

Item #72 (“Life as Guided Initiative”)

The following reflections may or may not turn out as a miniature autobiography. As of today (June 11, 2021—The Solemnity of the Feast of the Sacred Heart) the author of these words is well into his 94th year.

Birth and Family. I was born in a Catholic hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 18, 1928. My parents were a non-practicing Lutheran father (Henry Hubbard Swetnam} and a practicing Catholic mother (Helen Mary Luth Swetnam). But my whole life before entering the Society of Jesus was spent in Webster Groves, Missouri, an early railroad suburb of St. Louis. My parents were incompatible but, as G.K. Chesterton has observed, all married couples are incompatible to a greater or less degree. I was baptized in Mary Queen of Peace Parish in Glendale, Missouri, a suburb adjacent to Webster Groves, but my Catholic allegiance all through elementary school was to Holy Redeemer Parish in Webster Groves because Mary Queen of Peace had no elementary school. It was in the Parish of Holy Redeemer that I made my first Confession, received my first Holy Communion, was Confirmed, and attended Sunday Mass. Eventually my family grew to include two younger sisters: Anne Ellen, born in 1930, and Joan Caroline, born in 1935. Both married men who were lawyers and presented me with a large number of wonderful nieces and nephews. Anne married James F. McCarthy and they were blessed with eight girls and five boys. Caroline married John M. Kelleher, and they were blessed with three girls and two boys. I can go on record with a clear conscience as stating that my sisters have proved an unmixed blessing to me my entire life. I hope that they can say the same about me. Both my parents came with many relatives and friends, most of whom are now dead. I look forward to meeting them again on the other side of death. Many of them were a real help for me in growing up,

Holy Redeemer Grade School. The first stage of my academic life was at Holy

Redeemer Grade School and began in September of 1932 when I was four-and-a-half years old. It continued until my graduation in June of 1941. The school building is standing today much as it was generations ago on Lockwood Avenue facing Selma Avenue near where Selma bisects Webster Groves High School. The stately Gothic church that provided the heart of Holy Redeemer Parish during my life there has since been severely damaged by fire and given way to a less impressive modern structure. The priests in the parish were usually three in number and made a good impression on me, though not to the extent of ever giving me the idea of imitating them in becoming a diocesan priest. The teaching in the grade school was in the hands of the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, New York. They were a dedicated group of women and provided me with an excellent foundation for my subsequent academic career. All are dead now, and buried in the cemetery at the motherhouse not far to the north of the city of New York. I have visited all of their graves. I can remember each of them quite distinctly. I was able to visit some of them in retirement before they died. An important addition to our eighth-grade subject matter was introduced for the first time in our second semester (1941): a semester of Introductory Latin taught by two members of the Webster Groves High School faculty. The classes were within easy walking distance south on Selma Avenue. It was an excellent preparation for my four years of Latin at Saint Louis University High School and for my life as a Jesuit: I have been in contact with Latin for all the subsequent years of my life. During my years at Holy Redeemer we lived as a family on West Cedar Street in Webster. The neighbors provided a wholesome environment for growing up. My fellow students in the grade school at Holy Redeemer were around 45 in number, a number that varied slightly from year to year. There were a few more girls than boys. I became good friends of some of the boys, a friendship that lasted well into our old age. I must remark in closing this section of my life that toward its end I earned my spending money by selling weekly magazines and cutting the grass and shoveling the snow of the

suburban homes among which I lived. (As a student in the latter years of high school I worked as a tree-trimmer.) More importantly I developed a love of the Mass and frequently rode my bicycle the short mile to Holy Redeemer where the Mass was celebrated in the grade school basement to conserve heat during the winter. Looking back I think I can say that the frequent attendance at Mass with the reception of Holy Communion had an effect on me that I was unaware of. Around the age of ten I memorized the Latin and learned the rubrics necessary for serving Mass, a frequent practice that served me well during grade school and later.

Saint Louis University High School. In the fall of 1941 I entered the local Jesuit secondary school, well prepared, as it turned out, by my years at Holy Redeemer. My four years at SLUH corresponded closely with the involvement of the United States in World War II: Pearl Harbor took place in December of my freshman year and my graduation took place between the surrenders of Germany and Japan. At the time I was at Jesuit-run SLUH with so many gifted persons facing the same challenges that I faced. The summer before I reported for freshman year my family moved back to the house on Cherry Street where I had lived during kindergarten at Holy Redeemer. It was across railroad tracks from a Manchester Streetcar 55/56 stop. The weekly pass was quite reasonable and the rear of the streetcar provided excellent room for the renewal of homework preparation during the forty/forty-five minute ride between home and school. SLUH was a much different place then than it is now. Many more Jesuits, a much simpler curriculum. I am grateful that I was able to work through the four years there then. Two significant events occurred during my sophomore year. Both involved my junior and senior years. One involved a choice made by me. In my first two years I had dabbled in athletics, especially in distance running. But I decided that I would profit more from working on the yearbook and newspaper of the school. The second decision was made by a Jesuit. I was signed up for four years of Latin but at the end of my sophomore

year I had to choose an additional language. When I met with my academic advisor I told him I would like to study Spanish. His reply was: “No James, you will take Greek”. Though I did not realize it at the time, this decision was to prove crucial for my life’s work. Welcome, James, to Divine Providence. Not that Divine Providence had not been in action in many ways before in my life, as He is in every human life. At the beginning of my senior year, to my surprise, I was elected senior class president. This was an honor I had not sought, but it was and it remains an honor for which I am greatly appreciative. I also achieved a perfect score in an I.Q. exam, a score I did not take too seriously, though it was taken seriously by many other persons. One of my extra-curricular activities was membership in the “Literary Circle”. Through it I became acquainted with the writings of G.K. Chesterton, who has had a significant role in my life, as he has had in the life of so many others. But the crucial development in my life came in my senior retreat, which took place at the Jesuit Retreat House “White House” overlooking the Mississippi River south of St. Louis. Up until this retreat, in January of 1945, I had planned on taking part after graduation from SLUH in the closing chapter of the war with one of the armed forces, and then launching a career in journalism and marrying and fathering a large family. I had been dating a grade school classmate for some time though of course I considered us too young to make any commitments. But as a result of the retreat I decided I would seriously consider for the first time in my life becoming a priest, and specifically, a member of the Society of Jesus. When I decided to begin the process of discernment I fully expected that I would decide against such a move. But much to my surprise the more I discerned the more I thought that I would be doing God’s Will if I entered the Jesuit novitiate soon after graduation from SLUH. Decisive in my decision made in April was the hope that it would help my father, whom I loved profoundly as I did my mother and sisters, to become a Catholic. My years at SLUH had convinced me that my faith was the central factor in my life, a conviction that has remained

with me through thick and thin. The date for entering the Jesuits was August 8, 1945, at which time I would still be under 18 years of age. When I asked my parents for their approval of my decision I suspect that both were a bit disappointed, for they expected a career that would give them grandchildren. I can recall my father saying, "It's his life, let him do what he wants". My father was an intensely patriotic person who regretted that he had been too young to serve in World War I and too old to serve in World War II. He was hoping that I would be able to make up for his lack in some way. These were the circumstances of my mind-set when I graduated from SLUH as Valedictorian. With me as Class Orator was Daniel Craig O'Connell, who also would enter the Jesuit novitiate with me in August and would be one of the closest friends in my life.

Saint Stanislaus Seminary. On August 8, 1945, my father drove my mother, my two sisters, me and the young woman I had been considering eventually marrying out to Saint Stanislaus Seminary in Florissant, Missouri. At the time Florissant was a country suburb of St. Louis, but now it is one of the largest towns in the state. The Jesuits had been at what is now Florissant for over 120 years, centered on a farm. They had come from Maryland in 1823 at the invitation of the then archbishop of St. Louis, who gave them the land they needed to feed themselves. When I arrived in 1945 the seminary served as the novitiate for the Society of Jesus for the entire upper Middle West of the United States. It was less than two hours by automobile from my home on Cherry Street, and of course there were possibilities of communication as well by mail and telephone. But when my family and my girl friend left me at this group of historic buildings amid vineyards and corn fields and forests not far from the Missouri River, the understanding was that there would be no visiting for six months. After an indoctrination period of a week I and a group of other young men were officially admitted to the novitiate of the Missouri Province of the Society of Jesus. It was August 15, 1945, the day Japan surrendered and World War II was all but officially

ended. My life of Poverty, Chastity and “Guided Initiative” in the context of “Common Life” had begun. It would turn out to be a life of constant challenge, a challenge that has been pleasantly and unpleasantly formative and never ending. To my constant agreement and profit it has been a life for me in a society where Jesus is constantly present as priest and victim in the Mass. Some of the men who entered the Society that day with me I knew, but most I did not. 11 men had entered in February of 1945, and 25 were to enter at three different times during the rest of the year. Of the group of 11 all persevered, but only one is still alive. Of the group of 25, only 7 persevered, but I am the only one still alive. Thus in the year 1945 36 men entered the novitiate at Florissant, and 18 persevered. The novitiate lasted two years. At the end of this period the novice took perpetual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, vows which were binding on the person who made them but not on the Society which received him. At any time the Society could dismiss the individual who had taken simple vows (as opposed to solemn vows), but the individual was bound to remain in the Society. If all went well, at that time in the Society of Jesus, final vows were permitted by the Society for priests at somewhat less than 20 years from entrance. My entrance into the novitiate was August 8, 1945; my final vows were on August 15, 1962. Life in the novitiate consisted in classes on the rules of the Society of Jesus in the context of two “retreats” or periods of silent meditation of thirty and eight days respectively. Readings in the lives of the saints of the Society of Jesus were encouraged. There were also classes in Latin and French. All had to perform the assigned chores necessary for the maintenance of the buildings and grounds and the well-being of large groups of men. These chores were under the supervision of Jesuits who were not priests and were accordingly known as “brothers” as contrasted to the priests who were “fathers” and who were responsible for the Masses and the instruction of the community. At the time I made my novitiate Latin was the required language of the Latin Rite to which the seminary at Florissant belonged. A novice who did not take private

vows to enter the Society was always free to leave the novitiate, of course. Once, in my second year, I decided to leave, but when I went to inform the novice master of my decision he was, quite unexpectedly, absent from his office. I took his unexpected absence as a message from Divine Providence to reconsider. Which I soberly did. I took my first vows as a Jesuit on August 15, 1947. Two weeks later, to my great surprise (for I had not been informed in advance) but immense satisfaction my father entered the Catholic Church. The main reason for my taking vows as a Jesuit had been honored by the Providence that governs all. After my first vows I entered at Saint Stanislaus a two-year period known as the “Juniorate”. Further, command of the languages of Latin and Greek were still considered a part of a well-educated Jesuit. Accordingly, after two years of novitiate most candidates for the priesthood were required to make two years of “Juniorate”. Classes in Classical Latin and Greek were supplemented by classes in English literature and English writing and speaking. All of these were served up as courses with credit hours at Saint Louis University that were eventually part of an undergraduate degree. With my background in Latin from Holy Redeemer and SLUH and my Greek from SLUH I was well prepared to profit from the offerings of the Juniorate at Saint Stanislaus Seminary taught by gifted Jesuit teachers. One course in particular stands out: a course on Thucydides. For some reason the persons in his speeches became alive for me in a way that has served me well in a variety of ways. Another memorable event of my Juniorate days: in an eight-day retreat preached by Fr. Daniel Lord, S.J., famous at the time for his preaching and spiritual direction, Fr. Lord referred to his life of vowed obedience as a life of “guided initiative”. The expression found immediate assent in my Jesuit sensibilities as being fully justified by Fr. Lord’s example. It has served me well ever since as an understanding of how to live my vow of obedience. In August of 1949 my young colleagues and I who had persevered through four years of Florissant boarded busses for the ride into Saint Louis for the next phase of our education: philosophy at Saint Louis

University.

Saint Louis University. From the periphery of the metropolitan area of St. Louis (admittedly not that large or not that numerous in population), we found ourselves in the center. We began a three-year program called “philosophy” to make up for an undergraduate university degree the courses in philosophy and other subjects that had been lacking in our language study at Saint Stanislaus Seminary in Florissant. We became part of the Jesuit community of the university, living in a separate building with our own local superior and working for a degree in a university school for future clerics. Philosophy was the main subject in our first year, with specializations in other topics in subsequent years for those for whom a minimum of philosophy was sufficient. At the time the Philosophy Department of Saint Louis University was known as “The School of Dogmatic Thomism” with an impressive mix of Jesuits and lay persons as faculty. Some of the faculty had been students of the Thomistic historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson of Toronto. I had amassed a sufficient quantity of credit hours in classic languages at Florissant for a major in Greek for my B.A. degree with a minor in Latin. My courses in philosophy in St. Louis provided enough credits for a co-minor in Philosophy for my B.A. Other necessary credits were obtained so that my B.A. degree from Saint Louis University dates to 1951. I found the study of Philosophy most agreeable so that in 1952 I was awarded a Master’s Degree and a Licentiate Degree by the university. (A Licentiate Degree is an ecclesiastical degree, somewhat more demanding than a Master’s.) I was awarded my B.A. degree with the accolade “*Magna cum laude*”, I didn’t know until the night before I was accorded this honor that I was eligible to receive it. My two sisters each received the same honor at the two separate women’s colleges where they studied, so I look on this fact as a tribute to our parents, neither of whom was able to gain a collegiate degree for financial reasons, though both realized its value and acted accordingly. One special feature of my three years at Saint Louis University were the two summers we

young Jesuits experienced at the Jesuit-owned villa named Waupaca on a chain of lakes in east-central Wisconsin. It sounds like an expensive summer escape but actually it was a way to save money and provide a locale for courses on education. At Saint Louis University, as I specialized in philosophy after getting my B.A., my good friend Dan O'Connell began his specialization in psychology, a specialization that was to prove so rewarding. At the end of our three years at Saint Louis University as students all of us were shipped off to various secondary schools for which the Missouri Province was responsible, this time to face the challenges of the teachers' art. I was missioned to Regis High School in Denver, Colorado, and Dan to Campion Boarding School in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.

Regis High School. Regis High School during the three years I was stationed there was located on the campus of Regis College in the extreme north of the city of Denver. We "scholastics", that is, Jesuits not yet ordained but studying for the priesthood, lived in the same community as the priests teaching in the high school and the priests teaching in the college (shortly after the completion of my three years to become Regis University). A most attractive part of my assignment to Regis was the villa that had been a gift to the Jesuits many years before, in the 19th century. It was located at an elevation of 8,400 feet in the valley of the Fraser River on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains. It was the home of us young Jesuits for three months during the summer vacation. Again it sounds like a luxury get-away but in fact it was a way to save money and recuperate from two semesters of academic dueling with adolescents. As I had expected I was assigned to teach Homeric Greek and classical Latin to juniors and seniors. At the beginning of the school year I suggested to the Jesuit Principal that we give the students of Homeric Greek a taste of other Greek classics such as Plato and Sophocles in English translation. The Principal immediately accepted the idea and offered to pay for the paperback books of the Greek classics which the students would borrow. I subsequently felt fully vindicated when years later one of the students

confessed to me that after reading the first page of Plato's *Republic* he was "hooked for life": in later life he was a university professor of philosophy. In my first year of teaching at Regis I made many mistakes; in my second year I began to correct them; and in my third year I began to be a really useful member of the faculty. This usefulness consisted in my extra-curricular activity in prefecting week-end events such as speech meets and fixtures of the high school such as the student publications. The summers at Fraser proved useful for me as I helped young children of the neighborhood prepare for their First Holy Communion. Not to ignore the possibility of climbing mountains in the area. In my fourth and final summer at Fraser I was invited by the chairman of the Scripture Committee of *Theology Digest* at the theological seminary in St. Marys, Kansas, where I was about to begin my theological studies, to be a member of his group. I didn't realize it at the time but the One providing the guidance for my life was acting in the invitation. I accepted, and the rest follows below.

Saint Mary's School of Divinity. The location of the School of Divinity of Saint Louis University during the middle years of the nineteen hundreds was a small town about thirty-five miles west and a bit north of Topeka, Kansas called St. Marys. The school traced its origins to a Jesuit mission to the Pottawatomie Indians further south that had followed a group of the Pottawatomie to a site on the Kaw River and named it St. Marys. From a mission to native Americans the Jesuit ministry developed into a school for native American boys and then into a national boarding school for American boys in general and finally, during the Depression, into the School of Divinity of Saint Louis University. The fact that the town was the point of origin of the Santa Fe Trail, the California Trail, and the Oregon Trail in the mid-eighteen hundreds had much to do with the Jesuit presence. This was the school of theology in which I studied from September of 1955 to May of 1959. My class work in the usual subjects for a theological seminary was considerably influenced by my extra-curricular work in the Scripture Committee of the journal *Theology Digest*, for which I was the

managing editor in my junior year. The town of St. Marys, with a population of about five thousand, was a source of friendly contacts for many of us students. For me the town was my first experience of life in the midst of huge fields of wheat and corn. but I was able to establish friendships that have lasted until the time of this writing. Because we Jesuits had had three years of theology we were permitted to be ordained to the priesthood at the end of the third year of our course work instead of the fourth. (But of course this abbreviation of our theological education took no account of the three years that many of us had spent teaching in high schools.) So it was that I and Dan O'Connell and others who had entered Florissant with us were ordained to the priesthood on June 18, 1958, by the archbishop of Kansas City, Kansas in which archdiocese the school of divinity was located. My immediate family and many of my Catholic relatives were present for the occasion. Following a brief celebration in St. Marys I went to St. Louis where I celebrated a Mass at Mary Queen of Peace, the parish where I had been baptized thirty years previously. In the 63 years since my ordination I have rarely missed the chance to celebrate or concelebrate Mass. In my fourth year of theology I was one of four newly ordained priests from St. Mary's to be assigned as chaplains to Haskell Institute (now Haskell University) in Lawrence, Kansas. The four of us would take turns spending the weekend with the Catholics among the Native Americans from all over the country and preparing for Baptism those who wished to become Catholics and saying Mass on Sunday morning for those who were. It was my good fortune to have Holy Week fall to my lot and to baptize four whom we had prepared. Back at St. Mary's for final exams I did not do as well as I had expected but was awarded a Licentiate in Sacred Theology nonetheless on the basis of my work with *Theology Digest* during all four years of my coursework. Further, I asked my Missouri Provincial if I could get a Licentiate degree in Sacred Scripture at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome after making my "tertianship" (= third year of novitiate). After consultation with my theology professors this permission was

granted. Further, once I had received permission to do advanced studies in Scripture I asked permission to make my tertianship in a German-speaking area, and eventually was given approval to make it in Austria. The reason for this latter request was the importance of the German language at the time for scholarly research in Scripture. “Guided initiative” was in full swing. Before I left St. Marys I was informed that I was to make my tertianship in Austria, and shortly after this permission arrived I received a letter from the priest in charge of the tertianship informing me that my fluency in German was to be up and running from the moment I arrived in Austria. I wrote a close Jesuit friend of mine in West Berlin, Germany, Fr. Dennis J. McCarthy, S.J., if he could help me find a place of residence in Germany where I could practice my German. “Not to worry”, was his immediate reply. He was leaving Berlin where he had been studying Oriental languages as part of his study of the Old Testament and living at a convent of Good Shepherd nuns where he had been given free room and board in exchange for his saying Mass each day for the sisters. The convent gave me his room for three months in exchange for daily Mass.. Thus in a period of a few weeks Divine Providence and I had laid the groundwork for my life from the summer of 1959 to the fall of 2010, though I did not suspect it at the time.

Tertianship in Austria. Five of us from the 1959 graduating class of St. Mary’s School of Divinity in Kansas boarded the small ship *Ryndam* of the Holland-American Line in early June of 1959 in Hoboken, New Jersey for a ten-day ocean voyage across the North Atlantic to Rotterdam, Netherlands. (Air crossings had not yet become the normal way to travel between the United States and Europe.) All five of us had been missioned to make tertianship in Europe, two in French-speaking Belgium and three in German-speaking Austria. We were going to Europe early to improve our speaking ability in the languages we were destined to use beginning in September. Fr. Dan O’Connell was with me and another Jesuit destined for Austria. (German was the key language in psycho-linguistics which was to

claim Dan's attention in the context of his Jesuit priesthood for the rest of his life.) Each of us had arranged for a different place to prepare during the summer. Accordingly we parted soon after our disembarkment. I went to Cologne, had some reassuring conversations with children on the streets of that city, and the next day took a very early train for West Berlin on a route that cut across northern Germany. It took our train, nearly empty of passengers, almost two hours of waiting to enter Communist East Germany (the German Democratic Republic) that surrounded Berlin. As I stared out my window during the delay I saw two husky women in uniform standing in attention with automatic rifles in their hands as a loudspeaker blared in crystal-clear German, "Travel in the German Democratic Republic without permission is attended with difficulties". But I had no difficulty—my United States passport was treated with great respect. Once in Berlin a telephone call placed me in contact with my friend Fr. Dennis J. McCarthy, S.J., and he soon appeared to take me by bus to the convent of Good Shepherd sisters in an area in the south of the city called Marienfelde. There were about 45 sisters in charge of more than 300 women with varying difficulties. Marienfelde was in the American sector, the southwestern part of the city. Also in the west were the French and the British. In the east were the Russians, of course. The Wall had not yet been built to keep people in the eastern sector from escaping to the west. During my summer people from the Communist part of the country, usually families, could cross over to the west with little difficulty, provided they were willing to leave everything they owned behind except what they could carry in plastic sacks. Next to the huge convent building was a large house for priests. Many priests came from Communist Germany for a brief vacation before returning to their parishes in the east. After saying Mass for the sisters in the early morning I was free the rest of the day and I usually spent it with these priests visiting sites in the west and learning from them why they came west to relax: they, like most of the laymen who came west, came to escape the oppressive atmosphere of the east. And so passed the

summer as my conversation in the language of Goethe slowly improved. In early September I reluctantly said farewell to my new friends in Berlin and took a train for Munich, passing on the way through the southern part of Communist Germany. From Munich on to Austria where I arrived in Klagenfurt and from there by bus to the site of the tertianship in a small village called Sankt Andrä im-Lavanttal. The men who were to make the ten months of tertianship with us three from St. Marys were 19 from 16 other provinces on three continents. Our tertian master was a pleasant elderly Dutchman. It was the first time I had been in the same community with so many Jesuits from foreign countries. This led to some surprising discoveries. For example that some of the European Jesuits who were from middle class families had never taken part in any manual labor. The German and Austrian Jesuits had all served in the German forces in World War II. I became a friend of one German who had been a paratrooper. I helped him with Latin and he helped me with German. We lived in a medieval bishop's palace with a stove in each room. We had to break up the large pieces of brown coal in the courtyard to feed our stoves and keep warm. The idea of the tertianship was to enable us to adapt our new existence as priests to the pastoral needs of our ministries. We had lectures each day but much free time. I used the free time to prepare a detailed outline of an eight-day retreat. During Christmas and Easter vacations many of the men returned to their provinces or to the areas where they had improved their German. I chose to remain in the area of Klagenfurt, a nearby town with a Jesuit parish, where I heard confessions in the parish and in nearby country parishes. In the abundant time I had for prayer and reflection I came to a deeper understanding and appreciation of St. Ignatius of Loyola. In mid-July the ten months was up and I departed for northern Italy where a new chapter in my Jesuit life was about to begin. I bid farewell to my friend Fr. Dan O'Connell who was to go on and get a doctorate in psychology at the University of Illinois and teach in universities in the United States and Germany.

The Pontifical Biblical Institute. After saying farewell to all the men who had made their third year of novitiate in Austria with me I set out with one of them—an Italian—to a Jesuit novitiate in the hills of northern Italy. Goal: with the help of one of the Italian novices who knew a bit of English to learn enough Italian to insert myself in the community of the Pontifical Biblical Institute in the center of Rome. (Here it would not be inappropriate to remark that the writer of this account is not a brilliant speaker of foreign tongues. I would give myself a grade of “B” in my ability to converse in a language not English. Part of the difficulty is that I am an introvert, not an extrovert.) After six weeks the novice threw up his hands as a sign that he could do no more and I set out for Rome. I took my time, visiting famous Italian cities and practicing my newly acquired language on the way. I arrived in Rome on October 1, 1960. Classes began in the middle of the month. (The academic year ended in late June.) Jesuit students of the Biblical Institute lived in the same community as the professors, sharing the same tables in the refectory. The language for reading at table and conversation at the main meal at midday was Italian. At breakfast and dinner any language shared by all at the table was used. Living with so many Jesuits learned in Scripture was a distinct plus. The Pontifical Biblical Institute was founded by Pope Pius X in 1909. From the beginning it occupied a building in the center of Rome adjacent to the Pontifical Gregorian University. The property was increased by the addition of a building after World War II. In 1927 an affiliate was established in Jerusalem in the New City near what is now the King David Hotel. When I arrived to begin studies for the Licentiate in Sacred Scripture the language of instruction was Latin. A Licentiate in Sacred Theology was required for admission. The celebration of Mass was a matter for each priest to arrange. I celebrated an occasional Mass in the community chapel, but I soon began to say most of my Masses in the Church of the Trinità dei Monti at the top of the Spanish Steps, a twenty-minute walk away. I loved the walk to this historic church through empty streets early in the morning. I soon

learned that some of the first Jesuits had lived briefly nearby and had said Mass there as well. When I arrived and for many years thereafter the church was under the supervision of the Religious of the Sacred Heart who had a school for girls adjacent to the church. When classes at the Biblical Institute began I became acquainted with my fellow classmates who came mainly from Europe and North America. I found the international atmosphere of the Institute stimulating as was the location in one of the great historic cities of the world. Thursday was the weekly holiday of the Institute and I made use of it to explore the city and its environs. During Holy Week and Easter I thought it appropriate to seek employment in some diocese of Italy in order to become better acquainted with the culture of the country that was my host. As a result something completely unforeseen occurred: when I left Italy for good in 2010 I had worked pastorally during 50 Holy Weeks in 50 different dioceses in all provinces of the country, Sardinia and Sicily included. (For a complete listing of the dioceses see Item #56 [“On the Uses of Scripture”].) In June of 1962 I was awarded a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture, and with a fellow novice who had worked in parallel with me ever since we entered the novitiate and had also been awarded the licentiate (but who tragically later left the Society) I went to Jerusalem to begin doctoral studies at the Institute’s house in Jerusalem. There, under the supervision of the local superior, we both did an abbreviated, six-week course in Modern Hebrew. In the middle of the course we interrupted our studies for an evening to take final vows as Jesuits. This was 17 years after entering the Society, 15 years after taking our first vows, and four years after being ordained priests. The course in Modern Hebrew was taught by a 20-year old young woman born and raised in Israel. I was the only non-Jew in a class of 20 persons from a variety of countries, mainly in the Middle East. Normal attendance for the course was six months, but after six weeks my companion and I were examined and graded by the local Jesuit superior, who was a recognized authority by the Israeli Jews themselves on modern Hebrew. My summer in Jerusalem (the New City) was

the first of three visits to the Holy Land, all of which provided unforgettable experiences of the place where Jesus Christ entered and left this world. (See Item #54 [Visits to Israel]). At the end of the summer my fellow Jesuit and I returned to the Institute and further doctoral studies. He went on with the necessary course work and as soon as possible began writing his dissertation. This he finished in near-record time, saw to its publication, and was soon back in the United States to a teaching assignment. My encounter with the Guide was not as straightforward. I was fascinated by the work of the Biblical Institute and accepted an offer of the rector there to work on the backlog of publications which were waiting in manuscript form to see their way through the printer for publication, I still took courses toward the doctorate but most of my time was devoted to contact with authors and printers. Knowledge of foreign languages was essential for our publications, of course, as well as familiarity with printers. And here my background of work before I entered the Society and after was useful. Months of detailed work, not always as successful as I would have liked from my point of view, soon had the problem of an unpublished backlog under control. (My editorial responsibilities during my years at the Biblical Institute were as follows: Managing Editor, *Orientalia* and “*Analecta Orientalia*”, 1962-1969; Managing Editor, *Biblica*, “*Studia Pohl 1*”, “*Biblica et Orientalia*”, 1962-1975; Review Editor, *Biblica*, 1962-1975; Managing Editor “*Analecta Biblica*”, 1978-1986; Managing Editor, “*Biblica et Orientalia*”, 1978-1998; Managing Editor, “*Subsidia Biblica*”, 1978-1993.) And then a new problem arose: the Institute was beginning to receive an increasing number of students, often from Asia and Africa, who needed help in preparing themselves to take the basic language courses in Hebrew and Greek. At the moment my knowledge of Hebrew was not sufficient to be of help, but my background on Greek was. The small number of beginning students I was entrusted with succeeded in qualifying themselves for taking the regular introductory course in Greek. Heretofore students coming to the Institute had had sufficient preparation for their

immediate entrance into the first-year course work from their study of classical Greek in secondary school. Teaching at the Biblical Institute at this level was humble work (for which I have been teased and even criticized), but I was interested in contributing in a significant way to the increase in the knowledge of the New Testament on the part of Catholics throughout the world, and this was clearly an important contribution. In my thirty-six years of teaching Introductory Greek at the Institute I taught some 1500 students from 85 countries. (For a detailed account of this preparatory work by me and others see Item #25 [History of the Propaedeutic Year].) During the summer I taught Scripture in the Summer School at Saint Louis University, 15 courses in all, or, later, 8 courses in the Paul VI Institute in St. Louis or, in alternate years, spent the summer in a European country to improve my command of foreign languages. Latin was the language of instruction at the Institute until 1970 when, after some experimentation, the languages Italian and English emerged as the principal ones used. Meanwhile I had not abandoned the idea of attempting a doctorate but I wanted to wait long enough to make sure that when the doctoral work—successful or unsuccessful—was completed I would continue to work at the Institute. So much for Initiative. After the necessary permissions from superiors in the United States and Europe I found myself in the fall of 1975 at age 47 in Campion Hall at the University of Oxford in Oxfordshire, England. But between the end of teaching Propaedeutic Greek at the Biblical Institute and my arrival at Campion Hall two significant results of Guided Initiative occurred: my visit to the Middle Eastern countries of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and my pastoral work in Bavaria, Germany. See Item #52 (Archaeological Tour, July 1975: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria). The Biblical Institute encouraged faculty and students to visit archaeological and Biblical sites and in July of 1975 offered the possibility of visiting the countries in question by sponsoring a tour under the supervision of a competent guide. I surmised, given the turmoil of the Mideast, that it would be now or never for me as regards a visit, and so I joined in the

tour and, as the detailed account referred to above explains, was not disappointed. The following summer I took part in another tour of the Middle East, this time encouraged not only by the Biblical Institute but also by the University of Oxford where I had become a doctoral student. See Item #53 (Archaeological Tour, July 1976: Iraq, Iran Turkey). In the summer of 1975, after the trip to the Middle East but before my arrival for the fall term at Oxford, I spent several weeks in Beuerberg, Bavaria, as chaplain of a community of sisters at an historic convent in the middle of forests, villages and dairy farms. The purpose was to gain more insight into the pastoral use of scripture and at the same time refresh my knowledge of German. The visit was an unqualified success and it was repeated several times in subsequent summers. Finally, at the beginning of the fall term at Oxford, I arrived at Campion Hall, the official Jesuit residence. There I met the person who was successfully to direct my dissertation: a woman Methodist minister, younger than my 47 years, but of excellent judgment and admirable experience. Not long after she had officially accepted me as her student she was named Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge. She was allowed to finish the work for which she had contracted at Oxford and thus I became a student of the first female successor of Erasmus, as she liked to pride herself in saying. But I checked on the original recipient of the chair (the donor, Lady Margaret, was the grandmother of King Henry VIII), and discovered that it was St. John Fisher. Needless to say, he is for me even more impressive than Erasmus. And perhaps he has been more helpful. My nine terms (= three years) preparing for research and doing it at the Bodleian Library in Oxford and elsewhere were unforgettably challenging. Looking back I have to admit that I did not honor my membership in the Campion Hall community as well as I should have. But the subject matter of my dissertation was unforgiving: *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah*. (Later published as *Analecta Biblica*, 94; Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1981.) And every minute that I was in Oxford I felt I had to confront

some problem in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Even after the publication of my dissertation (which was delayed because the two examiners at Oxford thought my original submission needed more historical background) I kept getting what were to me new ways in which the thought of *Hebrews* had influenced the thinking of Jesus Christ. The chief challenge of *Hebrews* had for me been its text at 5,7-9 which I interpreted as meaning Jesus was pleading to die. It was with the greatest reluctance that I sent this interpretation to my directress at the University of Cambridge, for I thought it meant the end of her approval of me as a doctoral candidate. And so it was with much relief I read her approval next to my reading of 5,7-9 : “This is the best interpretation I have read of this passage”. I still had to reconcile my reading with other parts of the Gospel, in particular with the Agony in the Garden, where traditional interpretation views Jesus as being spared death, and this I have done in Item #11 (The Agony in the Garden). My acquisition of the doctoral degree from Oxford meant that I could direct seminars when I returned to teaching at the Institute, and this I did in addition to teaching Introductory Greek. I alternated between “Problem Texts in the New Testament” and “Texts in the New Testament with a Semitic Background”, for nineteen years before I retired. I learned a considerable amount from hearing our gifted students debate for hours on end. When I returned to teaching in Rome I also began teaching a side course at the request of Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity: “The History of the Catholic Church”. I taught this course for 29 years to the M.C. novices in Rome, and my notes were used in their other novitiates in Calcutta, Manila, Warsaw, Nairobi and San Francisco. Needless to say, this ministry was immensely rewarding. A tragedy occurred in the early eighties that had nothing to do with my life at the Biblical Institute after my return from Oxford: my close friend Fr. Dennis J. McCarthy, S.J., who had been teaching at the Institute for several years after a stint of teaching in the States following his obtaining a doctorate from Paris, died unexpectedly at Santiago in Spain as a result of a heart attack while attending a Scripture meeting. He was

one of my closest friends, all the more so because we were colleagues at the Institute. (See Item #51: Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, 2nd ed., for an understanding of his contribution to the study of the Old Testament.) When I had obtained the doctoral degree from Oxford and had more free time I was given more administrative work. (The complete record of my administrative work at the Biblical Institute is as follows: Dean of Preparatory Year of Hebrew and Greek, 1978- 1986; Dean of Biblical Faculty, 1986-1989; Acting Dean of Faculty of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, 1996-1998; Vice Rector, 1984-1993; Secretary 1991-1997; Founding Director of Alumni Association of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1998-2010.) My work as Dean of the Biblical Faculty left me very tired if not exactly exhausted, and as a result I was able to obtain permission for the first and only sabbatical of my time at the Biblical Institute. The sabbatical I spent largely in Greece. See Item #57 (Greece and Scripture). Which brings up the various countries and U.S. States I worked in because of my assignments as a Jesuit, when I was stationed at the Biblical Institute or elsewhere. The countries can be conveniently arranged according to continents: *Europe*: Scotland, Ireland, England, France, Spain. Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania, Croatia, Macedonia, Greece; *Africa*: Senegal, Zambia, Kenya; Egypt; Asia: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, India, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Hong Kong, Philippines, Indonesia; Oceania: Guam; South America: Argentina, Colombia, Belize; North America: Mexico, U.S.A., Canada. In the *United States* the States are: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, District of Columbia, South Carolina, Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee. Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota. Nebraska, Arkansas, Louisiana. Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Washington, Colorado. After my receiving the doctorate my teaching of elementary Greek continued as usual and resulted in the publication of a textbook: James Swetnam, S.J., *An*

Introduction to the Study of New Testament Greek. Part One. Morphology . Volume I. Lessons. Volume II. Key, Lists, Paradigms, Indices. Subsidia Biblica, 16; Roma, Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico. 1992. (Translations: Ukraine, Italian, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese.) In August of 1995 I celebrated my 50th anniversary of entrance into the Society of Jesus. The celebration began in Rome with two Masses on August 8. The first was in the early morning in the Cappella Clementina under the papal altar in the crypt of St. Peter's Basilica, only a few feet from the bones of St. Peter. The second Mass was in the afternoon in the Rooms of St. Ignatius. Each Mass was concelebrated with a fellow Jesuit from my province. Then, in late August in the College Church in St. Louis, Missouri, I comncelebrated Mass with many fellow priests and with the attendance of many friends and every member of my extended family. My retirement from teaching at the Institute came in 2003, the year I turned 75. This was the age when teachers at ecclesiastical institutions in Rome normally retired and returned to their home provinces. But my teaching of the Propaedeutic Courses for 36 years resulted in my having an unusual acquaintance with a large number of alumni/ae. As a result I was asked to be the Founding Director of the Alumni Association of the Institute. This assignment permitted me to remain in Rome until the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the Institute in 2009. The celebration took place at the beginning of the academic year following the anniversary and it was under my supervision. I was aided by two very capable laymen who had worked at the Institute for years. On October 1 of 2010 I celebrated the 50th anniversary of my arrival at the Institute. I remained in Rome until the end of October to bid farewell to the many persons in Rome I had come to know during my assignment there. Then, on October 29 I boarded a plane and crossed the Atlantic for the 80th time or so and arrived at my home base of St. Louis. Mission accomplished? If Providence is not entirely pleased He is at least hereby entirely acknowledged.

Jesuit Hall, St. Louis, Missouri. On my arrival back where my Jesuit mission had

begun—St. Louis, Missouri—I was assigned to a large Jesuit residence on the edge of the Saint Louis University Campus in the very center of the city. I was officially classified as a “Professor in Residence”, and planned on living up to that description even though I was 82 years of age. My daily life, as always heretofore, centered on the Mass. One of the advantages of being assigned to Jesuit Hall was my being able to visit relatives in the area and to renew my friendship with many Jesuits I had first met decades before. Especially gratifying was my being reunited with Fr. Dan O’Connell, my companion from high school and many years of our training in the Society of Jesus. (In the summer of 2020 we celebrated the 75th anniversary of our entrance into the Society of Jesus, a rare privilege for Jesuits. Then, in the following December, he died.) I soon acquired the role of a theological advisor to a small group of men who had made retreats at the local Jesuit retreat house, “White House”. The group was among several in the area and were known as “Manresa Groups”. I have been associated with this group for ten years as we meet monthly to discuss issues of the day that influence us as Catholics. But my main activity has centered on two websites: “James Swetnam’s Close Readings” and “James Swetnam’s Thoughts on Scripture”. The first website centered on the *Epistle to the Hebrews* and eventually led to the publication in 2016 of a book: *Hebrews—An Interpretation* (Subsidia Biblica, 47). Rome: Gregorian Biblical Press, 2016. Unfortunately the publication of this book was not accompanied with the customary review copies sent to the appropriate journals until a group of my friends in Vancouver, Canada, at their own initiative, succeeded in having a very competent review published in *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume 71, Issue 2, October 2020, Pages 870-872. During my years at the Biblical Institute and after, when I was in residence at Jesuit Hall, I authored many articles and book reviews, as can be seen in the Bibliography on this website. I particularly favored the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. But in June of 2020 the editors issued a norm to be followed in writing anything to be published in their journal: all

references to God must use plural pronouns. I saw immediately that I could not in conscience follow this norm so I resigned from all activity as a book reviewer. (See Item #55: My resignation as a Book Reviewer.) This would seem an appropriate occasion for expressing in more detail why I disagree with this norm. It is my understanding that the chromosomes for male and female are intrinsically different and immutable. Hence the contemporary fad of encouraging people of all ages to choose their “gender” and all that is related to it is false and immensely damaging not only to the persons directly involved but to society in general. My sympathy goes out to those led astray and to those who mislead them. But sympathy does not necessarily lead to agreement. After the publication of my book on the interpretation of Hebrews I canceled my website “James Swetnam’s Close Readings” and began a new one, “James Swetnam’s Thoughts on Scripture” in which I focus attention on the Fourth Gospel. The new website retains material from the previous one, even the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, because second thoughts and new thoughts on Scripture are always in order. For several years (2017-2021) I was a parttime resident of Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, the seminary for the Archdiocese of St. Louis and for many other dioceses of the central United States. I taught a course on the *Epistle to the Hebrews* for theologians and usually concelebrated morning Mass for the collegians.

Reflections. The above pages are a summary largely free of names. For the details that are of necessity missing in an outline one may consult the Jesuit Archives and Research Center, 3920 West Pine Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63108. The deaths of four very important persons are not mentioned above: my father died in 1973; my mother died in 1985; the husband of my older sister died in 2015; the husband of my younger sister died in 2020. These four were obviously four persons who made possible for me and for others the initiative needed to follow God’s guidance, just as other persons had made such initiative possible for them. The story outlined above is the story of an Adventure. Chesterton once

wrote: “When faced with the possibility of an Adventure one must have enough trust in oneself to accept it and enough mistrust in oneself to enjoy it”. Amen. **(July 1, 2021)**

Later Additions. One’s mistrust of oneself on the pursuit of the Adventure freely accepted is made up by The Guide, of course. . . . Since writing the above I have resigned as theological advisor for the Manresa Group mentioned above (as of July 7, 2021) after serving for 88 meetings. And one major segment of my pastoral work since making my tertianship (where I first worked out a program for giving a retreat based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola) has been inadvertently omitted in the summary above: I have given retreats of varying lengths over 100 times. These are in addition to the retreats I have made by myself and my attendance at retreats preached by others. Such pastoral endeavors have served to aid my understanding of The Guides’s Inspired Word in Scripture. **(July 7, 2021)**

