we walk away from love, and find ourselves in a pigsty of angers, resentments, judgments, jealousies.¹⁰³

As a spiritual guide, Bill used his own faults as a basis of his teaching. For example, in describing God’s desire to serve man, he painted an unattractive picture of himself seeking to attract friends after he moved back into the Jesuit community in 1974. In God, if not in Bill, the desire to attract friends was good. He writes:

I recently moved back into a community after having lived by myself for many years. What I gradually saw was that I had a ranking of people, one that I had not deliberately chosen. There were some that I wanted to be close to, others that I did not care to pass any time with. The opinions of a few I valued highly. A suggestion that their opinion of me was not good would depress me. I wanted very much to appear to them witty, gentle, concerned, alive. I made efforts to appear that way when I was around them. I was depressed if they thought me petty, boring, crude, or egotistic.

I was trying to give them a taste for my friendship. I was giving them a promise of good things that would come were

¹⁰²Walsh, “Interview,” (August 26, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁰³William P. Sampson, S.J. “The Father in Agony,” *Spiritual Life: A Quarterly Journal of Contemporary Spirituality* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Province of the Discalced Carmelite Fathers), vol. 25, p. 38.

we to become close friends. I was trying to plant an image of myself as an attractive and delightful person to be with. It was only gradually that I saw that I was doing this. At first, the behavior was spontaneous. With the rest of the community, I was not on-stage. I really did not care that much how they saw me. It had no depressing effect when an event or an anecdote put me in an unattractive light.

This reflection on my strange behavior reminded me of a text I had once seen from the *Scalae Meditationis* of Johannes Malburnus, a late medieval spiritual writer. He listed steps we pass through in the course of effective prayer. His first step was to taste the sweetness of the Lord's promises. In the concrete, it involved imagining a far greater intimacy with the Lord than what I now experienced. It was really an activity of the Lord. He was planting within me an image of what friendship with Him could really mean, and I was making myself and my imagination available to Him during my prayer time. I was, when I was at prayer, letting Him plant this image within me.

It was the word "taste" that had made me see a parallel. My befriending of others was in some ways similar to the Lord's befriending. I was trying to plant an image of myself as an attractive and delightful person. It was laborious task. I was anxious about its ups and downs. A suggestion that I was succeeding was consoling. Hints that I was failing were depressing.

There are vast differences between God and me in this planting of images. In my case, it involves half-truths, falsifications, distortions, a fear of the truth, and a self-seeking that is far from a true loving of my brother. In God's case, He labors for our sake, for our happiness, for our true freedom., and the truth is no threat to His work at all. But the work is parallel, and the inner experience God has when He does that work must be similar to my own: intense concern that the attractive image may be planted and nurtured: a frustration at setbacks: a joy, an elation at successes.

Jesus suggests the pain of the Father at a temporary defeat in the parable of the man sowing good grain in his field. The news of the weeds is a setback of such vast proportions it will involve His son's dying. "There are weeds in the field intertwined with the good growth." He comments, "an enemy has done this." What does it feel like to have my efforts spoiled? With the Father there is no thought of giving up, but the decision to push on is a very costly one.

It is filled with the assurance of eventual triumph, but He is not unaware of the precious blood that must be shed on the way.

God is striving to plant within me an image of His true self, so unimaginably more attractive than my present image of Him. He sees me bound in a relative desolation by my unawareness of His true desires, and of the depth of His true friendship for me. He knows what a new world I would enter, a world of joy and freedom, were I ever to come to know Him as He is.¹⁰⁴

Bill's way of life, which was what he shared in his directing, focused on his poverty in the face of God's love and faithfulness. Being a spiritual guide did not spare him from the normal emotional ups with serenity and downs with despair of daily living.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 35-36. The publication referred to above, *Scalae Meditationis*, seems to have been authored by Wessel Gansfort (1419-1489), who is also referred to as John Wessel Goesport in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Appleton Co., 1913). Gansfort was a nominalist, mystical, anti-ecclesiastic cleric in the anti-papal party of his era. He had the protection of Francesco della Rovere, who was general of the Franciscan order and afterwards Pope Sixtus IV. A search for Johannes Malburnus turned up nothing.

CHAPTER 6

Conferences and Writings on the Spiritual Life: 1979-1990s

As an extension of his retreat and spiritual direction work, Fr. Sampson was involved in conference presentations, workshops, co-teaching with his colleague, Fr. Paul Cioffi, S.J. at Georgetown University and writing. About the co-teaching, the latter commented, “We worked out a faith and literature course for Georgetown freshmen. We team-taught a course on ‘Bergman and the Silence of God’ for upper-class students.”¹⁰⁵ The substance of Bill’s activity was to pass on what he had experienced and learned. He did not emphasize creeds, laws, hierarchy, catechisms, ecclesiology, dogma or sacraments.

Conferences. A glimpse of one of Bill’s workshop discussions about prayer was given in his first book:

Recently in a workshop on the spiritual life, I began by setting up a case of a retreatant. I imagined the retreatant coming to get advice on how much time to put aside each day for mental prayer, and when to make it. Six of the fourteen people present suggested a minimum of forty-five minutes. Four others suggested a thirty-minute minimum. One suggested twenty minutes as a minimum. The most common suggestion on when to make it was the early morning. The late evening was suggested by a few.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵Paul Cioffi, S.J., “Homily of the Funeral Mass of William P. Sampson S.J.” (Washington, D.C.: August 3, 2000). (manuscript in possession of author), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, p. 65.

He summarized the content of another of his conferences in a three-page outline that he prepared in about 1980.¹⁰⁷ It contained most of the themes that were elaborated upon at length in his writings. It described the goal of the spiritual life as being the “kingdom of heaven,” a state where one was free from anxiety. Being anxiety-free came from becoming close to the Father, which involved having faith in and being like Him. The outline noted, “Intimacy comes as we become like God. And that is the only way we can approach him.”¹⁰⁸ To be like God required an understanding of God’s personality. He revealed his personality by his choices. He chose to create and to forgive. Just as for God, so for the believer, creating or making or working was the easy and enjoyable part. But forgiving or redeeming was painful both for God and for oneself.

Both God and the believer in order to forgive needed an enemy, someone who treated them unfairly and brought on a temptation to resent, be angry, jealous or judgmental. He quoted a desert father, that if the face of the enemy did not come when entering into prayer, one was not in God’s presence. God brought the enemy because the unloving of the enemy prevented joy. Since one became like God not in prayer but in sharing in God’s forgiving love, Bill saw no value in the so-called concert hall approach to prayer, where God sat on a throne being praised by angelic choirs. This conception was a favorite of monks, who spent much time singing God’s praises. It was rather the patient-doctor approach to prayer that Will saw as bring the believer closer to God. In such prayer the believer became aware of continuing spiritual infancy and need of God.

¹⁰⁷William P. Sampson, S.J., “Conference,” (no date or place). (manuscript in possession of author).

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 1.

In minimizing prayer, Bill commented, “Because this likeness to God consists primarily in forgiving love, our choices are far more important than our prayer. Our prayer is a means to choosing-to-forgive, if it is effective. . . . It is very easy to elevate our prayer life to the center of our relationship with God. And it is easy to consider charity a minor virtue, one we already have (As if loving others as Jesus loved us is already our normal way of life.) It is unpleasant to see ourselves wanting to resent, incapable of refusing to resent, and without ever coming to a deeper focusing on our unloving choices. Even though these choices cause us to depart from God, and keep us from entering the kingdom of heaven. They fill us with anxiety. . . . The focus of prayer should be on what I do not yet have in the area of loving. This is a negative focus like that of the publican, ‘me, a sinner.’ Since each of us has a bottomless need for God, the criterion of effective prayer is actually my perceived need. If I see myself as doing quite well and just needing a few pills, God is limited in what he can do for me. But if I see myself as hopelessly caught in selfishness and needing a new heart, then God is free to transform me, as he so deeply desires. The mystic sees herself before God as a ‘living need.’”¹⁰⁹

For Bill, then, the aim of the spiritual life was not to give a sense of worth, nor was it to be judged good if it produced a growing sense of worth. Rather its aim was to increase a sense of need to the point where one could enter God’s presence at any moment and pray as the publican. The examen of conscience did not need go from a weakness which one stayed with until it was strong, but from what one considered to be a strength in the area of charity. To stay with it until it was perceived to be an area of great weakness—then to drop it, and

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

move on to another strength. A growing awareness of helplessness would bring one to the state of “spiritual infancy.”

In obtaining the kingdom of heaven the believer needed to have a combination of helplessness or worthlessness and an expectation of receiving it as a free gift. Jesus used the example of children who were helped by their parents without having to pay. The poor of the Old Testament became the children of the New Testament.

Psychology and Joy: “The Father in Agony.” Bill liked the intellectual life and his writings reflected this. But they also had a popular appeal, being outgrowths of his directing. The focus was on helping retreatants and readers along psychological, existential and practical self-help lines. For the most part his writings were not footnoted, but they made reference to Scripture, Ignatius, St. Thomas Aquinas, the desert fathers (Abba Macarius), Kierkegaard, Gustavo Gutierrez, Friederich Engels, Nietzsche, Vonnegut, St. Francis de Sales, and the writings of other spiritual and literary figures.¹¹⁰

In several articles published in 1979 Fr. Sampson developed the theme of God’s suffering. He was aware of the limitations of anthropomorphizing God but argued for its legitimacy. It was as close to the truth as humans could obtain. He wrote:

Some would consider any effort to look at reality from God’s side futile because it will end up in anthropomorphisms. But Jesus and the New Testament writers, in line with the prophets, are quite willing to take that path. Since the human is the most perfect image available to our experience, to avoid all anthropomorphisms usually leads to images of God taken from less perfect areas, a kind of mechanicomorphism. In prayer, by not letting God be so personal as to have a real, concrete desire to act upon me, I can find myself in the presence of a pleasant humming consolation, something like a Cola machine still lighted up in an empty store. Or the presence of God

¹¹⁰Bill’s book, *The Coming of Consolation*, does have a number of footnotes. They are mainly the work of Jim Walsh’s uncredited editing. For better or worse, Bill and most of his readers were not interested in academic footnoting.

can become like a visit to a hospital bed. Your friend is there, bandaged from head to foot, with only a breathing hole. You are present to him, but you expect no input from him. You count on his hearing you and being cheered or resonating sympathetically, but he will do nothing more perceptible than be there and breathe. Is this the presence of the Living God?¹¹¹

In discussing the anthropomorphic deity, Bill looked at God's suffering. This suffering was brought on by His love of humans. On the positive side for humans, their understanding of this love of God brought them joy. For example, in one of his articles, titled "The Father in Agony," Bill used the image of a "laboring God, a worker-God" that experienced the emotions of any parent who suffers when he sees his child in pain.

Fr. Sampson disagreed with the notion of a god who, as he put it, "dwells in infinite and unspotted happiness even though in His world there are children suffering. This image has been the source of revulsion from the faith on the part of some. They prefer to believe in no god at all rather than be saddled with such a monster. But this image is a parody of God's true life, and the tradition has constantly tried to offer an alternative image – such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus. God's heart beats in sympathy with man's pain. Today, for many, the Old Testament images are coming to life, and images of God's intense concern for man and His suffering at our pain rise up from the prophetic writings."¹¹²

In developing the theme of God's love of humans, Bill compared the difficulty He (God) encountered in this with the difficulty that one has in befriending alcoholics, the mentally retarded, the deaf, the foreigner who speaks a different language and the enemy, even the murderer of one's own son. These people at best have brief attention spans, are indifferent, impatient, easily angered, jealous, resentful and judgmental. This puts special

¹¹¹Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, p. 55.

¹¹²Sampson, S.J. "The Father in Agony," p. 34.

demands on the friend. One has to be patient and be happy with small successes.¹¹³ Bill also used the image of God as being like a mother dealing with her angry child. He wrote, “We flail with our fists, and in His motherliness He absorbs our anger, and keeps looking for the moment when we will accept His embrace. Is that not the pain He feels as He relates to us, the pain of a mother trying to get through to this unreasonable child she loves so?”¹¹⁴ He concluded that God had adopted humans despite their wandering ways and that “a consciousness of how little humans know about His painful inner life can lead them towards the consoling truth of His full and bold love for them and assurance that they are in a father’s hands.”¹¹⁵

Because of the difficulties suffered by God, Bill suggested that humans should take pity on Him, which was just the opposite of their usual seeking of His pity. He wrote, “To center my attention on His inner experience is to love. It is to go out of myself into Him. The Lord is drawing us out of ourselves into Him, into a wonder about what His life is like, and a deepening conviction that His inner life is richer than my own, more personal than mine, and much more sensitive. It is not an image of a God shrinking from pain. Rather, like the good shepherd, He plunges forward, but it is not a robot plunging through the thickets in pursuit of us. It is one who is far more personal than I am.”¹¹⁶

Consolation and the Needs of Others: “Discerning the Spirits in Prayer.” In his second 1979 article titled “Discerning the Spirits in Prayer,” Bill also used the theme of

¹¹³*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 36.

God's psychology, His suffering that resulted from his friendship with humans. God chases after and suffers for his friends in their various unhappy wanderings that result from their absorption with the false spirit of God being remote. The article discussed several examples of how dark spirits caused misunderstandings about God's psychology. These interfered with the consolation that God wanted humans to enjoy.

In each example of where there were misunderstandings about God's psychology, Bill showed that God's friendship worked from exactly where the person currently was in order to bring understanding. One example in the article of those who were misled about God's psychology were those who viewed God not as a friend but a burden and thus they ignored Him. Fr. Sampson offered an illustration in the following passage:

One of the clearest cases of this feeling I have run into was a priest who told me that he would have great difficulty with the directed retreat because of the suggestion that the prayer periods be limited to one hour. He told me that ordinarily he prayed for three hours: it was usually one hour before even the sense of God's presence came. Here was a man who found God remote, requiring a great input of time just to make contact. Almost as with a great industrialist, you take for granted you may have to use up an hour just getting him on the phone.

He also told me he had not prayed in over two years. With such an image of prayer springing from such an image of God, it wasn't surprising. This is so far from St. Ignatius' assurance to the young scholastics: "Expect great visitations of God even in brief visits."

Now this was an unusual instance, but it is a common problem in prayer. A sense that God is not readily available, that a price must be paid - in time, or quietness, or reading, or even a sacramental confession - is part of our natural makeup. It is hard for us to believe in practice -

that is, to act upon our intellectual awareness, that *God is near*.¹¹⁷

The true spirit as proposed by Bill for those who believe God is remote is the suggestion or idea that enters their consciousness that they do not know the Lord. This frees them from the circle of frustration in which they find themselves.

A second example in the “Discerning” article of those who misunderstood God’s psychology were those who had an image of themselves as doing their best but God was still remote because “the mountain of the Lord is a very demanding task.”¹¹⁸ As a result they did not respond to the full trustworthiness of God and to the great needs of others. Bill pointed out that on the positive side, the good spirit leads them to see God’s commitment to them and their reluctance to respond. Consolation accompanies their entry into the truth of this bad news about themselves, which leads to the good news about God.

While the good spirit helps to an understanding of God’s psychology and to conversion, the dark spirit leads them toward pharisaism, the making of themselves the object of self-attention because of the influence of their consolation and strength. The spirit of light, however, leads them toward a second conversion to shift their attention to the needs of their neighbor and the love that God has for them.¹¹⁹ Bill summarized:

The Lord *will* be working within him. Judging by Jesus’ experience, it is a far more difficult task to reveal to man his needs, his sin, his unloving and unbelieving choices, his

¹¹⁷William P. Sampson, S.J., “Discerning the Spirits in Prayer,” *Review for Religious* (St. Louis, MO: Review for Religious: 1979), vol. 38, pp. 229-235; reprinted in *The Christian Ministry of Spiritual Direction: The Best of the Review 3* (ed. David L. Fleming, St. Louis, MO: Review for Religious, 1988, pp. 333-339), p. 335.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 337.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 338.

need to be died for. As it comes into man's consciousness it produces a growing inability to judge others, a growing concern for others' needs, a loss of concern about "How am I doing?"

St. Ignatius cautioned us about relying on quantities of prayer. He promoted instead the ideal of a man alive to his own weakness. For such a man even brief prayers would suffice. A regular prayer-life can produce a sense of well-being that is far from the gospel. The Spirit consoles us even as he reveals our inertia, our indifference to others' need for compassion and bread. It is not the Spirit's role, no more than it was the role of Jesus, to tell us how well we are doing, but rather how lucky we are to have Him as friend who alone would persist in befriending us at such great cost to Himself.¹²⁰

“Expectations in Community Life”: Faith, Love and Reality. In addition to God's psychology, another theme taken up by Fr. Sampson in his writings was human psychology and relationships. Like his writings on God's psychology, his discussion of human relationships grew out of his spiritual directing. He often directed religious (priests, brothers and nuns) and had the opportunity to observe and understand a number of communities. In the first half of a 1983 article titled “Expectations in Community,” Fr. Sampson outlined what an ideal community should be: a healthy egalitarian family in which the members were able to take for granted a number of factors. The second half of the article deals with what communities were really like and how to deal with this.

He wrote concerning the ideal community that the members should be able to take for granted certain behavior by fellow members:

Community life is a matter of belonging to each other. We are not just juxtaposed like apartment-house dwellers. We are committed to interact, to share our lives. Your life is no longer just yours; it belongs to me, too. Your sorrows, your joys, your setbacks, your breakthroughs are now mine, also. I remember a student who used to visit our headmaster

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

ever morning on his way to his homeroom, and ask him, "How's my school doing today?" In choosing to be a religious, you are deciding to belong to others, and you are inviting others to belong to you.

There are many factors that make for an effective community experience, factors that can lead to greater freedom for each of us, an enlarged life for each of us. The one factor that I want to consider is our expectations of each other. What I expect of you will play a very important part in how rich our interaction will be. The question I begin with is this: what should I expect of you: what type behavior should I take for granted.¹²¹

Being people of faith was one of the considerations which Fr. Sampson believed should be taken for granted in community life, since all members were religious. Their choices should be believing ones. Following Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), he proposed that a test of everyday faith should be, "Do you expect victory?" The believer does. Anxiety should get no real grip on a believer's consciousness. There is an assurance about the ultimate outcome, a knowing that there is no valid cause for worry in all the particulars of the day. Bill wrote, "The believer *sees* the same things as the unbeliever – sickness, wars, alcoholism, disease, starvation, crime, malnutrition, ignorance, and the non-Christian behavior of so-called Christians. None of these is ignored. In fact, it is all entered into far more deeply. But it produces no anxiety, no worry. That unbelieving way of reacting to events does not get a foothold in the consciousness of believers."¹²²

In Bill's view the consciousness of those with faith was filled with the Spirit that assured them from day to day that the Father was dominating all events. This produced an incapacity for worry. Bill loosely quoted Scripture to elucidate, "Trust me. I tell you not to

¹²¹William P. Sampson, S.J., "Expectations in Community Life," *Sisters Today* (June-July, 1983), vol. 54, pp. 608-613, p. 608.

¹²²*Ibid.*

worry. If the smallest things are outside your control, why worry about the rest? You are in another's hands, whether you like it or not. But there is good news: He is looking after you as with an only child. There is no need to be afraid, little sheep. Why, the very hairs of your head have been counted. If you follow me, you shall never walk in the darkness."¹²³

There was another expectation besides faith, which Bill proposed should be taken for granted among religious in an ideal community. That expectation was that the person be filled with love. Bill wrote, "For you not to be loving would be a contradiction within your heart. The name you profess to others, Christian, is a confession to the world: this man, Jesus, was right; by loving, and only by loving can anyone enter into peace and joy and a life filled with meaning. You have boldly stepped forward, put down all your money, and you have put it on loving."¹²⁴

In the concrete, as pictured by Fr. Sampson, the expectation of loving meant caring for others. The day of those filled with love revolved around the needs of other people. They displayed a heightened sensibility for noticing anyone in need, and an instinct for doing just the right thing. They dealt with people as if they belonged to themselves. The hurts, joys, hopes, lostness and loneliness of others was theirs. They resonated to all. They risked taking the initiative in reconciliation. Harboring resentment was not part of their life. To these Christians grace brought an incapacity to judge, to resent, to be jealous. In discussing this Bill, paraphrased Jerome Nadal (1507-1580), an early member of the Jesuit order, "All your spirituality will turn your thoughts to other people, and will carry you to them. This neighbor

¹²³*Ibid.*, pp. 608-609.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 609.

in need - whether a community member, a student, a parishioner, an employee – this neighbor in need will be your food, your spiritual drink.”¹²⁵

Bill concluded his discussion of what loving meant, stating:

That many of your sisters and brothers are suffering will never be far from your consciousness. The undernourished Asian, the diseased African, the despairing slum-dweller - all will be a matter of great concern to you. You will find it impossible to be indifferent to any of them. You will walk in their shoes and like the good Samaritan, you will imagine that it is yourself in the ditch, and you will be spontaneous in your loving service. The words of Jesus – “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” – will be at the center of your life. You have not committed yourself to a mere surface courtesy; that is not Christ’s way with us. No, he took us – in the words of Thomas Aquinas – as his other self. He opens his heart and lets us abide within. We are a constant focus of his attention. He has affection for us as for himself. He so identifies with us that he suffers in himself any evil I suffer, so much like a mother and a child.¹²⁶

The first half of Bill’s article on community expectations set forth the ideal: that the community be one of faith and love. The second half discussed the reality and how to deal with it. The reality was that one would be in for a terrifying string of disappointments because community members would constantly fall short of such reasonable expectations. In Bill’s view only a person’s blindness to their own inner life could bring them to such unreal expectations. He expanded on unreal community expectations by looking at his own failings:

From a true knowledge of my own self, I should know better. Were I to look within myself with great freedom not to conceal or distort what I see, what would I find? The gospel tells us - a child, a stumbler, an amateur, a powerlessness, a radical nakedness, and the Lord working within me step by step, freeing me into the truth. Other patterns than that of loving are deeply grooved into my life: patterns of unloving, of anxious choices; an ease in

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 610.

resenting; a spontaneous and apparently ineradicable facility to judge others, to read their hearts; a real fear at the invitation not to resent; a fear of turning the other cheek; a distaste for it; a desire not to think of it; a vast well of indifference towards the hungry, the naked, and the sick of the world; a pressure to think of them as little as possible; and endless fears of all kinds; fears of great events, the angst of the philosophers; fear of a thousand small threats to my peace; an ability to dwell in the land of anxiety, to be at home there, to find it reasonable to worry; a preference for dwelling in darkness. If I could look with honesty, I would see within myself a helpless child. The great saints saw themselves before God as a living need. . .

As von Balthasar puts it: as we meet true love in Christ, we also see that we, sinners and egoists, have no true love. Within me there is an inability to love. How can I reasonably expect you to be something different? Within me I find an inability to trust the Lord. How can it not be true of you?¹²⁷

In advising that one should find in themselves the source of unreasonable community expectations, Bill asked how would he be delivered from his idol-worship. He answered, “Only by entering into the truth drop by drop. That person who does not put out, that person who does not respond to others’ needs, that person who is insensitive to the world’s sufferings - can I stand it? It is myself. How the Holy Spirit ever gets through to me with such an unwelcome message is a mystery. It has to be a slow and wrestling affair, an agony: to put the truth to me, to hold up a mirror to my face, and to have me accept it so that I do not break the mirror.”¹²⁸

In tracing the problems in community expectations to oneself, Bill cited the writings of St. Bernard, St. Ignatius, Julian of Norwich and Karl Rahner. He concluded that one

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 610-611. Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) was a Swiss theologian and Catholic priest.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 613.

should expect fellow community members to be incompetents like himself, yet one should understand that God is dying for and loving them and that they deserved reverence despite external experiences. This will bring companionship and consolation. He wrote:

What should I expect? That you will be a stumbler like me, a stumbler but holy, stumbling under the loving gaze of God, the holy stumbling of a child's first footsteps. Your freedom at its deepest is being touched by the Lord's healing blood. He is leading you to a childlike trust in him, to an inability to worry. He is leading you to a neighbor's love for all humankind, for those near and for those far away. That costly redeeming of you, that wrestling of God with your self-centeredness, is going on within you, at such a great cost to him.

If I can allow that to happen, to treat you with reverence, if I can give up my demands to see it happening in your outward behavior, if I can give up my desires to stretch your life against *my* yardstick, if I can accept in faith that no part of the gospel is not taking place within you - that God is dying there and rising - then I will be your companion and we will form a community. Then the joy of our daily life together will be a sign to all we meet, inviting them into the gospel.¹²⁹

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 613. Bernard of Clairvaux, O.Cist (1090 – 1153) was a French abbot and the primary builder of the reforming Cistercian order. Julian of Norwich (1342 – ca. 1416) was an English anchoress and mystics. Karl Rahner (1904 —1984) was a German Jesuit and theologian.

CHAPTER 7

First Book: *Spiritual Life and the “Wretchedness of the Poor”* (1986)

Fr. Sampson’s first book, *The Coming of Consolation*, was a guide to the spiritual life and an outgrowth of his retreat work. Divided into eleven chapters, it covered God’s promises, despair in obtaining them, effective asking, our unloving ways, God’s intervention, mental prayer, honesty and mysticism. As noted earlier, his approach was not sympathetic to bureaucratic religion to the extent such religion took the focus off of one’s neighbor and the poor. Because of this the guide minimized the “ladder of perfection” conception of spirituality. This approach promoted a graded system running from novices at the beginning level to mystics at the highest with no place for the poor and with the great mysteries reserved for the privileged. Bill’s egalitarianism called for an honest realization of one’s poverty in love of God and neighbor.

The guide was based as much on the lessons that his retreatants taught Bill as on his own experience and readings. The retreatants were working people such as health care workers, teachers, social workers, secretaries and missionaries. Many were also nuns and priests vowed to the evangelical councils of perfection and living the gospel among the poor. They made annual retreats so that he got to know some of them well. Illustrative of their contribution to the book was a discussion about gratitude and poverty, which a nun shared:

Once a Sister told me about her experience teaching paraplegic children. One boy, Billy, about fifteen, had no control over his body except for his head. Even his neck

muscles were not in his control. Each day he was strapped into his wheelchair, but his head drooped forward on his chest.

This particular day Sister announced, "I am going to teach you today about prayer."

Billie's voice from below. "Sister, I know how to pray."

"Oh, Billie. Then tell us how to pray."

"Each morning, Sister, I say to God: thank you, than you, thank you."

The Sister told me she immediately left the room. After she had composed herself, she went back in, but she never mentioned prayer again.¹³⁰

The nun's story about gratitude was used to illustrate the first and most important part of prayer, which was to stand before God honestly in one's poverty and be filled with goodness. Fr. Sampson commented, "The saints experience great consolation in prayer, overwhelmed at the riches of His desire and at the shallowness of their own. The exaltation that is the Lord's doing is not based on some flattering self-image, but on an honesty, a humiliation, a compunction – that is the word used for centuries to describe the first part of prayer, our part. . . The awareness of our poverty in spiritual areas is the central focus of our spiritual activity. It has to be worked on. It cannot be presumed to be there."¹³¹ The guide warned that operating against honesty in the spiritual life were natural mechanisms within that propel toward distortion of self image in a flattering way. These mechanisms operated instinctively to develop images inflated with righteousness: "At least, I can say I tried." "I did my best, no more can be expected."¹³²

¹³⁰Sampson, *The Coming of Consolation*, pp. 103-104.

¹³¹Ibid. pp. 38-39.

¹³²Ibid.

Effective Asking: Honest Poverty. An early chapter in the guide titled “The Three Conditions of Effective Asking,” went into detail about standing before God in honesty. It dealt with the common experience of asking God for a gift and not receiving it. About not receiving Bill wrote, “Jesus puts great emphasis on asking. He makes it sound so simple. Just ask, and you will get. Our own past, our experiences in prayer may be teaching us a very different message: asking does not deliver.”¹³³

Despite the common experience, Bill’s retreat work taught that God did deliver. Assuming the gift sought was not something that would cause harm but rather was a gospel gift that God was always wanting to increase, there were three elements in effective asking: an honest desire, need and expectation of receiving. The first element was desire. One might ask for something but not really desire it; this was especially the case concerning the ability to love one’s enemy. One would ask for it simply because the gospels required it. About this the guide commented:

Why would anyone ever *not* desire the gift of the Holy Spirit? Can’t we take for granted that we do want the Holy Spirit? What is this Holy Spirit? In human life, the Spirit is the power to love someone whom we do not love, whom we judge, or feel resentful toward. Do you want the coming of love? It may be a threatening future. “If I get a real love for Charles, I’m going to have to be nice to him, forgive him and forget the books he has borrowed and never returned and let him back into my friendship and I know he will start to take advantage of me again.” I may not really want that. I know that once I start being friendly again, Carlotta will start stepping all over me. The gift of love can frighten us. We can suspect that beneath it there will surely be the cross. We suspect, very naturally, that any coming of God to me will be a purification, a crucifixion. Handing myself over to the workings of love may appear to be pure foolishness...

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 33.

Like all the higher gifts, like friendship itself, which it is a form of, the Spirit cannot be forced on anyone. God's desire is blocked.¹³⁴

So, one of the essential elements of asking was an honest desire for what one asked.

A second essential to effecting asking was the awareness of need for the gift. To come to prayer and ask for what one already had, would have no effect. It would be a routine without any reality that was done from a sense of obligation. The guide gave an example, "I am not getting on well with Edgar. I do love him, but he has ways of doing things that are unfair; and I don't love those ways. This has made our relationship somewhat unpleasant. Instead of telling him plainly, 'When you are not using the car, the keys belong on the board,' I am too reserved, and I just put up with it. I feel I should confront him, but I hesitate. My spiritual director tells me to pray for a deeper love. So I do. But I know that is not the solution because I already do love Edgar. It's what he's doing that is the problem. Any time I spend asking to love Edgar is pure waste. It's a pretense, a mockery of what Jesus meant."¹³⁵ The guide concluded that without an honest awareness that one needed love and that one did not already have it, asking for it would be ineffective. God's desire to fill one with a more intense love was blocked.

The third essential element in asking was an attitude of expectation. If one went into prayer and asked God for His gifts, but did not honestly expect to obtain them, such asking was futile. In order for God to give, He needed great expectations. Fr. Sampson wrote:

We ask, but we expect nothing. And because we expect nothing, nothing comes; and soon we stop asking. Our prayer can become an effort to settle peacefully for whatever it is that's actually happening anyway and a giving up on any hope

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 35.

that God will actually do anything, will enter and transform my heart, in a way so intensely active it is called a new creation.

Jesus encountered this problem constantly, and repeatedly addressed himself to it. Real faith is a rare commodity in his life, occurring in some surprising places, and not being present where he had expected it. A Jew says, "If you can . . ."; and a pagan says, "Only say the word..." (Mark 9:22-23; Matt 8:8).¹³⁶

In explaining how expectations were necessary for God's gifts, the book stated that it was similar to the human scene, where the higher gifts required one to expect another to act and to wait on another's choosing. Love was not alone a looking to one's own will, but a depending on another, letting the other choose. If one tried to guarantee it, one would destroy it or at best receive a substitute for real love.

For effective asking, the book recommended listening to God concerning the depth of His (God's) desire, need and expectation, "We feel our desire is deep, but we are in contact with a superficial feeling only. As He sees our inner depths, God can see how shallow is our desire compared to what it could be, to what He would wish to make it through His gift. Has He not Himself a profound desire to give, a desire so deep it is to the shedding of blood? Now that is deep desire. When we pray, it would be much more effective if we were in touch with the depth of *His* desire to give and how that overshadows our desire to receive. Does he not wish to give us a share in Jesus' own desire to receive at the hands of the Father? Is any desire of ours deep in comparison with that? Yet that is where He wants to lead us through His gifts."¹³⁷

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 37.

Praying for Desire, Need and Expectation. When it was honestly recognized that one had little or no desire, this was good. One could then pray to obtain desire. Prayer was the path along which desire came. As the book put it:

“Lord, I don’t want to forgive her.” “Do you wish that you did want, or are you just as glad that you don’t want?” On that willingness to be changed into a person of deep desire, the Lord can move. It is the desire for the desire that St. Ignatius mentioned. Some writers talk as if in prayer we need bring “nothing but desire.” But even that can be given to us by God’s transforming us. Desire in us is a share, a small share of the desire He has been wanting to fill our hearts with. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that the coming of the fervor of desire is the goal of prayer, not a predisposition.¹³⁸

Just as praying for desire was effective, so was praying for an expectation that God would give, when one lacked expectation. Such prayer was good because it was honest in talking with God. It acknowledged one’s poverty, atheistic mood and unbelief. Without honesty, God could not act. Bill commented:

I many become aware of how shallow or even nonexistent are my expectations, how disheartened I am. The Lord, too, can reveal to me at what a superficial level of expectation I live, how far I am from expecting the way Jesus expected the Father to sustain him and fill him with all he needed. I see myself in the grip of an illusion, a despair-filled illusion of God’s powerlessness or indifference. Whatever the reason, I feel that nothing will come but what I put in.

Jesus led the father of the possessed boy into effective prayer: from “Heal my son,” which the man did not expect to happen, to “Help my unbelief.” It is the only effective prayer at such moments. It puts us in harmony with God as He relates to us in our great need for faith. He does not need our affirmations of faith, our assurances to Him of how deeply we believe. He does need our honesty; He needs us to let Him reveal how shallow is our faith, how badly we stand in need of His gift of faith, how atheistic is our mood, our lack of expecting.¹³⁹

¹³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 38.

God's Promise of Faith and Love. Complementing his discussion of effective asking, Bill devoted a number of chapters to God's gifts of faith and love. The same problem about atheism in asking also appeared concerning faith and love. The guide first discussed the gifts then took up the problem of honestly accepting them. About the unbelievably wonderful gift of faith which God promised, the guide commented:

God sees us in His imagination, growing into a trusting of Him that approaches the trust that Jesus had in Him. This power to trust He desires to impart to us. It is described as a spiritual transformation in our inmost thoughts, feelings, and purposes. We are invaded by a new knowledge of God and a filial love for Him. In this gift God shares with us His divine consciousness; the secrets of His own consciousness are shared with us. It is an intimacy between us that is easy not to believe. . .

We live relatively depressed lives because we find it impossible to take God at His word. But He has a path through this: faith. He can reveal to our inner consciousness His own inner consciousness of His trustworthiness. Jesus experienced this - a certitude about Yahweh's commitment to him. "Do you really believe that if I asked the Father he would not send twelve legions of angels to deliver me?" He knew Yahweh too well to entertain any doubts.

That is the experience He offers to us, an inability to doubt Yahweh's friendship. What is the experience of one who believes so fully? A deep, irremovable joy. In that joy I could now be living, for it has been His will and intense determination to place me there.¹⁴⁰

Similarly examined in the most positive terms was the other fundamental of the spiritual life, God's promise of love. Bill noted that many religious were entering into experimental communities. They wanted to be with those who shared more closely their common ideals and to interact spontaneously with them as friends. He supported this, commenting that it was a sharing of God's love, "It is Yahweh's will also that we be

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 8.

surrounded by those we love. To accomplish this, He offers us a most precious gift, a clothing meant for His Son, now to be wrapped around us, the gift of love. It is a power to love others as Christ loves us. It is an energy source for loving which is the same energy source for His own loving. He opens a tap to His own love-energy, the Spirit, and the Spirit becomes available to us. Just as the Spirit filled Jesus with Yahweh's own compassion toward His needy brothers and sisters, so He wants to transform us, raise our sensitivity toward the needs of others."¹⁴¹

As an example of the transforming power of love, the guide mentioned a woman who one might meet who had been a classmate 30 years earlier. She could as easily have been Bill's own mother. As he described her, "She looks shabby. Her hair is not done, and the clothes are old. Her teeth are not taken care of. Her husband died seven years ago. She mentions a daughter in school. You invite her to lunch, but she has two jobs; and she's on the go all the time. It's sad. It's even somewhat embarrassing. But, as you talk, you notice she's a happy person. It's unexpected. Later, you mention it to a mutual friend, and she tells you, 'She dotes on that daughter of hers. She even gave her a car. A lovely girl, and the mother buys her everything she needs. She dresses her so beautifully.' With the coming of love there comes a very meaningful activity into our lives. We come more easily into contact with the needs of people we love. The entry into action is spontaneous. To see a friend who has a real need that I can fill is to move into an action that is filled with meaning for me. Moments filled with happiness accompany such service."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

The observation about a mother's joy for her daughter brought forth from the guide a quote from Julian of Norwich, to whom Jesus said in a vision: "It is a joy, a bliss, and an endless liking to me that ever I suffered passion for thee. And if I could suffer more, I would suffer more."¹⁴³ Bill concluded, "This same experience is what God intends for me, and what He is bringing about in me through His gift of love. It is an image of me intensely joyous and involved., in humble unselfconscious service in the midst of people I love. I would be reluctant to resent, incapable of refusing to forgive. He will not rest as long as this dream of His is not realized."¹⁴⁴

The Problem of Accepting and the Future. As wonderful as was His love and faith, they brought dissatisfaction to God because His friends did not accept His trustworthiness and love. His friends were also sad, because to the extent they were honest, they understood that they accepted the promises only on the surface, just as their asking was atheistic. The most advanced despaired because the love command as it related to their enemies and the poor was beyond them.¹⁴⁵

In discussing the failure to accept the promises, the guide began with the common practice of believers being technical or complicated concerning the love command and not accepting it at face value. From "love" should not be extracted the "liking." The love Jesus commanded should not be a cold, affectionless relating. Bill commented:

We suffer the consequences of this decision - to separate loving and liking. We end up with a "Yes, God loves me" that has little value in it. As if God were to say to

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

you: "Yes, I love you. I don't like you, no. But I do love you." As if the love Jesus has for me is affectionless. . .

So God says: love him as I love you. And we defend ourselves against it by trying to translate it into his telling us to do what we are pretty much already doing. We minimize the command. We neutralize it. We see the situation as one where I can wait for the other to wake up to Gospel values.¹⁴⁶

For Bill the love command meant accepting the command literally and having real affection for his enemy, just as did Christ. The guide commented, "He is my enemy, a person who is being unfair to me, and the love-command holds out an image of me filled with affection for him. What would it be like if I really loved him? The Gospel invites me to spend time with God's will, God's desire. God sees us both as children of His. He sees our lovelessness, and He knows how unhappy it makes us. He gazes on each of us with affectionate mercy. And he wants me to share His experience. So He projects into my imagination a new me, a me who has affection for this fellow, a me who isn't yet present, who is still in the future."¹⁴⁷

The future image of oneself which the love command promised of having real affection was of someone with amazing ability to endure unfairness. In describing the future image Bill proposed the example of the enemy being a new member of one's religious community, who actually was a younger brother, a blood brother. Even as a child, he had always made enemies by his exclusiveness and it hurt to see him isolated and lonely. He had been, then, a source of pain and worry in the past. There was delight when he entered the community. What sadness, though, when he again showed himself so unfriendly! But Bill noted there was no thought of anger or revenge or resentment, just an everlasting pity for

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*

him and for all humanity and their suicidal ways. An awareness of his pain filled one's consciousness. One's own pain was peripheralized. That was love. As Bill commented, "I don't want him transferred to Cincinnati where I could forget him. No. I want him here - even though he causes me pain."¹⁴⁸

The image of one's future loving self as inspired by considering one's suicidal brother might also be obtained from considering a spouse, parent or child's amazing affection for an alcoholic partner, parent or child, or a social worker or lawyer for their dysfunctional clients, or Catholics for their capitalist hierarchy, or even or Jesuits for their bureaucratic Society and revolutionaries for their own brain-washed society. From considering such affection came a glimpse of one's present distressing lovelessness, as well as an image of oneself that Jesus suggested, an image of a one filled with unyielding affection. Commented Bill, "It is a me-clothed-with-Jesus. That was Jesus - unyielding in his affection. That is God, pursuing me even when I return no love to Him. It is a new me, the me that God had in mind when He created me. He wanted to make a new, unheard-of splendor - a me-filled-with-love. By this loving I will become like Him. My enemy becomes a peculiar moment in my life, where I am invited into the fullness of reality."¹⁴⁹

The guide summarized the love of the poor and the enemy that would accompany being invited into the fullness of reality:

What, then, if I did love him like that! All would be so different. I would have an enthusiasm for dealing with him, instead of an instinct to avoid him. What a contrast that would be to the way I do relate to him. And now I begin to see that my present state is not love at all. Loving him like a lonely blood brother - that is what love is. Love is the mother's heart expanding to

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

embrace the weakness of her weakest child, a persistence in going-out to the most rejecting of her children.¹⁵⁰

Unfortunately the image of their future self did not, as pictured in the guide, bring results, at least in the short run. Their present loveless state inspired believers to want to struggle in their spiritual lives to become truly loving persons.¹⁵¹ They continually were mindful of the love command and were stirred to be kind, to be affectionate in deeds the poor and the enemy and to see Christ in the other. This resulted, however, as the guide put it, in making the other person nervous. It was painful to the other not being loved, but even worse when the person who did not love thought otherwise. It opened the door to manipulation and confrontation. The truth was there was no affection or warmth.

Hearing the Invitation to Ask for Love. The positive side of one's realization of inability to love and despair, as the pointed out, was when it opened the door to the good news that God would give the power of loving when asked. The entering honestly and persistently into one's lovelessness, was the spot where God was able to touch, Said Bill, "What does the believer believe that makes his life so different from that of the nonbeliever? What is that fundamental article of faith? The Resurrection? The Trinity? The Incarnation? Not these but this: 'that the power to love will be given to him when he asks for it. For that is the believing in Christ which the Apostle urges – a faith which works through loving' (St. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 117). . . God gazes on your enemy with everlasting affection. He wants you to share that. That is what Jesus' life was about – God sharing with us His power to love. His spirit. But we place upon ourselves a yoke of fulfilling the commands on our

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

own. . . This journey from hearing the love command to hearing the invitation to ask for its fulfillment is a journey God is constantly drawing us along.”¹⁵²

The love command and in despair hearing the invitation to ask for its fulfillment was for Bill the leveling, egalitarian center of the spiritual life, an on-going process in the present and a promised future. As he summarized, “It is not that we hear the love command only in the beginning of spiritual growth, and hearing the invitation to ask is the summit years of traveling. No, these events are taking place all the time. God is always promising a much more loving future even to saints, and His invitation to look to Him and ask is heard even by beginners. That is the way God is always relating to each of us. Notice, too, that the love command is really a promise. By commanding us to love as Jesus loves, He lifts our eyes to an incredible future, and seeks the moment when we are ready to believe that he will give us that future for the asking.”¹⁵³

Consolation and the Poor. Under the circumstance of not being able to comply with the love command, the guide suggested that the notion of seeking peace, consolation or mystical union as in the traditional stages of perfection approach to spirituality was out of place. One should rather focus on the wretchedness of the poor:

What if my God is in agony - as Pascal suggests - and I go into His presence seeking peace and consolation for myself! When we turn prayer into a search for peace apart from honesty, we do not allow the true face of God to appear. The coming of God's consolation is not along that path.

True consolation comes with the discovery of God's torment and with the discovery of what in me is the cause of His torment. As He introduces me to Himself, God is introducing me to a myself I do not know - superficial and

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 29.

unreal, so unlike Him. His true face will betray the horror He feels at the wretchedness of the poor.

It is very easy to pray at length - and even over many years - and never meet this God.

Even the reading of Scripture without an openness to true self-knowledge serves no purpose. St. Thomas calls the Gospels a dead letter, unless the Spirit gives life. That is why the examen was a way of life in traditional spirituality.¹⁵⁴

The minimizing of the traditional approach to the spiritual life, based on the idea that it neglected the poor, was widespread in the post-Vatican II. There was an understandable exodus of nuns and brothers from the monastic communities that were not working among the poor. The guide did not deny the desirability of mysticism and consolation. Such belonged to God, who longed to share it with everyone, beginners or advanced. All were stumblers in their unlove and unbelief and at best only able to obtain glimpses of the promises.

Christian mysticism, as opposed perhaps to Buddhist, involved at its center love of one's neighbor, an entering into someone else's story. About this Bill commented in discussing prayer:

The short examen enables us to read Scripture effectively and to partake in the liturgy fully. Christian mysticism centers on the liturgy and the liturgical year. Our mysticism is an entering into someone else's story. Because He made our condemnation His, He has become our justification, our sanctification. Our being lifted up to the heights of the divine life is so much a gift that it is imagined as an opening of our mouths and the Lord Himself feeding us. Into our mouths comes His flesh, His blood, and into our hearts His love for our brothers and sisters and His unshakeable faith in the Father.

Such a mystical path does not lead to openly showing our affection toward God. Modesty and humility prevent it. The

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 97.

emotion that finds expression is an embarrassed regretting. A momentary awareness of ourselves as obstacles to growth and faith, to love and joy. "There is no one who grasps how much he impedes and obstructs the great things God wishes to accomplish in him." That blessed and joy-filled awareness will never come, if I do not labor, by means of a persistent, ruthless honesty, to destroy the illusory self-image that my defensive mechanisms build.¹⁵⁵

As a practical matter in discussing the love command, the invitation to ask and consolation in the spiritual life, the guide advised that one should not worry about or expect to see "progress."¹⁵⁶ Better to simply trust that God raised His friends up despite the evidence to the contrary. Rather than be concerned about or admire what God did in oneself, in gratitude one should be looking to love others. God was found in absorption with one's enemies and the poor, not in absorption with self.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 103.

CHAPTER 8

Betraying God: “Horror” as Used by Jesus (1991)

Bill’s last published article was titled, “Horror as used by Jesus in the Formation of His Disciples.” Like his other writings it was a reflection on his own experience and was meant to help others. It continued the theme he always taught, God’s love, but focused on the consequence of failing to accept that love and betraying Him. God was an indulgent father but he was also a master capable of imposing the harshest of punishments. His close friends, including Bill, in neglecting to feed the poor, visit the imprisoned, welcome the stranger and in hating their enemy, were capable of hurting God deeply. It was these disciples that would be judged the harshest.

The article was despairing because God’s friend betrayed the poor. It argued for an openness to the reality that humans lived on a knife-edge. Their free choices were crucial with catastrophe hidden within humdrum realities and relationships. Ever-present to the saints was the monstrous possibility, as Philip Neri put it, “Lord, do not trust Philip, for he will betray you.”¹⁵⁷

In multiple passages that the article reviews, Jesus used images of loathing to provoke horror in his followers:

¹⁵⁷William Sampson, S.J., “Horror as used by Jesus in the formation of his disciples,” *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Institute of Formative Spirituality, Duquesne University: February, 1991), vol. 22, pp. 76-77.

And at the gate there used to be a poor man. . . . covered with sores. . . even dogs came and licked his sores (Luke 16:20-21).

If your eye is your downfall, gouge it out and cast it from you. (Mt. 18:9).

Thrown into hell where their worm will never die nor their fire be put out. (Mk. 9:47-48).

For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you,
and hem you in on every side,
and dash you to the ground
you and your children within you (Lk. 19:43-44).¹⁵⁸

Bill saw in the militant propaganda of the English communist, Friederich Engels, a parallel to Christ's frightful imagery:

More in line with the reasons that Jesus had for using such imagery is the use Friedrich Engels made in his great study, *The Condition of the working Class in England in 1844*. In that work Engels was hoping to motivate people, to get them to do something. He presented his readers with images designed to horrify them, to make them demand an end to the frightful ways that the poor had been forced to live in the new industrial age.

Much of the book is simple descriptions of what he saw as he walked about in Manchester's less pleasant areas. Here is a typical item:

In one of these courts, right at the entrance where the covered passage ends is a privy without a door. This privy is so dirty the inhabitants can only enter or leave the court by wading through puddles of stale urine and excrement.

The Young Engels was horrified at what he saw. He knew that to get changes made he had to horrify others.¹⁵⁹

Similarly the Gospel Jesus used horror to get people to change. The path they were on was leading to destruction. To continue on that path guaranteed a frightful future. As he tried to break through the false confidence of his followers, Jesus often used images of fire and darkness. He planted in his hearers' imaginations an image of a "blazing furnace" (Mt.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 66.

13:42) and warned that people would be thrown into it. Commented Bill, “It is like the mother who threatens to put her son’s fingers in the burner’s flames if he ever steals again. Over and over again Jesus leads his hearers to imagine being burned, not just in the fingers but throughout the whole body.¹⁶⁰

In frightening his hearers about a terrifying future, Jesus felt the threat was real and likely and that his followers were blind to it. For that reason he spoke of how surprised they were going to be. He carefully depicted the wealthy man who decided to build bigger barns, and promised himself many years of pleasurable indulgence. Jesus imagined his inner thoughts and portrayed well the confidence in the future that griped the man. And then, the surprise: “Fool! This very night the demand will be made for your soul” (Luke 12:20).¹⁶¹

The worst future possible for God’s friends was to lose His friendship. This was the tragic future Bill predicted:

Another source of human confidence comes from the knowledge that “I was there when it all happened” or “I knew him when.” It becomes the occasion for painting a most vivid reversal scene. Again we are at the judgment. It is the moment when Jesus is revealed to be the Messiah of God. When his contemporaries, “this generation,” those who are actually listening to his words at this moment – when they see themselves being excluded, they will appeal to their closeness to him. “We were there when you came! Have you forgotten how close we were! We’re not like those others; we were right there, and we ate and drank in your company! Remember: it was in our streets that you taught” (Luke 13:55ff).

But they will hear the frightful words: “Away from me, you evildoers!” The cameras continue to roll: a scene of weeping, gnashing of teeth, as they watch with open-eyed disbelief, and “people from east and west, from north and south, will come and sit down at the feast” and they

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 68.

themselves are not let in. "You are headed for a terrible surprise. You who are now first will be last."¹⁶²

Perhaps even more fear inspiring than the last judgment, as Bill pointed out was the story of the good man who stayed in his father's house and worked the family fields for many years. This was a person one identified with very easily, a faithful and obedient son. Jesus gave this man a prodigal younger brother, a man of consummate selfishness. Jesus described his selfish indulgence in ways designed to arouse the hearer's contempt. It was the return of this no-good that sparked the understanding of the elder brother. He had been in the fields, working away faithfully, and came home to find that he had been invited to a feast, a welcome-home for his younger brother. The invitation produced in him incomprehension. He tried to make his father understand but without success.¹⁶³ He discovered that he was not like his father, at the deepest level. He had thought that they shared a common mentality, and now he knew they did not. It was what his life was all about. It was the foundation of the relationship, and of his sense of self. To enter the banquet would be unbearable exposure to a side of his father he had never known, and did not want to know.

As Bill concluded about the elder son, Jesus related his downfall to a cause in his will, not just to some error he had made in the past. Long before he came to discover that his father was unbearable to look at and listen to, he had turned his back on his younger brother. That choice led to his present misery. When he blinded himself to his brother, he had to ignore the love that his father had for the prodigal, a deep level of his father's personality. He had imagined his father as other than he really was. Little by little he had come to not enjoy his father. He had come to feel that he had "slaved all these years," but it had been

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

worth it because he was in. Now he was suddenly out. His confidence that he was in had been illusory.¹⁶⁴

Unfortunately for those who were Jesus' disciples and the closest to him, they were the elder brother. They were able to work miracles, yet were the ones condemned as evildoers, "When the day comes, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?'"¹⁶⁵ Bill called it a strange truth, "As we get closer to people, they become more vulnerable to us, and we are given the chance to do enormous evils, evils we cannot inflict on our enemies."¹⁶⁶ Discipleship brought with it a capacity for much more terrible deeds than would ever be available to the crowds. At the same time, it brought in its wake an assurance that one would never do anything really terrible and obscured the frightful future that could so easily occur.

Toward the end of his ministry Jesus revealed to his apostles the true path of the Messiah, the awful secret. One of them refused to accept it as real. He urged Jesus to forget such a depressing possibility. As Bill observed, Jesus called him "Satan!" (Mt. 16:23):

The assurance that nothing too bad can happen is now being pressed on Jesus by someone in his inner circle. That very assurance – "Nothing really bad can happen to me" – is precisely the reason why Jesus' warnings have had so little effect. And now it is actually pressed upon him by a close disciple. He lashes out, "You have become a tool of Satan!" It was to Peter also that Jesus spoke this dreadful image: "In his anger the master handed him over to the torturers till he should pay all his debts. And that is how my Heavenly Father will deal with you" (Mt. 18: 34-35).¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 71 and Mt. 7:22-23.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 72.

Not only Father, But Harsh Master: Betraying God. Jesus taught the fatherliness-image, which was central to the good news that he preached, but he also taught about the master enraged at the behavior of his servant, enraged to the point of letting torture be applied. As the article put it, the warning was clear: these were one and the same God! In his fatherly bosom there was a most dangerous thunderbolt! Unless one became keenly aware of this reality now, one would be stunned at the day of judgment. One would encounter a God one never knew: in place of the indulgent father, an unrelenting stranger with frightening power.

Bill saw in his own life that he faced a double problem as God's friend. He hurt God more deeply for his failure to accept love and he was more blind about this failure because of his closeness to God. Like the disciples he did not see the outcome of being condemned as a real danger. There was nothing in the disciples lives that seemingly would lead to such a terrible outcome. But Jesus did see, as the article stated, "What of your reluctance to forgive your brother from your heart!" This was the connecting link that Jesus pointed out to Peter in the parable of the unforgiving debtor: unless one forgave his brother from the heart, this image would become one's future. Bill added, "In the judgment scene Jesus will link this terrible future to their present reluctance to feed the poor, to welcome the stranger, to visit those in prison. So much of his time with the disciples is spent in waking them up to those areas of their *present* reality that will, unless checked, lead to these frightful consequences."¹⁶⁸

After listing multiple examples of where Jesus tongue-lashed and became angered at his disciples for their over-confidence and lack of faith, the article drives home the point of

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 73.

their blindness by observing that many in the present time claim that modern people cannot hear the warning of Jesus because the culture makes it impossible to take them seriously. But in the Gospels nothing was more plain than the reluctance of the disciples themselves to hear what Jesus was saying.

In his own life Bill was constantly trying to clear away the false confidence that prevented him from taking Jesus' warning seriously. He noted that the reason behind the warnings to keep any good deeds hidden was to fight over-confidence. Fasting, prayer, almsgiving – all were dangerous! They could be used to assure oneself there was nothing to fear. Bill commented that good deeds must be kept hidden even from oneself.¹⁶⁹

The problem of living with honest fear was a price one paid for being intimate with God. The article concluded with the last supper and the attempts Jesus made even to the end to keep the disciples from denying and betraying him. Beginning with a quote from scripture, the article stated:

“Listen: the time will come – indeed it has come already – when you are going to be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone.” It is their very closeness that makes them risk betraying him. It is only those close to us who can wound us at the deepest level. God, too. An awareness that I can betray him is a sign of *intimacy*.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 76.

CHAPTER 9

Meeting Jesus (1991)

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