

**The Ignatian Examen: A Contemporary Tool for Awareness and
Discernment**

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Abstract

The Ignatian Examen: A Contemporary Tool for Awareness and Discernment

Cathie Macaulay

Within contemporary culture, there is a renewed interest in spirituality and a hunger to experience God in our complex world. This study focuses on the traditional practice of the Examen, as presented by Ignatius of Loyola as part of the Spiritual Exercises. The goal of this work is to trace the changes of our understanding of this spiritual practice and to explore the ways in which this discipline can increase our level of awareness of God and our capacity to discern spiritual movements. The versatility of the Examen in responding to a variety of contemporary pastoral situations will be highlighted.

To Matthew, Nicholas, Kyla and Samantha who taught me to seek God in all things.

The Ignatian Examen: A Contemporary Tool for Awareness and Discernment

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Introduction

One of the most important theological questions in contemporary times is not so much proving God's existence but experiencing God's existence.¹ Indeed, the resurgence of interest in spiritual experience in our times would bear this out. For those among us who are seekers, what we are seeking is a way to connect with God, to experience the Holy as we live our day-to-day lives in an increasingly complex world.

This study looks at a traditional spiritual practice - the Ignatian Examen² - and explores how this form of prayer can increase our level of awareness of God in our midst. By focusing our attention, we are able to become increasingly aware of the presence of God in our relationships, in nature, in service, in our choices. While deepening this awareness, we also come to see that God is One who acts intimately in our lives. The Holy Spirit weaves its way like a golden thread through the intimacies of our lives in order to guide us toward closer connection to God.

The practice of the Ignatian Examen raises our awareness of how the daily choices we make draw us into further intimacy with God or alternatively, draw us away from God. Through the person of Ignatius of Loyola, this spiritual discipline is available to us in

¹ Jeremy Langford. *Where in the Postmodern World is God?* Essay in James Langford and Leroy S. Rounder eds. Walking with God in a Fragile World. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003, 96.

² Although today most often referred to as the Awareness Examen or Consciousness Examen, terms which convey an important emphasis, for the purposes of this paper I will refer to this practice simply as the Examen.

order to call us to deeper intimacy and fidelity. Ignatius' great contribution was the way in which he was able to codify his own experience, providing structure and clarity, which transformed one man's personal experience into a helpful tool that can facilitate our sense of connection to the Holy.

Although an often misdirected and misunderstood spiritual discipline, the Examen's original emphasis has been recovered and can be used effectively as a means to deepen our awareness and experience of God. The Examen's versatility makes it an incredibly helpful practice, not only for personal spiritual growth, but for use with others to build community and to encourage reflective decision –making.

Chapter One focuses on the context in which the Examen was written as well as the original text as Ignatius presented it. It seems logical when examining a spiritual discipline that focuses so directly on daily experience, that we should look to the experience of Ignatius himself. His life provides us with a rich background to the understanding of his spirituality. Investigation into the realities of sixteenth century Spain provides us with a wider perspective in which to understand Ignatius and his work. The original text of the Examen is discussed and placed into context within the Spiritual Exercises.

A comparison between the Ignatian text and a groundbreaking article by George Aschenbrenner S.J. is the focus of Chapter Two. It addresses the practical difficulties of maintaining this spiritual discipline as it has been taught over the centuries. A shift of focus is evident in recent years. The Examen as an exercise of “conscience”, concerned

primarily with accountability for sinful actions, moves towards an understanding of this discipline as a way to deepen our awareness of the spiritual movements within.

Awareness of these movements can lead us to choose action that is more Spirit-led and in keeping with Gospel values.

Chapter Three emphasizes two of the foundations of the Examen: awareness and discernment. The practice of awareness is discussed with an eye to establishing this practice as one firmly held over the centuries. The tradition of discernment, an ancient and rich one, is discussed with particular emphasis placed on Ignatius' unique contribution: The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. The care taken by Ignatius to put into writing the spiritual dynamics he observed, to suggest specific strategies for fending off the Evil Spirit and aligning oneself more closely with the Holy Spirit, makes them an invaluable resource. Discernment, as it is lived out in our daily decisions and actions, has at its root the understanding that we are each created and called by God in a unique way. This is the essence of our personal vocation.

The final chapter addresses some of the inherent struggles involved in living out a spiritual orientation as "contemplatives in action." Like Ignatius himself, many contemporary Christians feel called to explore a deeper relationship with God in the midst of every-day service and activity. The Examen is presented as a spiritual discipline that can help modern believers to negotiate many of the challenges of contemporary culture in order to maintain a contemplative stance in the midst of a hurried world. The

versatile nature of the Examen encourages Christians to adapt this practice to a variety of spiritual and pastoral situations.

Chapter One

The Examen: Context and Content

Vocatus Atque Non Vocatus Deus Aderit

(Summoned or not summoned God will be present)

- Inscription over the doorway of the home of Carl Jung

It would be difficult, if not impossible to clearly understand the Examen as a spiritual discipline without understanding the context in which it was written and the man who wrote it down. This chapter will set out to explore the context of Ignatius' thought by considering his life story and some of the prominent experiences which give important insight into Ignatius' faith and his spirituality, The historical backdrop of sixteenth century Spain, as well as the religious and cultural climate of the time will be discussed.

The original, translated text of the Examen as it appears in the Spiritual Exercises will be presented and discussed.³ While it is clear that Ignatius meant for the Examen to be used as a spiritual discipline outside the context of the Exercises, it adds to our deeper understanding of the Examen to consider how it was placed in the text of the Exercises and how it can be understood in the context of the Spiritual Exercises as a whole.

Ignatius' Historical Context and Worldview:

The process by which he (Ignatius) assimilated God's revelation as handed on by the Church amid those circumstances of the late 1500's was gradual, distinctive and impressive. Especially from 1520 until his death in 1556, it combined resources drawn from the natural foundation of his chivalrous and practical character, from the all-controlling graces of infused contemplation as striking of those of an Augustine or Theresa of Avila, from his academic studies in the foremost universities of the era in Alcalá,

³ The translation of the Exercises that I have chosen to work with is Louis J. Puhl S.J. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1951. While the translation by Elder Mullan S.J. (1909) is a more literal translation of the original Spanish, it presents further difficulty at times in conveying true meaning. This is complicated by the fact that Ignatius' sentence structure and lack of literary form present further challenges. The Puhl text, while very faithful to the Spanish of the autograph (Ignatius' original), facilitates the reading of the text to the contemporary English reader. A comparison of the text of the Examen [43] in both translations uncovered no significant differences except in the title (see note 21).

Salamanca and Paris and from his own experience in widespread travel, in training men, and in founding as well as governing an apostolic religious order. This process by which his outlook was formed ranks among the most fascinating accounts of the growth of a great saint's personal interior life. It is a tale that might rival Augustine's Confessions if it had been written with equal literary charm.⁴

This evaluation of Ignatius' assimilation of many diverse factors and experiences underscores the reality that many events influenced the way in which Ignatius saw the world and thus impacted his decisions and his work.

Spain, at the time of Ignatius, was experiencing a change in the way the **political structures** functioned, away from more feudalistic dukedoms, which were no longer sufficient, towards a more powerful central government.⁵ Ferdinand (1452-1516) and Isabella (1474-1504), monarchs of Spain at that time, grew more powerful by uniting centrifugal provinces into a nation and creating a more centralized government that dispersed power through a viceroy to widespread regions.⁶ Some historians believe that Ignatius' apostolic order mirrored this system of government, in that the superior general held power under the pope in Rome and then the power descended through a provincial superior into its respective provinces.⁷

The **religious** climate in the sixteenth century was volatile. In northern Europe, religious unity was fragmenting as the reformers responded to the abuses prevalent within the

⁴ George Ganss S.J., (trans). The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970, 12.

⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Church. Ignatius seemed to understand the needs of the Church at this time in its history and sought to meet them. His emphasis on ecclesiastical poverty seems to work against (*agere contra*)⁸ the greed of so many ecclesiastics of the time and his openness to enduring Christ-like humiliation acted against the temptation toward pride and a lust for power.⁹ He felt first hand the influence of the Inquisition, having been summoned several times for potential breaches of doctrine. His experience of being held in suspicion by the Inquisition may account, in part, for his tendency to offer instruction that was very specific and pedantic. This was possibly a response to the climate of suspicion that was prevalent at the time. Clarity and specificity were used to counter the prying eye of the Inquisition, which set out to detect and prosecute heresy.

One of the **cultural** influences of the time that had a deep effect on Ignatius was the wave of courtly romanticism and chivalry that took hold of Spain. It can be traced to the appearance, in 1508, of the novel *Amadis de Gaula* which was immensely popular at the time. Ignatius was “wildly addicted” to this novel and to similar ones of the same romantic genre.¹⁰ These romances provided him, at least in part, with the ideals of courage, generosity, fidelity, courtesy, honor and truthfulness that he carried with him throughout his life.¹¹ Though he was later to regret all the time he spent reading and being entertained by these literary notions of chivalry, remnants of the influence of such

⁸ The term “*agere contra*” (“going against self”) refers to a principle by which we act against our own inclination as a method of attaining freedom. In John J. English S.J. Spiritual Freedom (Chicago: Loyola University Press) 1995, 174.

⁹ Ganss, 27.

¹⁰ James Broderick S.J. St. Ignatius of Loyola (The Pilgrim Years 1491-1538) San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998, 39.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

literature on Ignatius appear in the contemplations he has written as part of the Spiritual Exercises and played a part in his conversion in 1521.

Another cultural influence that deeply affected Ignatius was his experience of voluntarily seeking higher education and attending the universities of Alcalá, Salamanca and Paris. His experience at university contributed to his bold decision to move away from a more monastic model of religious community and to develop the Society with a strong link to academic activities. These academic activities or experiences helped the Society attain the objectives that held such importance for Ignatius. He very clearly encouraged members of the Society from the start toward intellectual endeavors and devotes a significant portion of the Constitutions¹² (Part IV) to the discussion of the education of scholastics and the structure of the colleges and universities that the Society would be called to minister to, or to found.

In 1539, Ignatius and his companions planned to educate young men in university whom they thought might be interested in later joining the Society.¹³ The practice of educating extern students, clerical or lay, as well as Jesuits arose later, in 1543 in India and in 1546 at Gandiá, in Spain.¹⁴ In organizing these schools Ignatius appropriated many of the features from the constitutions and practices of the schools of his day, particularly those

¹² The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus is a document that outlines the spiritual doctrine of the Society. It is divided into ten parts, with two preliminary documents, that is the work of Ignatius and his secretary Polanco. The document was begun in 1539 and completed by Polanco after Ignatius death (1556) with final approval being given in 1558. (Joseph de Guibert, S.J. The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice St. Louis: The Institute for Jesuit Sources, 1986, 139-147).

¹³ Ganss, 173.

¹⁴ Ibid.

he had attended.¹⁵ He did not develop any new pedagogical techniques, but effectively drew out the features best suited to his ultimate objectives.¹⁶ As Ganss comments, what Ignatius was able to develop in this way was “the first educational system in history.”¹⁷

The Context of the Examen:

The Examen appears in the Spiritual Exercises at the beginning of the First Week Exercises and after the First Principle and Foundation.¹⁸ The placement of the method and practice of the “examination of conscience” is significant as it comes after the important First Principle and Foundation which roots the exercitant in the “Magis” or the desire to choose that which is “more conducive to the end for which we are created” (that is, to praise, reverence and serve God) [23].¹⁹

The Daily Particular Examination of Conscience²⁰ is discussed in [24-26] with four additional directives being given in [27-31]. Then follows a discussion of the General Examination of Conscience [32-42] where Ignatius reflects on the sinfulness of thoughts, words and deeds and outlines the seriousness of various forms of sin. Then comes the method he outlines for making the General Examination of Conscience [43]²¹ in its succinct five-point sequence. Following this, [44] he includes a discussion of the merit of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 174.

¹⁸ For an outline of the basic structure of the Spiritual Exercises, please see Appendix E

¹⁹ Bracketed numbers refer to the numbered exercises in Ignatius’ text of the Spiritual Exercises.

²⁰ See Appendix G

²¹ It is interesting to note that the Elder Mullan S.J. translation (1909) refers to [43] as “Method for Making the General Examen” and does not use the term “of conscience”.

making a general confession, preferably after completing the Exercises of the First Week. The exercises of the First Week follow, which emphasize the experience of the exercitant as a sinner, but most importantly as a loved sinner.

Ignatius constructs the First Week exercises such that the exercitant contemplates the cosmic origin of sin in the fall of the angels [50]; the beginnings of sin in human history through Adam and Eve [51], “the particular sin of any person who went to hell because of one mortal sin” [52], the contemplation of one’s personal sin [55-61] and finally, the ultimate consequence of sin: a contemplation on hell [65-71] ²² By this sequence of prayer experiences, the exercitant situates their own sin history within the context of the cosmological and historical account of sin. Participation in this cycle of sin and the relation of one’s own sin to the crucified Christ is what the exercitant is led to experience in a profound way through the graces received in the First Week.²³

It is important to see the placement of the Awareness Examen as it appears as a prelude to the First Week not just as part of a reflection on sin, but within the context of the *Exercises as a whole*. The Exercises will lead an individual from the experience of being a “loved sinner”, to reflection on discipleship (Second Week), a meditation on the Passion of Christ (Third Week) and finally an involvement in the Resurrection of Jesus (Fourth Week). The Awareness Examen is a practice that is meant to be used within the

²² Egan, 98-99.

²³ For individuals doing the Spiritual Exercises in the format described in Annotation 19, the Exercises are spread out over the course of many months, typically a calendar year, in order that the individual may continue his or her regular activities while committing themselves to daily periods of prayer. In this format the “First Week” may actually last for several weeks.

context of the entire experience of the Exercises and indeed to be used outside the context of the Exercises, as part of an individual's daily spiritual practice. Indeed, the Examen is not so much an examination of sin as it is a reflection on the call to discipleship, a share in the Passion and Resurrection of Christ and the spiritual movements and choices within each person's everyday lives.

The Examen was written by Ignatius early in the process of constructing the Spiritual Exercises and the text emphasizes its use in that particular context. We do know that Ignatius was faithful to the practice of the Examen in his own prayer life and his use of the Examen changed over the course of his life. Unfortunately, he did not write down his thoughts or directions as they evolved over time. We are then left to draw inferences about his own practice of the Examen from the accounts of his earliest companions.

The Life and Spiritual Journey of Ignatius of Loyola

In order to understand more about Ignatius and his process of thought, we are able to consult his own account of his life, as told to a Portuguese member of the Society of Jesus, Father Luis Gonçaves de Camara. The process of dictating his biography began in September 1553, on the insistence of Jerónimo Nadal, one of the earliest members of the Society. Ignatius was reluctant to pursue the project, and in fact the interviews were interrupted and postponed several times while Ignatius attended to other business. The interviews were completed in late September 1553.

Ignatius was born in 1491 in the province of Guipuzcoa²⁴, in the old kingdom of Castile, of a noble Basque family. He was the youngest in a family of thirteen children and bore the name Iñigo Lopez de Loyola. Loyola was the name given to the site of the family castle and property. He assumed the name Ignatius much later in his life, during his Paris years (1528-1535), probably in homage to St. Ignatius of Antioch, an early church father.²⁵

Ignatius begins telling the story of his life with the incident of his injury at Pamploma in 1521. At this point in his life, he is already twenty-nine or thirty years old. He has been a courtier, a swaggering caballero and now a soldier loyal to the Spanish King. In May of 1521, the Spanish citadel in the city of Pamploma in the Navarre region came under attack by the French and Ignatius was severely injured in the attempt to defend it²⁶. Both his legs were badly damaged by a cannonball, and he was brought back to the family castle at Loyola for his difficult and painful convalescence.

It is during the course of his recovery that, when he was well enough, he requested some reading material, particularly books of chivalry and romance which were quite popular at the time. Since these were not available in the house, he was given two books: one of the Life of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony and another about the Lives of the Saints by Jacopo de Voragine.²⁷ It was these books that proved to be the trigger for the very profound

²⁴ See Appendix A

²⁵ John C. Olin (Ed.), Joseph F. O'Callaghan (trans.) The Autobiography Of St Ignatius Of Loyola. New York: Fordham University Press, 1974, 4.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 5, 23.

spiritual conversion that occurred within Ignatius at this time. The invalid found himself obsessed with thoughts about the life he had been living up to this point. He was prone to chivalric fantasy: of being in the service of a particular lady, the words he would compose to honor her, the deeds he would do in her service. Alternatively, he would imagine himself acting in the same way of the saints whose lives he was reading. (“What if I should do what Francis did, what Dominic did?”)²⁸ He would spend extended periods of time dwelling on these kinds of thoughts. With an astute awareness that we now come to associate with Ignatius, he realized that when he was thinking of things of the world, he took delight in these thoughts but afterward was left feeling “dry and discontented,”²⁹ However, when he thought about becoming a pilgrim and going to Jerusalem barefoot and in various ways emulating the saints about whom he had read, he remained “content and happy” even after putting these things aside.³⁰ In this way he began to become aware of the spirits that affected his soul.

As a penitent and a pilgrim Ignatius decided to make the journey to Jerusalem. It was March of 1522, and Ignatius’ set out by mule to travel a distance of over 300 miles.³¹ After brief stops in Oñate, and Navarrete, he headed for Montserrat³², where he met with a confessor, having written out a general confession over three days. He left his sword

²⁸ Ibid., 23.

²⁹ Ibid., 24.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 29.

³² See Appendix B (map of Northern Spain)

and dagger on the altar of Our Lady Of Montserrat, and gave away his noble clothing to a poor man, donning instead a cloak he had made of sackcloth.³³

Since his actions in Montserrat had called some attention to himself, he made the decision not to take the most direct route to Barcelona, but to make his way through a little town called Manresa, so as not to be recognized and honored. In Manresa, he begged for alms and fasted from meat and wine even when they were offered to him. He decided to let his hair and nails grow out, a hardship, since Ignatius had always been extremely conscious of style and spent time combing his hair and grooming himself in the style of the day. It was at Manresa that he received several visions that provided him with great consolation.³⁴ Periods of great spiritual joy alternated with periods of great doubt, depression, disgust and temptation.³⁵ He battled ill health and again came to the brink of death.

It is during this time that he received great spiritual clarity in a consolation he received while sitting on the banks of the Cardoner River. In his autobiography he describes it in this way (speaking in the third person):

While he was seated there, the eyes of his understanding began to be opened; though he did not see any vision he understood and knew many things, both spiritual and matters of faith and of learning, and this was with so great an enlightenment that everything seemed new to him. Though there were many, he cannot set forth the details that he learned then, except that he experienced great clarity in his understanding. This was such that in the whole course of his life, through sixty two years, even if he gathered up all the many helps he had had

³³ Ibid., 31-32.

³⁴ Ibid., 33.

³⁵ Harvey D. Egan. Ignatius Loyola the Mystic Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987, 42.

from God and all the many things he knew and added them together, he does not think they would amount to as much as he had received at this one time.³⁶

This experience in Manresa was a time of unprecedented spiritual growth in Ignatius' life. On the banks of the Cardoner River, he received a deeper understanding of his vocation and faith which he carried with him throughout his life.³⁷

On February 28, 1523, Ignatius left Manresa and journeyed to Barcelona where he then set sail for Italy.³⁸ After receiving the blessing of Pope Adrian VI for his trip to the Holy Land, he set out for Venice for passage to Jerusalem.³⁹ We have in Ignatius' autobiography a brief account of his important time in Jerusalem. Our knowledge of what he did during this time is supplemented by the writings of others who accompanied him.⁴⁰ It is known that he visited many of the places described in the gospels and that it was a time of great spiritual consolation for him to be visiting the historical homeland of Christ. These experiences no doubt influenced the instruction in his Spiritual Exercises to contemplate and set the scene according to how it would have appeared (composition of place) as this was obviously employed by Ignatius himself to draw him closer to the experience of Christ. On the day before his departure, Ignatius has a strong desire to make a return visit to the Mount of Olives:

³⁶ Olin, 39-40.

³⁷ Ibid., 39.

³⁸ Egan, 45. See Appendix C

³⁹ Olin, 46.

⁴⁰ Notably, two others who journeyed with Ignatius on the ship and visited the Holy sites of Jerusalem with him, kept diaries of their travel. Peter Fussli, a clock maker from Zurich and Philip Hagen, from Strasbourg has a more detailed account of the journey and the specific sites visited in and around Jerusalem. In James Broderick S.J., St. Ignatius of Loyola: The Pilgrim Years 1491-1538 San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998, 119-131.

On Mount Olivet there is a stone from which our Lord Rose up to heaven, and His footprints are still seen there; this was what he wanted to see again. So without saying anything or taking a guide (for those who go without a Turk as a guide run great risk), he stole away from the others and went alone to Mount Olivet. But the guards did not want to let him enter. He gave them a desk knife that he carried, and after saying his prayer with deep consolation he felt the desire to go to Bethphage. While there he remembered that he had not clearly noticed on Mount Olivet in what direction the right foot was pointed nor in what direction the left. Returning there, I believe he gave his scissors to the guards so they would let him enter.

When it was learned in the monastery that he had gone out without a guide, the friars took steps to find him. So as he was coming down from Mount Olivet he met a "Christian of the belt" that is, a Syrian Christian who served in the monastery. He had a large staff and with a great show of annoyance made signs of striking him. When he came up to him he grabbed him harshly by the arm, but he did not let himself be led easily. The good man, however, never let him go. As he went along the road held in this way by the "Christian of the belt", he felt great consolation from our Lord, and it seemed to him that he saw Christ over him continually. This (consolation) lasted in great abundance until they reached the monastery.⁴¹

This incident illustrates Ignatius' desire to walk where Christ himself had walked and to follow him as completely as possible. It also points out Ignatius' "rich incarnational faith and his Christ-centered mysticism."⁴² This emphasis on experiencing what Christ experienced and contemplating the places and events he would have are a central feature of the Spiritual Exercises.

The very next day the pilgrim set sail for Venice. He and his companions traveled to Cyprus and after a tremendously difficult voyage lasting a couple of months, arrived in Venice mid- January 1524. From Venice he traveled to Genoa and then through to Barcelona where he arrived during Lent 1524. In Barcelona he undertook to study

⁴¹ Olin, 50-51.

⁴² Egan, 46.

grammar with Master Ardéval, alongside boys decades younger than himself.⁴³ In an interesting example of Ignatius' acute awareness of the spiritual movements working within him, he noted that when he was engrossed in memorizing grammar, he would often receive great spiritual insight and pleasure. This he found to be very distracting to his studies and he found he had difficulty thinking of anything else. Upon reflection, he came to recognize these spiritual consolations as a temptation. He revealed to Master Ardéval the cause of his lack of progress in his lessons and pledged to work tirelessly to hear the lessons of his teacher. After this confession and pledge of commitment, the temptations left him completely.⁴⁴

After two years in Barcelona, in 1526 Ignatius moved on to study liberal arts in Alcalá, attracting the attention of the Inquisition. Jailed for seventeen days before being examined or knowing what he was accused of, Ignatius spent a total of forty-two days in prison. He was eventually released on two conditions: that he conform to the dress of the other students (in lieu of his sackcloth) and that he refrain from speaking of matters of faith until he studied another four years. Ignatius decided that under this last condition he could not "help souls" and after he sought guidance from the bishop of Toledo, he decided to go to Salamanca.⁴⁵

In Salamanca, Ignatius ran into more trouble with the Inquisitors. Again, the main complaint against him was his lack of education. It is 1527 and he is imprisoned along

⁴³ Olin, 59.

⁴⁴ Olin, 60.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 63-65.

with his early companion Calixto in an upper room for twenty-two days, even though during their imprisonment there was a steady stream of visitors and they were not prohibited from speaking to their visitors about matters of faith. A point of contention for the Inquisitors was Ignatius' definition of mortal and venial sins. Ignatius himself recounts how he gave over all his papers outlining his Spiritual Exercises for examination.⁴⁶ This is the first indication of them having been written. He was eventually released and no fault was found with his teaching. His release was conditional on his obedience to the condition that he would not teach about mortal and venial sin. He would obey but not accept this condition. In part because he felt that this condition was prohibitive, Ignatius decided to move on to Paris.⁴⁷

He set out alone, on foot, for Paris in 1528.⁴⁸ He went to study humanities at Montaigu College, part of the University of Paris. It is at this time that he recounts having given the Spiritual Exercises to three persons. It is recounted that through this experience these individuals "changed very much and gave all they had to the poor, even their books, and began to seek alms throughout Paris."⁴⁹ Since two of the men were of some prominence in the community, word spread about Ignatius, and he came to the attention of the Inquisition yet again. This time, not wanting to disrupt his studies, he approached the Inquisitor himself, Master Ory, a Dominican friar, and asked if they had any quarrel with him. He was not officially summoned.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 70-71.

⁴⁸ See Appendix D

⁴⁹ Ibid., 75.

Ignatius entered an arts course under a teacher named Master Juan Peña. It was also during this time that he made the acquaintance of Peter Faber and Francis Xavier, who were two of his most important companions and who eventually helped him found the Society of Jesus.⁵⁰ On August 15, 1534 Ignatius and his six closest companions took a vow in a chapel in Montmartre to go to Jerusalem, an event that is sometimes seen as the beginning of the Society of Jesus.⁵¹

Ignatius became ill with a stomach ailment in Paris and his physician was of the opinion that the only thing that would help him was to breathe his “native air”.⁵² He therefore made plans to return to Spain in early 1535. It came to his attention that an accusation had come up against him yet again with the inquisitor and since he was about to leave Paris, he approached the inquisitor and asked him to pass sentence. While the inquisitor confirmed that an accusation had been made against him, he reassured him that it seemed to be inconsequential. The inquisitor asked to see a copy of Ignatius’ exercises, which he praised and requested a copy.⁵³

Upon arriving in Spain in April of 1535, Ignatius chose to stay in a small hospital, a kind of poorhouse, in lieu of staying in the family castle at Loyola where his brother lived. At this hospital he preached and instructed children in their faith. After visiting the families of some of his companions, he set sail for Genoa in rough seas and then made his way to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 78-79.

⁵¹ Ibid., 80.

⁵² Ibid., 80.

⁵³ Ibid., 81.

Bologna under difficult circumstances and battling ill health.⁵⁴ In late 1535, he arrived in Venice.

Upon Ignatius' arrival in Venice he gave the Spiritual Exercises to a number of individuals, including a number who were quite prominent members of society. Again he attracted attention, was brought to trial and found to be innocent of the charges. He and several of his companions, who were not yet priests, were ordained on June 24, 1537.⁵⁵

From Venice, Ignatius traveled to Rome, where shortly before arriving in the city he received an important confirmation of his mission, what has become known as the vision of La Storta. An answer to Ignatius' fervent prayer that Our Lady would "place him with her Son"⁵⁶, while in prayer in the small chapel at La Storta Ignatius received the vision of the "eternal Father" with his cross-bearing Son:

The eternal Father spoke interiorly to Ignatius' heart: I shall be favorable to you (plural) at Rome", and "I want you, my Son, to take this man as your servant." Then Christ said to Ignatius: "I want you (singular) to serve us (Father and Son)."⁵⁷

While Ignatius' experience at Manresa has been widely perceived as a time of great intellectual conversion for Ignatius, when his understanding of his mission and vocation was solidified, La Storta seems to be a time where he received the grace of conversion of heart. He experienced himself in relationship with the Father and the Son, in their service.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 84-85.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁵⁷ Egan, 55.

Rome was to be Ignatius' home until his death in 1556. On September 27, 1540. Pope Paul III approved the formation of the Society of Jesus, giving Ignatius and his companions the right to elect a general⁵⁸ and to draw up a formal constitution.⁵⁹ Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, which were a work in progress from his time at Manresa in 1522, were taking on their final form about this time in Rome.⁶⁰ Ignatius worked on the Constitutions of the Society⁶¹ during the last nine years of his life and they were published in 1558, two years after his death.⁶²

Method of Making a General Examination of Conscience⁶³

Five points to this Method [43]

1. The first point is to give thanks to God, our Lord, for favors received.

The Examination is rooted solidly in an experience of gratitude and thanksgiving. We recall the graces and favors received and give thanks to the Lord as the Giver of all gifts.

⁵⁸ Interestingly, on April 2, 1541, Ignatius is elected the first General of the Society of Jesus, but declines as he feels that he would rather obey than command. He is elected again on April 13th and accepts after discussing the matter with his confessor.

⁵⁹ Egan, 57.

⁶⁰ The earliest manuscript of the complete Exercises dates from 1541 (Olin, 92).

⁶¹ His biographer notes that Ignatius' habit at the time he was writing the Constitutions was to "say Mass each day and to present the point that he was treating to God and to pray about it; he always said the prayer and the mass with tears" (Olin, 94). This illustration demonstrates Ignatius' diligence in making each decision a matter for prayerful discernment.

⁶² Ganss, 3.

⁶³ Italicized text is from the text of the Spiritual Exercises, Puhl (1951) translation. (Appendix F)

2. The second point is to ask for the grace to know my sins and to rid myself of them.

Aware of being gifted by God, we request from God the ability to see areas of darkness in our life and to be made aware of the ways in which we can act to overcome these areas of sinfulness. The focus here is not on self-reflection, but a reliance on the Spirit of God to illuminate for us those areas of our life that require attention. The illumination that is sought is not the final goal, rather light is shed on a previously hidden area and, having been made aware of this area of sinfulness, we are called to act. As St. Louis notes, “knowledge, as an Ignatian petition, is never an end in itself, but always a means of moving to deepening freedom, one asks to know and understand precisely in order to choose more freely ...”⁶⁴

3. The third point is to demand an account of my soul from the time of rising up to the present examination. I should go over one hour after another, one period after another. The thoughts should be examined first, then the words and finally the deeds...

The focal point of this review is to look back upon the events since the last review and to reflect on our thoughts, words and deeds and how we have aligned ourselves with the will of God. Ignatius’ choice of words, that we “demand an account” of our souls, lends itself easily to the understanding that this review is a scrupulous account of our faults and failings before the Lord. If we look at this review in light of the whole of Ignatius’ thought, we can see beyond Ignatius’ tendency toward scrupulosity, to understand that

⁶⁴ Donald St. Louis. *The Ignatian Examen, A Method of Theological Reflection. The Way Supplement*, 55, Spring 1986, 70.

this is intended not only as a self-focused inventory, but as a way of reflecting on those areas in our life that may be an obstacle to greater spiritual freedom and service to God.

Ignatius sees that recognizing and reflecting upon patterns in our everyday life experiences hold great value as we strive toward living a life more finely tuned to the will of God. This “account of our soul” can provide much information about the way that we are responding to God, to ourselves and to the influence of evil.

St. Louis points out that what is at the heart of this review is a movement towards answering two questions: “How has one responded to that divine love which seeks to share itself in mutuality? And how have the concrete details of one’s life authenticated one’s love by drawing it beyond words to more fruitful action?”⁶⁵

4. The fourth point will be to ask pardon of God, our Lord, for my faults.

The dynamic of admitting our culpability and seeking pardon from the Lord is seen here, as it is in the First Week Exercises, from the point of view of the sinner in intimate relationship with a God who loves them. The experience of being loved in spite of our sinfulness is what fuels the desire to serve. For indeed, what wouldn’t we do for a God who has been so merciful to us? For Ignatius, the goal is not a chest pounding penitence but a growing sense of ourselves as “loved sinners,” a realization that moves us toward action and service. For Ignatius, “absolutely everything is oriented toward service”.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ St. Louis, 73.

⁶⁶ St. Louis, 74.

***5. The fifth point will be to resolve to amend with the grace of God. Close with an
Our Father***

This step of the Examen focuses on the future. How will I change my behavior in order to serve the Lord more completely tomorrow? Do my past thoughts, words and deeds lead me to change my behavior so that it is more conducive to serving the greater glory of God? What are the particular areas that I need to amend? I ask the grace of God to be able to live out these changes.

At the end of the Examen we are left with a resolve to be more faithful in our service to God in all our daily activities.

The Particular Examen [24]⁶⁷

Preceding the laying out of the method for Examination of Conscience in the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius presents the particular Examen. As its name suggests it is a more specific form of the Examen, concentrating on one particular “sin or defect with regard to which he seeks to correct or improve himself.”[24]

Ignatius presents a method of examining this particular fault that is detailed and persistent. One is asked to consider one’s progress in resolving this fault on an hourly basis, the aim being to rid oneself of this fault through constant scrutiny.

During the last twenty- five years of Ignatius’ life, it has been said that the subject of his particular Examen remained the same: “vanity, ambition and vainglory.”⁶⁸ Daily, these were the particular faults that he focused his attention on in order to free himself to serve God more completely.

Many stories are told of Ignatius’ early life, among them that he was conscious of style and the fashion of the day. During his convalescence at Loyola, when it became clear that his shattered leg would be misshapen, he agreed to go through painful surgeries without anesthetic to have his bones reset. The motivation for this was said

⁶⁷ See Appendix G

⁶⁸ Alphonso, 67.

to have been out of concern that he would not be able to wear the style of boot popular at the time.

After his conversion, he devoted himself to *la mayor gloria de Dios* (the greater glory of God). It seems fitting that his consistent effort, the focal point of his particular Examen, was to keep in check that part of himself that may have wanted to keep some of the glory for himself.⁶⁹

*

It seems clear from his own use of these ascetical practices that Ignatius placed great importance on the use of the Examen and the particular Examen. It was considered so important to Ignatius, that all apostolic people were cautioned not to omit it except for serious reason. It would be less critical to forgo one's daily prayer than to omit the practice of the Examen.

It is clearly recounted that Ignatius himself was very faithful to this practice. Even more than the twice-daily practice he recommends, Ignatius himself performed examinations, on an hourly basis, and was constantly striving for progress as he compared hour-to-hour, day-to-day. As Ribadeneyra recounts:

He has always kept this habit of examining his conscience every hour, and of asking himself with careful attention how he had passed the hour. If at the end of it he happened upon some more important matter, or a task which

⁶⁹ Ibid.

prevented this pious practice, he postponed the Examen, but at the first free moment, or the following hour, he made up for this delay.⁷⁰

Having looked at the background of Ignatius' thought, the original context in which the Examen was written and having gained a sense of how Ignatius himself used this spiritual tool, the next Chapter will focus on how the Examen has developed as a spiritual discipline over time.

⁷⁰ Joseph De Guibert, S.J. The Jesuits: Their Spiritual Doctrine and Practice. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986, 66.

Chapter Two

From Conscience to Consciousness: A Shift in Focus

*This being human is a guesthouse.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.*

*Still treat each guest honorably,
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice
Meet them at the door laughing
And invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.*

-Rumi (13th century Sufi Poet)

The method of Examen that Ignatius gave to us in the Spiritual Exercises has been a staple of religious life over the centuries. Ignatius' own insistence on its use, that it was not to be left out of an individual's private daily devotion for any reason even if regular prayer was not possible, made it a foundation of religious formation – not only among Jesuits, but many other religious orders as well. As critical as this spiritual practice seemed to be to Ignatius, anecdotal accounts showed that at least in modern times, the Examen is usually the first practice to disappear from the day-to-day life of a religious.⁷¹

D.K. Townsend's personal account of his own relationship with the discipline of the Examen seems to be fairly typical of the struggle many religious have had with incorporating this discipline into their life of prayer.

The Examen certainly had no place in my life at that time. It was a 'bad' job. It made me feel 'bad'. It rubbed into me my sense of failure. It did not produce in me what I thought it promised: namely, moral success and improvement. The Examen did not seem to help me 'get better' in those areas of my life and living where I had hoped to improve.

On the other hand, dropping the practice of Examen did not produce any drastic moral regression in me. It was rather like the peace that comes when a person stops beating his head against a brick wall. Yet all was not completely well. There was some sense of guilt. I was not willing directly to tell others that I had dropped the Examen. I did not know how or to whom to talk about the difficulties with the Examen.⁷²

⁷¹ George A. Aschenbrenner S.J. *Consciousness Examen*. Review for Religious, 31, 1972, 621.

⁷² David Keith Townsend S.J. *The Examen Re-Examined*. Drawing From the Spiritual Exercises: "Nova et Vetera," Rome: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis 1987, 11-12.

The honesty with which Fr. Townsend recounts his difficulties with the Examen is most enlightening when considering the reason why the Examen, despite Ignatius' insistence on it, has been such a burden and struggle for so many.

A turning point in the deepening of our understanding of the Examen was the publication of George Aschenbrenner's article on the Consciousness Examen in 1964. This article proved to be groundbreaking as it took a fresh look at the discipline of the Examen with its inherent obstacles and offered a new way of looking at it that seemed to be closer to Ignatius' own understanding of how it should be used. It emphasized that the focus of the Examen must be rooted in the discernment of spirits. This discernment is not primarily concerned with the morality of our actions (whether we had acted in a way that was morally good or bad) but rather "the concern is how the Lord is affecting and moving us (often quite spontaneously!) deep in our own affective consciousness."⁷³

Aschenbrenner's article draws out five important points about our use of the Examen:

1. He asserts that the Examen, as a spiritual practice, has been misunderstood and has often been used with an eye to an improper emphasis on the morality of our daily actions.
2. He contends that the more authentic emphasis of the Examen prayer lies in a primary emphasis on the discernment of spirits.

⁷³ Aschenbrenner, 14.

3. The Examen, if employed correctly, is about coming to a deeper knowledge of how we are called to serve God, resulting in a deeper sense of our own unique religious identity.
4. Aschenbrenner makes an important link between the use of the Examen and the ongoing contemplative prayer of the person who employs it. It is through contemplative prayer that God is able to reveal to us the mystery of God's reality. "The presence of the Spirit of the risen Jesus in the heart of the believer makes it possible to sense and 'hear' this invitation (challenge!) *to order ourselves* to this revelation. Contemplation is empty without this 'ordering' response."⁷⁴ The Examen is a tool to help us with this "ordering". It becomes clear that both contemplative prayer and the Examen are incomplete without the other.
5. Finally, he reasserts that the aim of the Examen is to develop a discerning heart. This resonates with what we know of Ignatius, whose frequent, even hourly use of the Examen towards the end of his life can easily be mistaken as compulsive or overly scrupulous. In fact, he was able to develop a manner of discernment whereby he could find God in his present interior movement almost instantaneously.⁷⁵ It is this goal that is at the heart of the practice of the Examen.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14 (Emphasis mine).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 21.

It is with these insights in mind that Aschenbrenner takes a look at the actual five-point practice of the Examen. I would like to draw out the important features of Aschenbrenner's method with reference to the original text of Ignatius as discussed in Chapter One.

Aschenbrenner's Interpretation of Ignatius' Five-Point Method:

(a) Prayer for Enlightenment

Aschenbrenner correctly points out that the first two points of Ignatius' method can be interchanged without affecting the outcome of the process. Therefore, he suggests beginning the Examen with a stance that indicates that we are reliant on the movement of the Spirit throughout the process of Examen. It is a movement away from the temptation to see the Examen as an exercise of our own memory and analysis. Rather it is "a matter of Spirit-guided insight into my life and courageously responsive sensitivity to God's call in my heart."⁷⁶ We begin the process of Examen by placing ourselves at the initiative of the Holy Spirit that will move through us to enlighten us to the ways and movements of God within ourselves and in our everyday actions and experiences.

(b) Reflective Thanksgiving

Next comes an acknowledgement that as Christians, we live as "a poor person, possessing nothing, not even (ourselves), and yet being gifted at every instant in and

⁷⁶ Ibid., 17.

through everything.”⁷⁷ It is a time to reflect on the moments of giftedness in our day and to “rest in genuine faith-filled gratitude to the Father for His gifts.”⁷⁸

Often we are not aware of the gifts bestowed upon us in a very personal way as we live out our day-to day experiences. This is an opportunity taken to reflect both the momentous and seemingly insignificant moments and to open ourselves to the awareness that “all is gift”.⁷⁹

(c) Practical Survey of Actions:

Aschenbrenner clarifies here the prime concern of this survey of our daily actions. He rightly points out that most often we use this exercise to look over the events of our day, quick to “catalogue” our actions and experiences as good or bad.⁸⁰ He re-orientes the focus to what is happening to us and within us since our last Examen. He suggests three operative questions:

- i. What has been happening in us?
- ii. How has the Lord been working in us?
- iii. What has He been asking us?⁸¹

Our own actions become only a secondary consideration. This reading of Ignatius’ original meaning holds at its foundation a life-stance of faith: that our response to life is

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 18.

⁸¹ Ibid.

first to listen and then to act.⁸² By listening to the affective ways in which the Lord communicates to us interiorly, our daily activity becomes more about the quality of our action and through this our response to God, than the activity itself.

Obviously, to live such a stance of faith is counter-cultural. Activity, efficiency, productivity are highly valued in our culture, where often too little attention is paid to the nature of our activity and even less frequently to the question of responsiveness to the will of God.

It is in this context that Aschenbrenner looks at what he considers to be the most misunderstood element of the Examen, the particular Examen. He points out how, in actual practice, the particular Examen has often become a striving toward self-perfection by focusing on virtues and vices, spending effort nurturing virtue and eliminating vice in a methodical way. For many, it became a type of “spiritual accountancy”, tallying up moments of virtue and subtracting from that the moments of infidelity or sinfulness. As an alternative to this, he asks us to consider the particular Examen, for what it was meant to be: “a reverently honest, personal meeting with the Lord in our hearts.”⁸³

As we grow in intimate relationship with God, we will become aware through interior movements of particular areas where the Lord is calling us to conversion. This is the stuff of our particular Examen. Again, what is emphasized here is a response to a prompting of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

the Lord as recognized through our attention to interior stirrings, this time in a response to a specific “nudging” by the Lord toward change.

(d) Contrition and Sorrow

It is clear throughout the Examen that there is an understanding that a growing sense of our own sinfulness is central to our ongoing spiritual growth. As we strive towards a more obedient response to God in our actions, we become increasingly aware of our tendency toward sin and infidelity. In this fourth point of the Examen, this realization comes front and center. We take the time to reflect here on when we lack an adequate response to the Lord’s movement within us. Usually this is rooted in a lack of courage or denial and requires, in us, a response of sorrow. Aschenbrenner points out that “this contrition and sorrow is not a shame or a depression at our weakness but a faith experience as we grow in our realization of our Father’s awesome desire that we love Him with every ounce of our being.”⁸⁴

(e) Hopeful Resolution for the Future

This final point of the Examen naturally flows from the examination process that has taken place. Upon consideration of this discernment and the experiences reflected upon—what do we look to for the future?⁸⁵ Aschenbrenner’s emphasis here is on the element of hope that is rooted in “our Father whose glorious victory in Jesus Christ we share through

⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the life of their Spirit in our hearts.”⁸⁶ It is through this hope and founded in this victory that we can approach the future with new and growing awareness of the movement of God within our lives and a desire for a greater fidelity in our response to Him.

When one juxtaposes the Ignatian text against the Aschenbrenner text, the original stands out for its use of penitential language and Ignatius’ sense of the practice as to “demand an account of my soul.” [43] There is a clear sense of the desire to improve and purify oneself.⁸⁷

Table 1.0 Comparison of Language used in Ignatian text and Aschenbrenner text describing the method of Examen.

Point	Ignatian Text	Aschenbrenner Text*
1	Thanks	Enlightenment
2	Know my sins	Reflective thanksgiving
3	Demand an account of my soul	Practical survey of actions
4	Pardon	Contrition and sorrow
5	Resolve to Amend	Hopeful Resolution

*Note that Aschenbrenner inverts points one and two.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ There is some merit to looking at the background information Ignatius gives us concerning the Examination of Conscience. In his discussion of the General Examination of Conscience [32] (See Appendix I) Ignatius describes the purpose of the examination of conscience as twofold (1) to purify the soul and (2) to improve our confessions. He presupposes that there are three kinds of thoughts: (i) one’s own, that arises wholly from my own free will (ii) an external thought that comes from the good spirit (3) and outside thought that comes from the evil spirit.

Ignatius gives us background concerning his classification of thoughts, words, and deeds and the ways that he weighs sinfulness in these three categories. This instruction to the exercitant concerning the nature and seriousness of various forms of sin is meant to be a backdrop to the Exercises. A constant movement to have a soul that is more pure, less laden with sinful thoughts, words and deeds is understood as an underlying foundation to the Exercises.

What may account for Ignatius' perspective and language? How do we remain true to the sense Ignatius had of this important discipline while at the same time recognizing that there may be a need to 'translate' this practice for use among 21st century Christians?

Is Aschenbrenner's "re-reading" of the Examen true to Ignatius' original vision of this discipline? Judging by the significant impact that his article has had in the understanding and use of the Examen, this interpretation of Ignatius' method has struck a chord. For many, it had opened up the discipline of the Examen to new life and understanding after the practice has been commonly set aside as unhelpful and even irrelevant.⁸⁸

There is a temptation when using the Examen in a contemporary context to minimize or ignore the penitential tone of Ignatius' original form. We are less comfortable today with the notion of being a penitent. The penitential language of sin in Ignatius' original text may hit a dissonant chord to our modern ear where we are not used to, or are perhaps adverse to hearing choices and behavior categorized in terms of sinfulness and virtue. Emphasis on our sinful actions and nature often becomes an initial obstacle, rather than a vehicle to growth. Ignatius understood the Awareness Examen as well as the First Week Exercises in the context of being a "loved sinner", rooted in the love of God, surrounded

⁸⁸ It must be said that traditionally the Examen was the practice almost exclusively of members of the Society of Jesus and other religious who incorporated the practice into their Rule. The practice of the Examen as a daily spiritual practice among those who have not taken religious vows is a relatively new phenomenon. Examination of conscience as a preparation for confession was a more common practice.

by it and thus courageous and honest enough to explore the areas of darkness. The notion of the penitent was a long-held tradition, one that we are less familiar with today.

So in “re-packaging” the Awareness Examen as an exercise of discernment and softening its emphasis on sinfulness and penance, have we done a disservice to Ignatius’ original vision? As I see it, the movement from the legitimate Examination of Conscience to Consciousness Examen or Awareness Examen, has been a development in understanding this form of prayer.

Our traditional use of the English word “conscience” (examination of conscience) ties the practice to a sense of morality. In Spanish, as well as in all of the other Latin languages, the word “consciencia” refers to both the English terms “consciousness” and “conscience.” This is significant in that Ignatius’ intent in using this term is likely closer to what Aschenbrenner has termed “consciousness” Examen. It is linked to our awareness rather than strictly to our morality.

It would be helpful to look at what elements of Aschenbrenner’s Examen remained the same and what elements changed or developed. It seems clear that there are four points, which Ignatius and Aschenbrenner both emphasize and are thus foundational to the practice of the Examen.

Similarities

1. The understanding that the Examen is rooted in gratitude, in a sense of thanksgiving,
2. The fourth point of the Examen, contrition and sorrow, is a focal point. This acknowledges the attitude with which we can approach the Examen: that of a sinner who is deeply loved by God. This is the focus of the First Week Exercises, which the Examen precedes. It is a healthy acknowledgement of our vulnerability before God, our weakness as individuals who often are not faithful to God in many different ways. An honest acknowledgement of our fault and a demonstration of contrition and sorrow are pivotal for Ignatius. Without authenticity in this dynamic, one cannot truly appreciate the many remarkable gifts and graces with which God blesses us despite our unworthiness. For Ignatius, this is an emphasis that one sees not only in the fourth point, but also as an underlying emphasis in the language he uses throughout. Aschenbrenner underscores its importance and contains it to the fourth point of the Examen.

It may also be noted that Ignatius' emphasis on contrition and sorrow are linked to its placement in the Exercises at the beginning of the First Week. The penitential emphasis is written with a particular spiritual dynamic in mind, namely, to receive the grace of being accepted by God as a "loved sinner".

The flexible nature of the Examen and the opportunity it provides to be used both inside and outside the context of the Spiritual Exercises, allows for different emphasis to be placed in different areas depending on the area of growth that is discerned.

3. Both Ignatius and Aschenbrenner have recognized and emphasized, to differing degrees, that the process of praying the Examen must be Spirit-led. Ignatius is more subtle on this point (“to ask for the grace....”). Aschenbrenner, speaking to a more self-focused, modern culture needs to be a bit more deliberate on this point:

The Examen is not simply a matter of a person’s natural power of memory and analysis going back over part of the day. It is a matter of Spirit-guided insight into my life and courageously responsive sensitivity to God’s call in my heart.⁸⁹

4. It is a point of argument to say that Aschenbrenner’s interpretation of the Examen appears to be more “relational”. It is clear that his language is more overt in emphasizing the connection between the Creator and the fidelity of the creature. I would argue that Ignatius’ original text is also deeply relational responding to the Creator with gratitude and requesting from him the grace and pardon required to live a life of greater fidelity.

⁸⁹ Aschenbrenner, 17.

Ignatius, living in a time of thriving Christendom, could assume a deep underlying relationship with God. Aschenbrenner uses language that encourages a deep spiritual connection with God, a more overt focus that is relevant to a time when Christianity has less influence.

Differences:

In two significant areas, Aschenbrenner departs from Ignatius:

- As previously mentioned, although both Ignatius and Aschenbrenner emphasize pardon and sorrow (point four) there is decidedly less emphasis on sinfulness in Aschenbrenner's sense of the Examen. "To know my sins..." becomes broadened out in Aschenbrenner to developing and reflecting on a deeper sense of oneself and the interior movements within one's soul. There is a sense here that it is through knowledge of these interior movements that one can come to recognize their fidelity or infidelity to God.

Underlying this difference is the understanding that we do not just become aware of our sin simply by focusing on our sinfulness. By placing the Examen within the context of the First Week, Ignatius' emphasis lies with our sinfulness. By transporting the Examen out of the First Week and placing it in the context of all of the Exercises and Ignatius' actual practice of it, the emphasis becomes one of a call to greater and deeper love.

- The method for the third point of the Examen differs greatly. Ignatius asks us to “demand an account of my soul” and then suggests a methodical hour-by-hour reflection first on our thoughts, then our words, and finally, our deeds. Aschenbrenner moves away from such a technique of examination, choosing to emphasize instead what has been “happening to us and in us since the last Examen.”⁹⁰ Again, he emphasizes awareness of interior movements and discerning the movements of these spirits as they operate within us through the course of the day. It is also about how faithful we have been in response to these movements.

What seems, on one level, to be a departure from Ignatius’ original text by Aschenbrenner, at another level resonates with the acute emphasis Ignatius places on awareness and discernment of spirits throughout the rest of the Spiritual Exercises and indeed in his apostolic life. Aschenbrenner, it should be noted, is writing with the distinct advantage of being able to look at the Examen with the perspective of the whole of the Exercises already having being written, prayed with and analyzed for almost five centuries.

There are two additional areas that Aschenbrenner draws out in his article that are important to deepening our understanding of the Examen: 1) the relationship between the Examen and one’s religious identity and 2) the relationship between the Examen and contemplative prayer.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 18.

Aschenbrenner underscores the fact that the Examen should not encourage us in a Pelagian-like striving for self-perfection. Instead, he presents the Examen as an “experience in faith of growing sensitivity to the unique, intimately special ways that the Lord’s Spirit has of approaching and calling us”⁹¹

If we are truly praying the Examen, rather than simply doing a general, vague reflection on our day’s activities, we cannot avoid confronting the unique and special identity that God, our Creator, placed in us, affirms in us and asks us to act out of as we live faith-centered lives. This “personal vocation”⁹² or unique “religious identity”⁹³ is as much about who we are as uniquely created by God as about what we choose to do with the particular set of gifts and limitations within which we operate.

As Herbert Alphonso S.J. points out, our personal vocation is the unique name by which we are called by God.⁹⁴ This speaks to the sense of religious identity that Aschenbrenner emphasizes. The tool of the Examen can enable us to remain connected to the unique way that God chooses to call each of us by providing us with regular opportunities to become

⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

⁹² Herbert Alphonso S.J. Discovering Your Personal Vocation. New York: Paulist Press, 2001.

⁹³ Aschenbrenner, 15.

⁹⁴ Alphonso, 2. It is Alphonso’s assertion that it is the discovery of this unique “name”, or personal vocation that is at the heart of the Election. In turn, it is the Election that is the focal point of the Second Week Exercises. The Election has traditionally been seen to be a choice of a particular state in life (i.e.: the decision to enter religious life, to be married, to choose a particular career path etc.). Alphonso’s emphasizes that it is not so much a question of what *one chooses to do*, but more foundationally, a process of coming into acceptance and understanding of *whom one is* as a uniquely created being.

aware of moments when the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the ordinary moments of our life.

The other emphasis that Aschenbrenner draws out is important and often overlooked – that is, the relationship between the Examen and regular, personal prayer. Aschenbrenner points to a mutuality between daily contemplative prayer and the practice of the Examen. Contemplative prayer is a practice that is at the heart of who we are as Christians, a discipline that opens us to listening to the revelation of God on a daily basis. The contemplator receives the grace of subtle insight into the revelation of the Father in Christ. These daily periods of contemplation, in whatever form they may take, can be supported by the use of the Examen. The Examen can help to “order” the rest of one’s life to be increasingly faithful to the Truth that is revealed in contemplation.

As well, the Examen, without the ongoing practice of contemplative prayer, can easily become turned in on the self, focusing on self-perfection or even a selfish orientation of ourselves to what it is that we want and desire. We acutely need the complementarity of contemplative prayer and the Examen in order to achieve the balance we seek for personal growth.

Regular “contemplative contact” puts us in constant touch with the revelation of the Father’s ways. Our daily attention to the ongoing revelation of God through scripture, through silence and through many of the experiences of our everyday life, is central to

our lives as faithful Christians. It is this experience that the Examen prayer is designed to support.

The Significance of the Examen within the Ignatian Tradition.

It has already been mentioned that Ignatius placed great emphasis on the practice of the Examen. He saw this discipline as an indispensable part of daily life. He repeatedly advises his companions not to omit the practice of the Examen under any circumstances, even if regular prayer is not possible. This was clear again in his instructions to Salmerón and Laínez, two of his original companions who were with him in the chapel at Montmartre at the beginnings of the Society and who were called upon by Pope Pius IV to participate in the Council of Trent in 1562. Ignatius' first words of guidance to them as they prepared to attend the Council concerned the daily, unfailing practice of the Examen prayer. While his guidance in the points of theology came later, he saw it being of utmost importance that these representatives were in touch with the movements of the Spirit within them as they were attending this historical event, and that they responded to these movements with awareness and freedom. In this way, Ignatius could be assured of their fidelity to the Holy Spirit as they participated in the Council.⁹⁵

It seems clear that it was Ignatius' conversion at Loyola, the very first awakening of his own awareness of the workings of different movements within him, which was the seed of the writing of the Examen.

⁹⁵ Fr. Herbert Alphonso S.J. Transcript of the Seminar: *"God Labors for Me: The Third and Fourth Weeks of the Spiritual Exercises*. Montreal, Quebec. June 20, 2004. p. 26.

When he first noticed the change within himself as he fantasized about the works of chivalry he would do for a particular Lady and then considered the feelings he had as he thought about following in the path of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic, he was struck at the difference. Although he enjoyed both sorts of thoughts, when he considered his works of chivalry toward a particular Lady, he was left, afterward, with a dry and discontented feeling. After reflecting on following the path of admired saints, he remained “content and happy” even after he put aside these fantasies and took up other activity.⁹⁶ It is out of this experience that the Examen took root.⁹⁷

As I have tried to understand the progression and development of the Examen, I have been struck by the underlying notion of Ignatius’ image of God. While it is true, as a rule, that our image of God is an important factor in our spiritual growth, and that it matures and deepens with time, this seems true, too, of Ignatius.

What seems clear in Ignatius’ original text of the Examen is the presence of an image of God who is concerned with how faithful we have been to the law. Where have we succeeded and where have we failed to keep the commandments? Many who have employed the Examen over the centuries have employed it with this image of God rooted

⁹⁶ Olin, 24.

⁹⁷ I owe a debt of gratitude on this point to Fr. Herbert Alphonso S.J. who confirmed that the Examen was indeed rooted in this initial experience of Ignatius and that sequentially, the Rules for Discernment of Spirits were formulated much later than the Examen.

within it. God is interested in how faithful I have been to His law, how good or bad I have been.

With maturity, in the life of faithful Christians, it is revealed to us and we come to see that we are called to a deeper understanding of morality: a response of love. How have I loved today? Where am I being called to love? It is this image of God as a God of love and relationship that Ignatius seemed to grow into and deepen. His use of the Examen towards the latter years of his life confirms this – a fastidious reflection on his interior movements as a way to become more faithful in love to His God. It is a call to this deeper understanding of God that is evident in the final contemplation of the Spiritual Exercises, that is, the Contemplation to Attain Love.⁹⁸ It can be said that the Contemplatio contains the whole of the dynamic of the Exercises within it. In the four points of the Contemplatio, we are asked to reflect on the ways in which we have been beneficiaries of God's goodness and are asked to make a response of love. As a response to the first point, we are encouraged to pray this beautiful offering of love and surrender:

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. Thou hast given all to me. To Thee, O Lord, I return it. All is Thine, dispose of it wholly according to Thy will. Give me Thy love and Thy grace, for this is sufficient for me. [234]

We see here, a movement of acknowledgement of the profound gifts that the Creator has bestowed upon His creature and the response of love and complete surrender to His will on the part of the creature. It is the living out of this deep response of love that the Examen is designed to support. It is a tool that helps us to remain connected to our

⁹⁸ The original Spanish term that has been translated by many as “attain” is actually closer in meaning to a sense of “reaching the summit” of love rather than a sense of “obtaining” love that we most often imply.

experience and inner movements and offers us the daily opportunity to deepen our awareness and to consciously make a response of love and generosity.

Aschenbrenner helped to place the Examen in the context of the larger dynamic of the whole of the Exercises. With it we see this movement from an image of God as the God of law, a God of obedience and enforcement, to the image of a God who calls us to a greater, deeper response of love. The whole of the Exercises challenges us to grow in this freedom to love God more completely and to see His love and His presence in all.

Chapter Three

The Foundations of the Examen: Awareness and Discernment

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, falling in love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you will spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything.

Attributed to Pedro Arrupe, S.J. (1907-1991)
Superior General of the Society of Jesus 1961-1984

In this Chapter, I would like to highlight two important practices: awareness and discernment as being foundational to the practice of the Examen. Each of the two has a depth and tradition that volumes of work have been dedicated to. I would like to outline these practices, albeit in broad strokes, to emphasize the crucial role that they play in Ignatian spirituality and particularly, the spiritual discipline of the Examen.

The Tradition and Practice of Awareness

The tradition of awareness is a diverse one that reaches across many traditions and cultures. Eastern religious traditions have at their root a deep spiritual notion of what it is to sustain awareness in prayer and daily activity. The Christian practice of the Awareness Examen will be explored as a helpful tool for sustaining a spiritual attitude of awareness and gratitude.

In our contemporary society, we seem to be bombarded with demands for our attention. The spaces of quiet in our day have gradually been taken over by television, cellular phones, walkmans, advertisements, etc. More and more we are called away from our own thoughts and awareness to enter into the reality of something else, be it Muzak in the elevators, cell phones, CD and DVD players in our vehicles, or the constant barrage of print and TV ads that clamor for our attention and our money. It has become harder and harder to escape to a quieter place within ourselves, to attend to the quieter voices within ourselves, to be present to silence.

It seems almost counter cultural to explore the notion of mindfulness. There is so much in our daily experience that encourages us not to be mindful of our experience of each moment. Even the volume of what we are asked to attend to at any given moment seems to make mindfulness more difficult. “Multitasking” is seen both as a necessity and as a virtue. What is a spiritual response to such sensual bombardment? Where can we find God in the midst of divided attention and distraction?

With the eyes of faith, we understand that in the prayerful awareness of each moment, we may encounter God. The ancient practices of Buddhism can inform us of ways to integrate disciplines of awareness into meditation and daily living. Christians can draw much from the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition to inform our own practices and desire to be present to God in an ever-deeper way.

The Buddhist Tradition of Mindfulness

The practice of mindfulness lies at the core of Buddhist tradition. Mindfulness dates back to ancient Buddhist traditions, particularly the Theravada tradition.⁹⁹ There are many different forms of meditation within the Buddhist tradition and we will focus on insights connected with *vipassana* meditation. Vipassana meditation is distinguished from *samatha* meditation, which has as its goal the attainment of tranquility through concentration on one’s breath or a simple mantra, to the exclusion of all else. Vipassana meditation, on the other hand, has the same goal but differs in the way it employs and

⁹⁹ William Rehg. *Christian Mindfulness: A Path to Finding God in All Things*. Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits. 34/3 (May 2002), 3.

emphasizes concentration.¹⁰⁰ Vipassana meditation employs mindfulness in a way that focuses awareness on breathing, and inclusively allows other experiences to come through the senses and to be acknowledged. One remains aware of everything that is present.¹⁰¹ For the Buddhist, spirituality means “relating to the working basis of one’s existence which is one’s state of mind.”¹⁰² The way in which one engages directly with the mind is what is referred to as the practice of mindfulness. As Thich Nhat Hanh puts it:

Keep your attention focused on the work, be alert and ready to handle ably and intelligently any situation which may arise—that is mindfulness.¹⁰³

The Christian Tradition

In his article, *Christian Mindfulness: A Path to Finding God in All Things*, William Rehg, S.J. explores Catholic and Jesuit traditions as ways of providing habits of mindfulness that are particularly Christian. He focuses on two ways in which the Christian faith experience differs from the Buddhist experience of reality:

1. The Buddhist concept of *insubstantiality* (“the experience of phenomena as ongoing process without self”) differs for the Christian in that there is the belief that each moment is the “ongoing creative act” of a God of love and personal relationship.
2. The experience of *impermanence* is qualified for the Christian by belief in the promise of resurrection, that some deeper meaning to our lives and our experiences will be revealed to us at the end of Time.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Thich Nhat Hanh. The Miracle of Mindfulness. Boston: Deacon Press, 1975, 14.

¹⁰⁴ Rehg, 11.

Thus, for the Christian, the experience of both insubstantiality and impermanence are rooted in the understanding that the reality we are living, in its incompleteness, will be brought to completion and to full comprehension on the Last Day.¹⁰⁵ It is within the tension of this incompleteness that we are called to participate in the “compassion of Christ toward a suffering world”.¹⁰⁶ As Rehg points out:

We might say that Christian mindfulness is above all a mindfulness of the heart, a mindfulness that attends to the love of God in creation and thus is lovingly responsive to that creation. Consequently, as one’s mindfulness deepens, so should one’s charity.¹⁰⁷

Just as Buddhist meditative practices pour into everyday awareness an increased sense of mindfulness, so Christian prayer can foster an ongoing sense of God’s love, compassion and redemption within our every day lives.

Rehg goes on to categorize various forms of Christian prayer in terms of Mindfulness.

These three (sometimes overlapping) distinctions are as follows:

1. *Formal preparations for mindfulness*: periods of lengthy formal or meditative prayer. In fact, any kind of formal prayer that increases our awareness and faith in God’s presence can be considered a preparation for Christian mindfulness.¹⁰⁸
2. *Prayers of retrospective mindfulness*: Examen, examination of conscience, and the sacrament of reconciliation. These forms of prayer have us take the time to

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Rehg, 13.

reflect on our actions to discern how attentively we responded to God's presence.

In this way we indirectly practice the discipline of mindfulness.

3. *Prayers of engaged mindfulness*: i.e. the Jesus Prayer, centering prayer. This kind of prayer focuses on the moment as it is. Contained within that moment is the understanding of God's presence within that moment.

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection:

The act of Christian mindfulness, an awareness of the love of God as present in His creation, is embodied in a beautifully unique way by the spirituality of a discaled Carmelite lay brother in seventeenth century Europe by the name of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. His practice of the presence of God, in its depth and in its utter simplicity, has much to teach us.

Upon entering religious life, Brother Lawrence did not find the peace of mind that he had been searching for. Rather, he suffered a full ten years anxiety and fear believing with conviction that he was damned.¹⁰⁹ Nothing, not even prayer, seemed to lessen his suffering. Then, quite suddenly, Brother Lawrence "perceived a ray of divine light which, illuminating his spirit, dissipated all his fears and ended his pain."¹¹⁰ He lived in that light for the rest of his life, some forty years. He was able to live his life completely in the present, in the presence of God. He was no longer obsessed with the notion of heaven and hell. It mattered only that he loved God fully in the moment, so that there was not even a

¹⁰⁹ Sr. Mary David (trans.) The Practice of the Presence of God: The Complete Works of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. New York: Paulist Press, 4.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

nuance to suggest that he might be loving God to avoid hell or to attain heaven. He loved God and sought His presence as one solid, fluid movement throughout the rest of his life.

Monastery life saw him serve in the community kitchen, work for which he had “the greatest natural aversion.”¹¹¹ Yet he devoted his action for the love of God. Indeed, he once said, “I turn my little omelet in the pan for the love of God.”¹¹² Later, he worked at repairing shoes and declared that he found God in that work “as much as when he was praying with the community.”¹¹³

In his works, we find a series of maxims with the title “Practices Necessary to Acquire the Spiritual Life.” They are as follows:

1. “The most common and necessary practice in the spiritual life is the presence of God; that is, habitually to take pleasure in His Divine company, speaking humbly and conversing with him lovingly at all seasons, at every minute without rule or measure.
2. One must try continually so that all his actions without distinction may be a sort of little conversation with God; however not in a studied way but just as they happen, with purity and simplicity of heart.
3. We must do all our actions with deliberation and care ... by this continual attention to God we will break the demon’s hand and make his weapons fall from his hands.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

4. During our work and other actions ... let us stop a few minutes, as often as we can to adore God in the depths of our hearts, to enjoy Him, as it were, in passing and in secret.”¹¹⁴

The beauty of the spirituality of Brother Lawrence is the grace he received to become aware of God in every moment of every day in whatever task he needed to do. His love for God had been purified through years of great anxiety and unrest, until finally he loved God with a pure heart and was graced to be able to see God in all he did, even in the simplest task and to love God through it. His example speaks to the possibility that this grace is available to us as well.

I see the spirituality of Brother Lawrence as somewhat of a link to the understanding of Ignatius' spirituality and to the understanding of the Awareness Examen. What Brother Lawrence was able to live in his daily, minute-by-minute connection to the presence of God is something to which we, too, are called. Ignatius' insight brings this a step further. While we strive to become aware of God and attune ourselves to His presence within our daily activity, we can also become increasingly aware, as we are active in our day-to-day lives, of the movements within us that call us to action. Ignatius spent a lot of time attending to these movements and categorizing these movements as he attended to them. He saw that there was a pattern of movement that led one to be close to God and to act in a way that would bring greater glory to God. He also saw that there were conflicting movements that lead us away from God and can lead to deception. An important part of

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 82-83.

the legacy that Ignatius has handed down to us is the way he classified and categorized these observations in his Rules for the Discernment of Spirits.

Within the Ignatian tradition of the Spiritual Exercises there is a sense of mindfulness in which one is encouraged to pay attention to one's experience, one's interior movements and agitations. Once we become aware of what is going on within us on a spiritual level, what can we do to know how to faithfully respond to our spiritual experience? The Rules for Discernment of Spirits help one to discriminate between movements that are brought about by the Holy Spirit and those that have their origin in the evil spirit. The goal is to be able to discern with greater clarity which movements and inclinations are from God and which are from the evil spirit. The key is attentiveness to what is going on inside us and understanding these movements in light of Ignatius' helpful guidelines.

The Tradition of Discernment

It would be somewhat misleading to present Ignatius' contribution to the area of discernment of spirits as unique. In fact, Ignatius joins a long tradition of faithful men and women throughout Christianity who have written about the importance of discerning the difference between spirits leading one toward God and the force of evil spirits that lead us away. What I find striking in the stories and recorded thought of many holy men and women is the simple quality they all seem to have in common: their ability to *notice* what is happening to them interiorly.

From the discernment of true and false prophets in the Old Testament, through St. Paul's epistles (where the term discernment of spirits is introduced (1Cor.12: 10)) to Antony of Egypt in the 4th century, John Cassian, (360-430), Bernard de Clairvaux (1090-1153), Richard of St. Victor (d.1173) and others, the discernment of Spirits has been at the heart of observed spiritual experience. Time and time again, in individual ways among great believers, observations about the workings of the Holy Spirit and the influences of dissenting spirits have been recorded. To notice and pay attention to such (often subtle) influences is one of the great legacies of our Christian faith.

The instructions that Ignatius himself gives us on discerning spirits and how to act on them when they are discerned are not specifically Ignatian.¹¹⁵ These are observations and guidelines that belong to the whole Christian tradition. We can be fairly certain that Ignatius did not compile this information from study of the writing of the saints that went before him, but rather focused in on his own personal spiritual experience tested in the light of Holy Scripture and the teachings of the Church.¹¹⁶ That Ignatius' own keenly observed experience resonates so deeply within the tradition of discernment that came before him, speaks to its authenticity.

Ignatius' unique contribution to the understanding of the discernment of spirits, apart from his particular perspective, has been in his ability to structure the knowledge in such a usable form. As Toner suggests:

¹¹⁵ Jules J. Toner, S.J. A Commentary on St. Ignatius' Rules for the Discernment of Spirits. St. Louis: The Institute for Jesuits Sources, 1982, 15.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

The ordering of elements for practical purposes, the emphasis on active energy in discerning and responding, and the imagery- all these are characteristically Ignatian; but only the ordering, the codification, if you will, is his particular contribution. Strangely enough, no one before him succeeded in giving us such an organized set of practical counsels, and no one since his time has provided anything which could replace it.¹¹⁷

Thus, Ignatius provided us with a way of codifying a particular set of observations so that they can be usable tools for the strengthening of the spiritual life. As with all things, Ignatius did this in order to encourage the believer toward greater spiritual freedom.

Clearly, the gift of the Rules of Discernment or Spirits, or the larger Spiritual Exercises, is not meant to be the unique domain of the Jesuits, as has sometimes been the mistaken assumption. In fact, both the Rules for Discernment of Spirits and the Spiritual Exercises have been used by a variety of people, from a variety of Christian spiritual traditions as a means of better living out their unique personal vocation.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 16.

The Rules for the Discernment¹¹⁹ of Spirits

The Rules for the Discernment of Spirits appear at the end of text of the Spiritual Exercises, as an Appendix. The Rules consist of twenty-two paragraphs, which on first reading often resonate immediately within the individual reading them. One finds that the principles therein can be almost immediately applied to one's inner experience. As the Rules are studied in more depth, one can come to appreciate the far reaching implications of a life of faith lived with careful attention to these Rules. It becomes clear that one can easily spend one's life under the instruction of these guidelines. While an exhaustive study of the Rules is beyond the scope of this paper, my goal here is to simply offer a taste of how Ignatius teaches us to discern through the Rules and how this can offer us insight into the use of the Examen as a method of ongoing discernment.

Ignatius' usage of the word "rules", while a correct translation of Ignatius' original, has the connotation of "rigid directives imposed by authority"¹²⁰ The content of the rules, for the most part, is not directive. Rather, they seem to be primarily descriptive of certain spiritual experiences, providing normative standards to judge such experiences as they happen. When the rules do become more directive, it is with Ignatius' characteristic

¹¹⁹ For an in depth discussion as to the exact Spanish term Ignatius employs ("discrecion" or "discernir") please see Toner, 18-19. What seems rooted in the use of the term are two basic ideas: (1) perception of the respective spirits as good and bad, with a view to (2) separating or distinguishing them (Toner, 19). It is important to make the distinction that this term, discernment, is used by Ignatius in a particular way and our modern use of the term, as an exploration of options, a weighing of pros and cons, does not reflect with precision Ignatius' meaning as he employed the term.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 9.

respect for the individual experiences and situation of each individual.¹²¹ As Toner suggests:

Ignatius' rules are concerned with inner, private events, the movements in the individual discernor's own mind and heart prior to even his own overt actions which flow from these interior movements, whether spontaneously or subject to the agent's free choice. They tell us how to discover whether the movements are prompted by the good or evil spirit.¹²²

Toner is also careful to make the important distinction between the *discernment of spirits* and the *discernment of God's will*. Ignatius' discernment of spirits has two central aims: (1) to help us to discriminate among the variety of inner movements to determine which ones are from ourselves and which ones are prompted in us by some spirit. (2) Among the spirits that might be involved, to be able to determine which might be prompted by the Holy Spirit and which might be prompted by an evil spirit.¹²³

Ignatius' directives for finding God's will are not outlined in such a succinct way, but are found embedded in various places within the text of the Spiritual Exercises. For example, the final line of the First Principle and Foundation [23] states, "our one desire and choice should be what is *more* conducive to the end for which we are created." This striving for the "magis" or what is "more" can be a helpful criterion for discerning the will of God in a particular situation. While not mutually exclusive from the Rules for Discernment, discernment of the Will of God helps us to read our inner movements as well as external

¹²¹ Ibid., 9.

¹²² Ibid., 11.

¹²³ Ibid., 12.

“signs” to make good judgments concerning a course of action and to make choices that are likely to be more conducive to the “greater glory of God.”¹²⁴

Another point worthy of mention is the fact that Ignatius’ Rules for the Discernment of Spirits would be severely limited if it was felt that they could only be applied while one is praying the Spiritual Exercises. Their value is far-reaching and clearly applicable in everyday experiences outside the scope of the Spiritual Exercises.¹²⁵ It is in this broader context that we include a discussion of the Rules in this discussion of the Examen. As we heighten our awareness of our daily spiritual movements, the Rules for Discernment of Spirits can provide helpful guidance for understanding our experience and choosing our actions in response to our inner movements.

It would be important here to clarify the structure that Ignatius has set out in his Rules. There are two separate classifications of Rules in the text of the Spiritual Exercises: one set that is more appropriate for the “First Week” [313-327]¹²⁶ and another set that is more suited to the “Second Week” [328-336]¹²⁷.

In his First Week Rules #1-4 [314-317] Ignatius describes the opposing spirits of light and darkness and how they come to influence those who are moving towards deeper union with Christ and alternatively, how they affect those who are moving away from deeper union with Christ. First Week Rules # 5-14 [318-327] go into further detail about

¹²⁴ Ibid. 13.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 14.

¹²⁶ See Appendix J

¹²⁷ See Appendix K

how one can respond faithfully to the Holy Spirit even in the midst of desolation and temptation. He outlines recognizable strategies that the Enemy employs so that we might, with this knowledge, repel him and remain attuned to the Spirit of Light.

In the eight Rules of the Second Week [328-336], Ignatius points out areas where the deception of the Enemy can be more subtle and where the Enemy can use experiences of spiritual peace and joy to deceive us. He outlines how the Enemy might operate in this manner and what his predictable tactics are so that we may be aware of these types of deception should they occur.

It must be said that classification of the rules in terms of “First Week Rules” and “Second Week Rules” can be misleading. Clearly, the guidelines presented are not referring to the experiences that can exclusively occur while praying with either First or Second Week Exercises. These rules, as has already been said, are applicable to spiritual growth both inside and outside the context of the Spiritual Exercises. They can guide the experiences of those well along in their spiritual path towards deeper union with God as well as those who have dared take their first tentative steps.

A more helpful distinction might be to see the First Week Rules as guidelines with broader reach and focus. These rules govern the vast majority of spiritual experiences and are helpful in reinforcing the broad lines of how the spirits of good and evil can operate within one’s spiritual experience. It would be valuable to instruct anyone who expresses

interest in their interior spiritual movements with the valuable help of the First Week Rules.

The Second Week Rules describe a type of dynamic that is more subtle. They describe instances where the Enemy may operate under the guise of Good in order to deceive. We can see this in [332]:

It is the mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of the angel of light. He begins by suggesting thoughts that are suited to a devout soul, and ends by suggesting his own. For example, he will suggest holy and pious thoughts that are wholly in conformity with the sanctity of the soul. Afterwards, he will endeavor little by little to end by drawing the soul into his hidden snares and evil designs.

An example from Ignatius' own experience illustrates the dynamic of this Rule. While he was studying grammar in Barcelona with Master Ardéval, Ignatius became aware of the fact that while he was memorizing verbs by rote, he consistently experienced spiritual insight and pleasure. This caused him to become distracted with his studies. Upon reflection, he came to see that this, indeed, was a temptation. While what he was experiencing was positive and seemed to be of God, in fact it was a way of distracting this man of God from what he was being called to at the moment: to be an effective student of grammar. Ignatius' hunch that this was indeed a temptation was confirmed when he revealed to Master Ardéval the source of his distraction and pledged his re-commitment as a student. This temptation left him completely.¹²⁸ In this example we see

¹²⁸ Olin, 60.

not only an example of [332], but also an example of the effectiveness of bringing a temptation into the light and speaking to someone about it in order to eradicate it [326]¹²⁹.

While it is in these Rules that Ignatius' ability to notice and describe very intricate spiritual movements is most evident, it is also with these Second Week Rules that one must be most prudent in the discernment of one's experience and in guiding others to discern. Typically, in a spiritual direction setting, while the spiritual director must be fully familiar with both first and second week dynamics, one would need to be judicious in terms of what information about the Second Week Rules are offered to guide a prayer.¹³⁰ To suggest that the Evil Spirit could be undermining any experience of consolation would diminish the grace received unnecessarily in many instances. A person of prayer needs to be able to trust and believe in their experiences of consolation from God. It is for this reason that Ignatius offers these Second Week Rules separately, to inform those who already have a foundation of trust and spiritual experience. He astutely observed a trend in the pattern of the Enemy: while a beginner is most often tempted by things that are morally questionable (i.e. lies, illicit relationships, alcohol abuse) those who have followed the spiritual path for some time fall prey to different temptations. Ignatius observed that these individuals are most often successfully tempted by deceptions under the guise of doing a moral good (for example, the committed Christian who over-involves

¹²⁹ In this First Week rule [326], Ignatius guards us against the evil spirit's manner of acting as a "false lover" who seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered. To work against such secrecy, Ignatius urges bringing such deceptions to the light and confiding in some spiritual person. The evil spirit, recognizing that his deceptions have been revealed, will retreat knowing that he can no longer succeed in his evil undertakings.

¹³⁰ Ignatius makes this point very clearly in Annotation 9 of the Exercises.

themselves in Church related activity placing great strain upon marital or family relationships). It is this observation that underlies the differentiation between the First and Second Week rules.

The Role of the Examen in Discernment

We have already seen how the Examen can be employed as a method of maintaining an increased sense of spiritual awareness. By following the five-step method once a day (minimally), we remain connected to our foundational desire to heighten our connection to God through awareness and to respond faithfully to the movements of the Holy Spirit within us.

In the third step, what Aschenbrenner terms “practical survey of actions”, we offer ourselves the occasion to look back upon what we have done, the choices we have made, the conversations we have had, and to examine these in light of how faithful we have been to consistently discerning God’s Presence and Will in all. In this way, the Examen provides a daily opportunity to “check in” to see how it is that we are aware of the spiritual movements and our responses to them.

We can choose to share these observations with another (a spouse, a friend, a spiritual director, or fellow members of a religious community) and/ or to trace the movement over time through the use of a daily journal. By moving from interior observation to external sharing, we can commit ourselves to watching how this process reveals itself

over time. We can trace our areas of progress as well as our areas of vulnerability. Ignatius very clearly points out the need to acknowledge these areas of vulnerability in order to avoid them becoming entry points for the Enemy [327].

Personal Vocation

At the very beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius tells us what the purpose of the Exercises are: “every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments and, after their removal, *of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of my life* and for the salvation of my soul.” [1] In this way, the Election can be seen as the focus of the entire Spiritual Exercises. Traditionally, the focus of the Election has been “making a choice of a way of life”, as Ignatius himself expresses it in [169]. For those who have had the privilege of doing the Exercises and discerning the Election in this way, the choices have typically been about committing oneself to a religious order, to married or single life, to a certain course of employment, to a new commitment of some kind.

Fr. Herbert Alphonso, in his small book entitled *Discovering Your Personal Vocation*, offers us another way to look at this process of Election. He points out that it seems somewhat disproportionate to enlist the whole depth of the Exercises in order to discern a decision that could quite honestly be decided, in prayer, over the course of a retreat weekend. Alphonso proposes that Ignatius’ intention was that in the Election process we are actually being called upon to discern something much deeper. Something, in fact, foundational to our being: our personal vocation.

Fr. Alphonso describes the personal vocation as “ the unrepeatability uniqueness God has given to me in ‘calling me by name’”¹³¹ This special “name”¹³² by which we are called by God is the thread that runs consistently through all that we do, all that we are. The Election, then becomes a process of discovering and discerning this unique name. Once known, we can use this name, or personal vocation, as the criterion for all of our other choices and decisions. For God’s will for me is always directly in line with my personal vocation.¹³³

The practice of the Examen can help us to remain aware, in all of our daily encounters and decisions, of our personal vocation that has been bestowed on us by God. Alphonso’s definition of the Consciousness Examen bears this out: “in prayer, a reorientation of the heart that begins in thanksgiving, then moves toward being centered on the Lord through one’s very real experience consciously accepted.” This element of consciously accepting our experience strikes me as being pivotal. It is one thing to reflect on our experiences each day and yet another to be aware and consciously accept them. As Alphonso writes:

We would do well to distinguish clearly between “approval” and “acceptance”: “approval or “disapproval” is a judgment, “acceptance” or “non-acceptance” is an attitude. God cannot approve of so many things I say and do, yet in the very same things He accepts me unconditionally- of this I am absolutely sure and certain. What God does for me, I need to do for myself. Experience has taught me that we either mix up approval and acceptance, disapproval and non-acceptance or take it for granted that consciousness or awareness of an experience automatically involves its acceptance. The fact is that we have a kind of spontaneous inner dynamic of non-acceptance operative within each one of us. And one of the great

¹³¹ Alphonso, 2.

¹³² Being “called by name” has a deep biblical tradition that speaks to the importance of God calling us in a way that orients us uniquely toward Him.

¹³³ Alphonso, 8.

fruits of the experience of the ministry of counseling and spiritual direction is the realization that non-acceptance of real human experience is a fundamental obstacle that in so many good-willed and well intentioned people is blocking effective human and spiritual growth.¹³⁴

Thus our personal vocation becomes an indispensable guide or benchmark for discernment. By consciously accepting the events of my day without judgment, my attitude becomes one of more and more deeply disposing myself to the will of God. The Examen becomes an effective way to maintain contact with my inner experience. Having done that, and accepting that experience as true, I can begin the process of discernment. Rather than an exercise of weighing ideas and possibilities and choosing the most logical, the discernment Ignatius speaks of requires more of us. It is an invitation to reflect on the intimate way that God the Creator speaks within those that He has created. The next Chapter will outline ways in which this conversation can be heard and nurtured within the din of our contemporary world.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 60-61.

Chapter Four

Contemplation In Action

“...as long as a man is acting in his heart, speech, or work in such a manner that he is tending towards God, he is praying; and thus one who is directing his whole life toward God is praying always.”

(St. Thomas Aquinas, Commentary on Romans Ch.1 Lecture 5)

“In the midst of actions and studies, the mind can be lifted to God; and by means of this directing everything to the divine service, everything is prayer.”

(St. Ignatius of Loyola, Ignatii Epistolae (Letters) VI, 91)

Contemplation in Action

There is a common human tendency to see a spiritual practice, particularly one that is as helpful as the Examen, as an end unto itself. This, of course, is not the intention. The idea of the Examen is to dispose the soul to more freely making choices that would align it with the will of God.

Ignatius broke with the monastic tradition of his time by placing particular emphasis not only on prayer, but on prayer in the midst of other activity. It was Jerome (Jerónimo) Nadal, an early companion of Ignatius who was charged with promulgation of the *Constitutions*,¹³⁵ who apparently coined the term that is associated with Ignatius and the Jesuits: “contemplation in action”. In Nadal’s own words:

The Society “extends prayer and contemplation into all the activities it undertakes, since all of these activities are spiritual: preaching, explaining Holy Scripture, teaching Christian Doctrine, giving the Exercises, hearing Confessions, distributing Holy Communion, and performing other good work. In these ministries God must be found with peace, tranquility, and the application of the interior man; with light, joy and contentment; with fervor of love for Him; and thus God should be sought in all other ministries, even those that are external.”¹³⁶

If we have committed ourselves to taking the time to deepen our faith with daily prayer, it is very often the experience that that relatively short amount of time becomes a spiritual anchor for the day. Few of us who desire to live our Christian faith more completely are called to a monastic life where a large proportion of the day could be spent in prayer. We live our faith and our prayer as we go about our daily responsibilities. We cook supper,

¹³⁵ See Footnote number 12.

¹³⁶ de Guibert, 206.

we work, we drive, we keep appointments, we are in relationship with others. Most of us are busy. If we were to confine our prayer to the moments of our day when we are alone and silent, for most of us that time would be a small fraction of our daily twenty-four hours. "Contemplation in action" calls us to see beyond quiet moments of prayer, in the midst of our activity and to find God there. This allows us to incorporate God into every moment of the day and to do it all for "the greater glory of God."

Ignatius himself lived as a contemplative in action as he vigilantly discerned his authentic responses to the Spirit, which led him to apostolic action. All that he was called to in his studies, his writing of the Exercises, his founding and organizing of the Society of Jesus were all applications of his unique gifts and his particular temperament.¹³⁷ As Ganss characterizes it:

Ignatius was a contemplative person in the highest stage of spiritual development whose contemplation compelled him to engage in the works of the active life. Thus, he found and pleased God sometimes by prayer in solitude and sometimes by means of the most distracting or vexing occupations undertaken for the love of God and his neighbor. His idea of apostolic spirituality was to seek and find God in all things.¹³⁸

Just as Ignatius' spirituality met the needs of his times, we are called to orient our spirituality to reflect the times that we live in. It is my belief that the Examen provides us with an invaluable tool to negotiate what God is calling us to, as individuals and as communities, in the midst of the daily influences of our contemporary North American culture. The Examen is a daily invitation to quietly listen to the heartbeat of our faith. It beats while we are silent and when we are busy with the preoccupations of our daily

¹³⁷ Ganss, 22.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 23.

activity. It is an invitation to check on our interior movements and to see that they resonate within our external actions and attitudes.

The Challenge of Contemporary Culture

Contemporary culture presents ample challenges as we attempt to integrate an active spirituality into its midst. In order to discuss the particular challenges of our culture, I would like to draw upon the thought of Richard Gaillardetz, who has reflected on the implication of North American culture on spirituality. If spirituality as a discipline and a human experience is “the attempt to consciously align one’s life, in all its concrete particulars, with the rhythm of the divine,”¹³⁹ it seems clear that the Examen can still be of significant help almost five hundred years after Ignatius first proposed it.

While Gaillardetz points out that modern technology can be seen to be an expression of imagination and intellect that reflects the divinity within us, it also becomes clear that modern technology is reshaping the way that we live in the world.¹⁴⁰ He outlines three particular aspects of North American society and reflects on the implication of these changes on contemporary spirituality.

¹³⁹Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Discovering “God’s Rhythms”: Nourishing Christian Spirituality in a Technological Culture*. New Theology Review, February, 2003, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

The way *technology* shapes our lives has changed in such a way as to offer us not newer, better tools, but rather, devices. He draws our attention to the “device paradigm” ¹⁴¹in which we find ourselves living:

Where a tool might be thought of as technological artifact intended to help us more effectively engage our world, a device tries to relieve us from the need for engagement altogether.¹⁴²

He illustrates this point with the comparison between a piano and a CD player. While both are technological to varying degrees and both provide the same desired result: music, the piano requires extensive discipline, effort and engagement. The CD player provides us with a similar result but with much less effort. The modern device is, in some ways, beginning to shape our culture and the way we look at all areas of our lives.

The counterbalance to this is suggested to be the use of “focal practices” or “the routine ways in which we engage the larger world in our daily lives.”¹⁴³ These focal practices often require a certain cultivation of skill and attentiveness. Cooking, gardening, hiking, writing may be focal practices. It is this kind of activity that changes the way we orient ourselves toward our world, encouraging us to become engaged, plugged-in, and connected to the world around us. Our Christian faith and our membership in the Church community can offer us other focal practices. The discipline of keeping the Sabbath can be one such practice. It is radically counter cultural to see time not as a commodity or something to be “spent” but rather as a gift to be embraced.¹⁴⁴ To plan our lives with a

¹⁴¹ Ibid., citing Albert Borgmann. Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 10-11.

mind to the sanctification of our time and the time of others requires an enormous change of focus for most of us. To place concerted effort in cultivating this notion of time and integrating this practice into our daily lives may, indeed, be the most radical of all Christian practices¹⁴⁵.

Another area that impacts spirituality is the pervasive influence of modern *consumerism*. Gaillardetz discusses the related process of commodification that he describes as “whenever a particular good is extracted from the context in which it was produced such that this good can now be quantified and measured.”¹⁴⁶ By transforming goods and values into “products” changes our relationship to these things. Commodification has “instigated a monumental shift in the mode of human existence from “being” to “having”.”¹⁴⁷ Even spirituality has not escaped the process of commodification as there are numerous examples of ways in which spirituality is being packaged for the modern palate, designed to fit into our busy lives without inconveniencing us.¹⁴⁸

Gaillardetz argues that authentic Christian spirituality must resist these processes.¹⁴⁹ One way in which this can happen is by a recovery of the theological concept of gift.¹⁵⁰ Understanding that God, the giver of gifts, gives not what can be extracted, packaged,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

hoarded or sold, but the divine rhythm of gift giving and receiving that we experience in such a profound way in the Eucharist.¹⁵¹

The third feature of contemporary culture that Gaillardetz explores is the *digitization of the Word*. New technologies such as e-mail, electronic documents and instant messaging have changed the way we relate to the printed word. In many ways correspondence between individuals has become disposable. Revival of spiritual reading as a focal practice is suggested as a way to counteract the effect these new technologies have had on us as spiritual beings.

I would like to suggest that the Examen is a spiritual practice that can be a focal activity, one that helps to counterbalance the growing tendency towards a device paradigm that is evident, even within the realm of spirituality. Practiced with reverence to the original intent of Ignatius, the Ignatian Examen can facilitate greater engagement with the world, at a much deeper level. We become “plugged into” the world and to the will of God beyond the surface, at a depth of true authenticity.

The concept of gratitude, the starting point of the Examen, is in itself a helpful adjustment from the threat of commodification. Acknowledging that all is gift and taking time each day to focus on the gifts we have received in the course of our everyday lives provides a resistance of sorts to the process of commodification that is rampant in our culture. While we are definitely not immune to it, faithfulness to the act of gratitude

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 15.

within the Examen allows us the opportunity to see things for their inherent goodness and to work against the temptation to commodify and objectify.

While it is natural for many of us to end the day with a mental run through of our activities, our first response is often to look at our day as a function of how *productive* we happened to be. The Examen calls us to something different. The focus shifts from what we have been able to produce or do to the quality of our “being”. Where has the Spirit been present? How did we allow ourselves to be led, when did we resist? The questions become different when we commit ourselves to faithful service, as Ignatius did, and allow ourselves to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit in all that we do.

The Common Pitfalls of the Practice of the Examen

As has been mentioned previously, even when we employ the Examen as a regular spiritual practice and do so with fidelity to the original Ignatian emphasis of awareness and discernment, there are certain common pitfalls that many of us tend to experience.

Negative Experience

My experience in teaching the Examen to others has shown me that some individuals, often those who have practiced the Examen as part of the life of a religious community, balk at the thought of integrating the practice into their life. Some may feel it as a burden, as almost a ‘final exam’ at the end of the day where God can test the areas where we have been faithful and those areas where we have failed. The roots of the understanding of the

Examen as a penitential exercise run deep. Many, understandably, feel resentful after a day filled to overflowing with activities of service to have to set aside precious time (often at a time where we are most tired) to engage in a daily 'performance review'. Sometimes this is an obstacle that cannot be overcome, and the Examen is dropped in favor of other spiritual practices. However, if the individual is open to re-learning the Examen and focusing on it as a practice of awareness of God's presence and discernment of the Spirit in the midst of our daily activity, the resentment can fall away to uncover the true gift of the Examen as an encounter of gentle intimacy and guidance.

Sleep

One of the most common hindrances of those I have spoken to who desire to maintain the discipline of the Examen, is a very human one: sleepiness. Many people choose to pray the Examen during the last part of their day, often while they are in bed. Not surprisingly, many find themselves drifting off to sleep midway through. If this becomes a persistent problem, perhaps a different strategy is in order. Some may find that entrenching the practice in another part of the day is more practical, say after dinner, or even while driving home from an evening meeting. Some may find that praying the Examen with a spouse or a friend at the end of the day makes us more available and attentive and less likely to doze off.

Allowing the Spirit to Lead

The second point of the Examen, where we ask the Spirit to lead us in the process of Examen, illuminating areas where we need to look, is in many ways the most difficult

step. It is no wonder that this prayerful surrendering of our own will to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is often a stumbling block. Even though we may pay lip service to following the lead of the Spirit in examining our day, we often find ourselves taking control of what we mentally pay attention to and what we ignore. Sometimes it is the positive that will spring to the surface and we enthusiastically examine that. Other times it may be the negative parts of our day that become our fixation. Truly allowing the Spirit to lead us in the journey of the Examen demands that, as much as possible, we place before the Lord a blank screen and allow the Spirit to guide us in terms of what needs looking at. Our unconscious agenda becomes less important and we can be more open to being surprised by the promptings of the Spirit.

Conscious Acceptance of Experience

As we have seen in Chapter Three, Fr. Herbert Alphonso's definition of the Examen includes the acceptance of our experience as *consciously accepted*.¹⁵² In my own experience of practicing the Examen and in sharing this method of prayer with others, I have come to see that this element of conscious acceptance is critical.

Once we have allowed ourselves to be prompted by the Spirit to become aware of a certain experience that has taken place during the course of our day, we often mistakenly believe that with awareness automatically comes acceptance.¹⁵³ This is not the case. Once we become aware of our experience, it is not uncommon for us to run away from it, to

¹⁵² Please see Chapter Three p. 69

¹⁵³ Alphonso, 60.

feel guilty about it, to repress it, to distort it. All of these reactions are various forms of non-acceptance.¹⁵⁴ Our lack of acceptance can happen as much in the positive aspects of our day as in the so-called negative aspects. The key here is to take the time and energy necessary to truly accept our own experience.¹⁵⁵ This may involve approaching each moment slowly and becoming aware of how it “sits” within us. Are we aware of how we are feeling about it? Do we bring our experience to the Lord in a way that “rings true”? This allows the Examen to become a way to place our true selves and experiences authentically before God.

Applications for Spiritual Direction

The Ignatian Examen, as we have seen, can be an extremely helpful discipline to grow in spiritual awareness and discernment. Its versatility lends itself to be used as a helpful tool within the context of spiritual direction.

Certainly within the Ignatian tradition, the Examen has been used extensively, both inside and outside the context of the Spiritual Exercises as an effective tool for spiritual growth. Experience has shown that the Examen can be taught in a spiritual direction context and used effectively in a wide array of pastoral circumstances.

The Examen can be an effective tool for those who are beginners on the spiritual journey. Perhaps an individual has had a recent spiritual experience or conversion and is seeking

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 61

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 62

spiritual direction as a way to integrate and explore this experience. Some individuals who begin the process of spiritual direction may not be ready, for varying reasons, to learn prayer with scripture, meditation or other prayer techniques. The Examen can be used effectively as a way to introduce beginners to the discipline of prayer. Since its formula tends to be quite simple, its emphasis on reviewing the day often familiar, and the daily time commitment minimal (fifteen to twenty minutes) the Examen is often accepted easily as a reasonable initial prayer commitment. It is the role of the director to teach the Examen clearly and carefully, to encourage a correct emphasis on awareness and discernment and to help the pray-er negotiate some of the previously discussed pitfalls. It must be said that the practice of the Examen goes hand in hand with regular contemplative prayer and the director may encourage a beginner toward deeper prayer as they are drawn closer and closer into intimacy with the Lord.

The Examen can also prove to be a very helpful tool to use with individuals who seek out spiritual direction and pray in apophatic way (i.e. Christian meditation, prayer without words or images, 'via negativa'). Traditionally, Ignatian prayer tends toward the kataphatic, using images that arise through prayer with scripture ('via affirmativa'). This easily lends itself to discussion in spiritual direction about what occurred while contemplating a particular scripture passage. The lack of imagery and words in the apophatic tradition can present a lack of material to speak about when spiritual accompaniment is sought. Introducing the practice of the Examen in addition to regular meditation can give director and directee material to discuss: the movement of the Spirit in the daily life of the individual. The fruits of meditative prayer is lived out in their

everyday activity and then reflected upon in the Examen allowing the individual the opportunity to pursue spiritual direction within a given framework.

Ignatius clearly saw that the Exercises needed to be adapted to those who would be engaged in them (Annotation 18). He makes it clear that the Exercises are not well suited for all Christians. Many who may desire to follow the Exercises may be insufficiently gifted to do so. However, Ignatius suggested that many more individuals could benefit greatly from the use of the General and Particular Examen for “the attainment of a certain degree of peace of soul.” [18] In fact, the Examen stands out as a spiritual discipline that is uniquely suited for both personal and communal use and is versatile enough to be used by a wide variety of persons in different life situations.

Adaptations of the Examen

The flexibility of the Examen allows it to be used easily in a wide variety of settings. As we have seen, within the context of spiritual direction it can be used with beginners, with those praying the spiritual Exercises and with individuals at almost every stage of their spiritual journey. In pastoral settings it can be used with very young children, with teenagers and young adults as well as with the elderly. Many different formulations of the Examen have evolved over time, using different images or emphasis but remaining true to the spirit of Ignatius. Here follows a discussion of a few of these adaptations.

The Companion Examen

The communal nature of the Examen is an aspect that deserves further exploration.

Gerald O'Keefe describes what he terms the Companion Examen as "the effort of two believers to discern the activity of God in their respective lives and share this with each other."¹⁵⁶ It is through the sharing of the Examen with another that we are able to appreciate a new dimension, a Trinitarian practice of the Examen.¹⁵⁷ It is by trusting another enough to share this practice with them that we are blessed with a deepening of our own spiritual understanding. We become affirmed by the other and strengthened against some of the perils that can occur (depression, scrupulosity, fear, despair) in isolation. It can help us, as well, to nurture the emergence of our identity before God, as this identity emerges from relationship, not isolation.¹⁵⁸ Friends, spouses, housemates, members of religious communities can benefit from the practice of the Examen with a trusted companion.

The Thanksgiving Examen

The Thanksgiving Examen is based on the idea that the first point of Ignatius' traditional Examen, "to give thanks to God our Lord for favors received" [43], can be developed as a method of Examen complete unto itself. It is particularly helpful for specific groups of people, but can be of benefit to all of us at some point in our lives. This Examen is recommended for those who may lack self-esteem, those who may be overly scrupulous

¹⁵⁶ Gerald E. O'Keefe, S.J. *The Companion Examen*. Review for Religious, 37, 1978, 59-68.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 60

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 64

or have a strongly compulsive personality, as it avoids the temptation to view God as a judge, focusing instead on God as a giver of gifts.¹⁵⁹

As well, the Thanksgiving Examen can be of value to those who may be sick, mentally or physically handicapped, people experiencing severe pressure or symptoms of burn out. People who are facing these challenges may not have the energy or attention to be able to pray the five point Examen. By focusing on moments of the day that one can respond to with gratitude (“Last night’s headache is gone”, “ I was able to complete a project”, “ a friend called to offer help or support”) we allow ourselves to stay connected with God’s love and grace.¹⁶⁰

This practice of gratitude can be of help to those who may find themselves in periods of discouragement, depression, desolation or grief after some personal loss. By praying the Thanksgiving Examen, one is affirmed, even in the midst of difficulty, that the believer’s fundamental attitude is one of trust and hope.¹⁶¹ Even in the most desolate of times, one can find at least one thing in the course of the day to be grateful for.

The Thanksgiving Examen can be used effectively communally as well. When the process is shared in a group it can serve to build up trust, hope and mutual support among group members.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Louis M. Savary, S.J. *The Thanksgiving Examen*. Review for Religious 39, 1980, 241-242.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 242.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 243.

The Family Examen

While little has been written about the practice of the Examen within a family context, it can become a cherished family ritual of prayer and sharing. For the last several years my husband and I have introduced the Examen as part of our evening meal with our four children (ages 13, 10, 7 and 4). Using a very simple adaptation of the Examen we pose these two questions: What have you been most grateful for today? What have you been least grateful today?¹⁶³

The sharing of our responses to these two questions becomes the material for our dinner table discussion. Each member is given their turn to respond to the questions with the other members of the family listening respectfully (on this point we try!). What has struck me about the practice of the Examen in this context is the enthusiasm with which the children participate. It is often the children that initiate the sharing before the adults. It has certainly shaped our dinnertime sharing into something different from what it would be without the focus of these particular questions. It places our day's experience in the context of gratitude and allows us to share both the parts that have positive meaning for us and those that were difficult. It often surprises me what each of the children will choose to share, often not what I thought would have been the focus of the sharing at all. It encourages us to listen to each other, and at times to be challenged to listen more than superficially. It also helps the children to learn to get in touch with their inner experience, and to learn to share that with others. It is the hope that with time, this type of reflection

¹⁶³ Found in Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant-Linn, and Matthew Linn, S.J., Sleeping With Bread: Holding what Gives You Life. New York: Paulist Press, 1995, 6.

will be second nature to each of us and that the experience will deepen for the children as they grow to adulthood.

Over time, patterns emerge about what it is we are grateful for and what it is we are least grateful for. On one occasion, my oldest son pointed out to his father that “his most grateful thing was always about our family and his least grateful thing was always about work.” He had clearly identified the pattern that had emerged as my husband was dealing with being in a job that no longer brought him life.

It is difficult to measure the benefit of practicing a family Examen, yet it has proven to be a cherished part of our family life. I believe it has helped to foster a sense of gratitude in each of us. My hope is that it prompts us to be more aware of the presence of God in our daily activities and encourages us to share that awareness with others, even when it is difficult to do so. One of the benefits of doing the Examen communally is that we are encouraged to do it even when, left to our own devices, we would “skip it”. This feeling often comes at a time when there is something difficult that has surfaced. We resist “conscious acceptance” of our experience. Taking our turn around the table at such a time can be a source of healing and insight.

Use of Imagery

For individuals who find it easy to pray imaginatively, to pray visually with scenes from Scripture, the use of imagery in the practice of the Examen can often be helpful.

Especially when we are praying with the content of our day (“practical survey of actions”), different ways of visualizing how this is presented can be of help.

John Govan S.J. uses the image of a train moving forward to visually represent the different events of one’s day for consideration. It is Jesus who stops the train at certain points during our day for us to reflect on.¹⁶⁴ The events flow by as a kind of stream of consciousness, and rather than the “train” stopping at our whim, we relinquish control and allow the Lord to judge what is to be prayerfully considered.

An image that I have sometimes employed in the use of the Examen is that of a movie theatre. I visually enter the theatre with the Lord. As we sit down to enjoy the film, it is the events of my day that are flashed on the screen. A gentle nudge from the Lord, a squeeze of the hand, alerts me to consider one event more carefully and the image freezes as I prayerfully pay attention to what has happened. Sometimes there will be a sense of peace that I appropriately responded to the Spirit. At other times I sense that I became distracted or was not able to respond appropriately because of my own limitations at the time. I reflect on this. The presence of the Lord, visualized as sitting beside me in the theatre, is never angry or disappointed, just lovingly present.

Some individuals find that this type of imagery is very useful to help them employ the Examen. Others may find it a distraction. It is important to find a method that draws you closer to the Lord, rather than having the method construct barriers of its own. Since it is a

¹⁶⁴ John Govan, S.J., *The Examen: A Tool for Holistic Growth*. Review for Religious 43, 3, 1986, 394-401.

daily practice and there may be a tendency toward monotony, it is sometimes helpful to find new ways of approaching it, alone or communally, with different visual images or by reading through the traditional steps. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will prompt us to experience the Examen in a completely new way. As the Lord draws us closer to Him, he can overcome obstacles to invite us to experience Him in a new way.

I would like to end with an excerpt of an account of the experience of a woman religious who speaks honestly about rediscovering the practice of the Examen in her own prayer life:

I have resented the Examen as an 'obligation to review the day'. At the end of the day, my thoughts might be, "I have lived this day, I have done my best. Now I want to be free of religious duties. Let me simply sleep." If I then remind myself of the 'review', the thought comes as a burden. Then my failure to do it spoils the last few minutes of the day before I sleep.

Fortunately for me, M. acted as my spiritual companion in discussing the Examen. I told her of my resentment, resistance. She spoke of her own experience in which nightly reflection on the day becomes a sort of detective exercise in which she identifies the Holy God in ordinary, ever-day living. Her evident enthusiasm made me curious again about the Examen.

So I began to practice the Examen again, but using the metaphor of the 'river of grace'. I stand or drift, or I may be buffeted about in that river. Whatever happens, the context of life is God's grace. This metaphor has freed my recollection considerably. I am no longer as threatened by the thought of uncovering my failures when I think of myself as already positioned in the river of grace. Also I realize that I cannot make a complete (or perfect) review because the river of grace, deep and wide, holds mysteries which are beyond me.

I have a freedom now which I had not taken to myself before. Usually, I look back on the day before on the following morning. I may work with only one particular event, or I may try to recall most of the events of the day. It is important that I start with the sense of my feet being in the river of grace.

When I search for God in my life, looking for clues like detective, I can be surprised. I find evidence which I have been missing. When I think through

events, I can see evidence of my own self-deception. This is usually a surprise, too.

I believe that the Examen is a very important practice, as Ignatius taught. My experiences in daily life provide a unique and convincing body of evidence. I need to attend to this evidence. I want to persist in the Examen. I know that I have tried before, but this time the 'river of grace' metaphor offers me hope.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Used with permission.. Beryl Stone, SSJD. Prayer Companion Workshop, 2004.

Conclusion: Finding God in All Things

We know that Father Ignatius had received from God the exceptional grace of being able without effort to pray and repose in the contemplation of the Most Holy Trinity ... a contemplation which was often given him, but especially, and then almost continually, in the last years of his pilgrimage. By a great privilege, Father Ignatius was acquainted with this manner of prayer to an eminent degree. To this was added, that in all things, actions, conversations, he felt and contemplated the presence of God and the attraction of spiritual things. He was a contemplative in action, something he expressed habitually in the words: we must find God in all things.¹⁶⁶

Jerónimo Nadal's observations point out that Ignatius, toward the end of his life, was able to reconcile the struggle between prayer and activity by embodying a type of spirituality where activity *becomes* a spiritual expression. In this way, zealous devotion to service "will never be a theft from God, but the very breathing of (our) love."¹⁶⁷

Can the same be true of us? Indeed one of the most common spiritual obstacles experienced today is the struggle to remain connected to the Holy in the midst of everyday bustle and activity. Can the Examen help to nurture in us the grace to be able to find God in all things? Ignatius seems to embody that possibility. If we are able to practice the awareness of God's presence and the discernment of spiritual movements that are at the heart of the Examen, the Examen will remain an empty practice unless it culminates in some sort of **action**. Are we making better choices? Are we more loving? More just? More compassionate? Does the practice of the Examen transform our

¹⁶⁶ William Young S.J. (trans.) Finding God In All Things: Essays in Ignatian Spirituality. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958, 23.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

relationships, our acts of service, our moments of communion with God? If so, then we are moving toward an authentic practice of the Examen.

It is all too easy to find ourselves striving towards an active spirituality where “all is prayer” only to discover that in actuality, nothing is prayer. We become lured by our own busy-ness, which most often consists of well-intentioned areas of service, only to discover that we have become disconnected from the Source. That the Examen is recommended to us by Ignatius as (at least) a daily practice is significant. It is a way for us to check in and make ourselves available to God. It is a decision to bring the events of our day before the Lord so that His grace can “radically transform its meaning and significance for us.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, the Examen is a commitment to reflection and discipline. It is also a choice to make us available to the workings of the Holy Spirit in generosity, intimacy and love.

To be sure, anyone who has attempted to integrate the Examen as part of their spiritual life will be aware of the challenges it presents. To consistently remain focused on areas of awareness and discernment without tending toward a scrupulous focus on our failings is not always easy. The disposition to allow the Holy Spirit to lead the reflective process and not our own will, requires a constant effort. Consciously accepting our own experience before God, truly and authentically, is perhaps the biggest challenge of all. Knowing that the Examen is a daily invitation to deeper intimacy with the Lord is what brings us back to it again and again.

¹⁶⁸ Govan, 319.

The Examen, as a spiritual practice, has relevance today more than ever. At a time where the Church is suffering from a crisis of credibility,¹⁶⁹ as members of this Church we are urged toward greater authenticity. The Examen offers us a tool to this end. We have yet to explore the vast array of applications that the Examen might have in our current culture. Communal adaptations of the Examen for use in small Christian communities, Parish Councils, Pastoral Teams, Marriage Enrichment programs are but a few possibilities. Healing ministries could be aided by the use of the Examen as a way to offer current experiences (which often mirror the pain of past hurts) over to the transformative power of God. The Final Examen,¹⁷⁰ the process of imagining yourself on your deathbed and doing a review of your life, can be of value to many, including the terminally or chronically ill.

Even the technology that can sometimes be an obstacle for our spiritual growth can be used as a tool to enrich us. The Irish Jesuits have produced a website where one is led through a process of prayer by text gently appearing on the computer screen. It has many of the components of the Examen along with an opportunity to pray with a daily scripture passage.¹⁷¹ This is a surprisingly effective form of prayer that can offer an opportunity for prayer to employees at their workstations, students, shut-ins in a way that uses technology as a bridge to spiritual experience.

¹⁶⁹ John P. McIntyre S.J., *Accountability Before God: The Examen*. In Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, O.P., *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990, 189.

¹⁷⁰ Linn, 42-43.

¹⁷¹ Sacred Space www.jesuit.ie/prayer.

By the example of Ignatius, we are encouraged to offer ourselves generously to the Lord in service, and to reflect on our thoughts, words and deeds through regular use of the

Examen. Our prayer may be to heed his advice:

(They) should frequently be encouraged to seek God, our Lord in all things, setting aside, as far as it is possible, all love of created things, placing it in their Creator, loving Him in all things and all things in Him, according to his most holy and divine will.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Young, 20.

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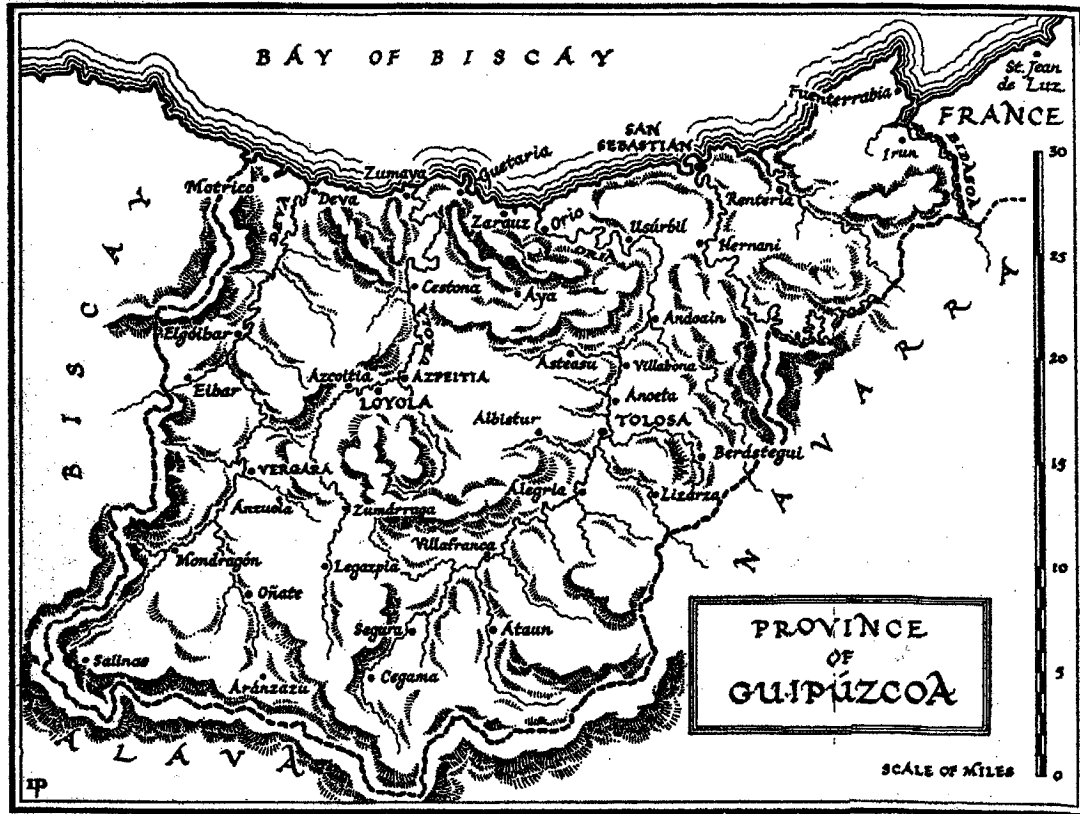
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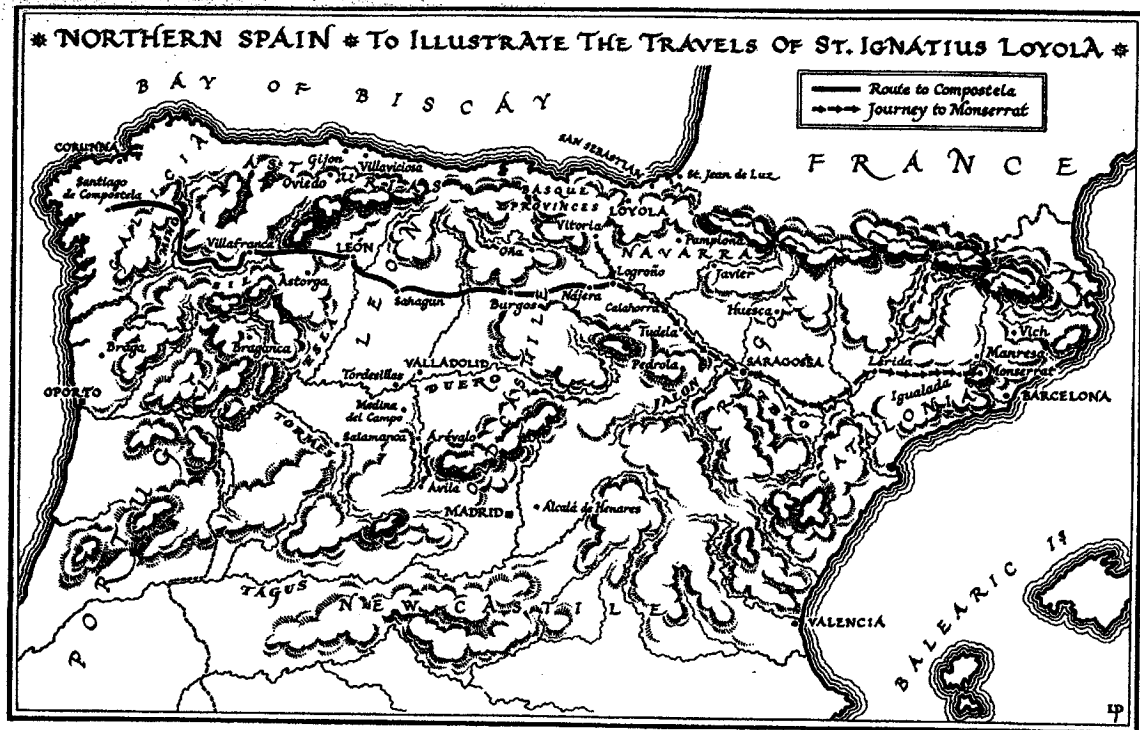
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APPENDIX A



From: Saint Ignatius Loyola
 The Pilgrim Years: 1491-1538
 James Broderick SJ
 San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998

APPENDIX B



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APPENDIX C



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APPENDIX D



From: Saint Ignatius Loyola
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Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.
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Appendix F

43. METHOD OF MAKING THE GENERAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

There are five points in this method

1. The first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the favors received.
2. The second point is to ask for grace to know my sins and to rid myself of them.
3. The third point is to demand an account of my soul from the time of rising up to the present examination. I should go over one hour after another, one period after another. The thoughts should be examined first, then the words, and finally, the deeds in the same order as was explained under the Particular Examination of Conscience.
4. The fourth point will be to ask pardon of God our Lord for my faults.
5. The fifth point will be to resolve to amend with the grace of God. Close with an *Our Father*.

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Appendix G

24. DAILY PARTICULAR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

There are three different times of the day and two examinations involved in this practice

First, in the morning, immediately on rising, one should resolve to guard carefully against the particular sin or defect with regard to which he seeks to correct or improve himself.

25. Secondly, after dinner, he should ask God our Lord for the grace he desires, that is, to recall how often he has fallen into the particular sin or defect, and to avoid it for the future.

Then follows the first examination. He should demand an account of himself with regard to the particular point which he has resolved to watch in order to correct himself and improve. Let him go over the single hours or periods from the time he arose to the hour and moment of the present examination, and in the first line of the figure given below, make a mark for each time that he has fallen into the particular sin or defect. Then he is to renew his resolution, and strive to amend during the time till the second examination is to be made.

26. Thirdly, after supper, he should make a second examination, going over as before each single hour, commencing with the first examination, and going up to the present one. In the second line of the figure given below, let him make a mark for each time he has fallen into the particular fault or sin.

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Appendix H

27. FOUR ADDITIONAL DIRECTIONS

These are to serve as a help to more ready removal of the particular sin or fault

1. Every time one falls into the particular sin or fault, let him place his hand upon his breast, and be sorry for having fallen. He can do this even in the presence of many others without their perceiving what he is doing.

28. 2. Since the first line of the figure to which *G* is prefixed represents the first examination of conscience, and the second one, the second examination, he should observe at night whether there is an improvement from the first line to the second, that is, from the first examination to the second.

29. 3. The second day should be compared with the first, that is, the two examinations of the present day with the two of the preceding day. Let him observe if there is an improvement from one day to another.

30. 4. Let him compare one week with another and observe whether he has improved during the present week as compared with the preceding.

31. Note

It should be noted that in the figure below the first *G* is larger, and signifies Sunday. The second is smaller, and stands for Monday, the third for Tuesday, the fourth for Wednesday, and so forth.

G

G

G

G

G

G

G

G

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Appendix I (1 of 3)

32. GENERAL EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

The purpose of this examination of conscience is to purify the soul and to aid us to improve our confessions

I presuppose that there are three kinds of thoughts in my mind, namely: one which is strictly my own, and arises wholly from my own free will; two others which come from without, the one from the good spirit, and the other from the evil one.

33. *Thoughts*

There are two ways of meriting from evil thoughts that come from without:

1. When a thought of committing a mortal sin comes to my mind which I resist at once, and thus overcome it.

2. When the same evil thought comes to me, and I resist it, but it returns again and again, and I always resist it till it is conquered.

This second way is more meritorious than the first.

3. It is a venial sin if the same thought of sinning mortally comes to mind and for a short time one pays heed to it, or receives some sense pleasure, or is somewhat negligent in rejecting it.

4. There are two ways of sinning mortally:

1. The first is to consent to the evil thought with the intention of carrying it out, or of doing so if one can.

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2. The second way of sinning mortally is actually carrying out the sin to which consent was given.

This is a greater sin for three reasons: 1. Because of the greater duration; 2. Because of the greater intensity; 3. Because of the greater harm done to both persons.

38. *Words*

(One may also offend God in word in many ways: by blasphemy, by swearing.) One must not swear, neither by the creature nor by the Creator, unless it is according to truth, out of necessity, and with reverence.

By necessity I mean that the truth I swear to is not just some true statement I choose to confirm by oath, but one of real importance, either for the welfare of the soul or of the body, or with regard to temporal interests.

By reverence I mean that when the name of the Creator and Lord is mentioned, one acts with consideration and devoutly manifests due honor and respect.

3. It must be noted that in idle oaths we sin more grievously when we swear by the Creator than when we swear by a creature. However, to swear as one ought, according to truth, out of necessity, with reverence, is more difficult when we swear by a creature than when we swear by the Creator. There are three reasons for this:

1. When we wish to take an oath by some creature, the intention to call upon its name does not make us so attentive and cautious to speak the truth, or to con-

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Appendix I (2 of 3)

firm it by oath only if necessary, as we would be with the intention to use the name of the Creator and Lord of all.

2. When we swear by the name of some creature, it is not so easy to observe reverence and respect for the Creator as when in swearing we use the name of the Creator and Lord Himself. For the intention of using the name of God our Lord carries along with it a greater respect and reverence than the intention to use the name of a creature.

Hence, those who are perfect should be allowed to swear by a creature rather than those who are imperfect. The perfect, due to constant contemplation and the enlightenment of the understanding, consider, meditate, and ponder more that God our Lord is in every creature by His essence, power, and presence. Therefore, when they swear by a creature, they are more apt to be disposed to show respect and reverence to the Creator and Lord than those who are imperfect.

3. In frequent swearing by a creature, idolatry is more to be feared in those who are imperfect than in those who are perfect.

40. (Among other sins of the tongue that we must avoid are idle words.) No idle word should be uttered. I understand a word to be idle when it serves no good purpose, either for myself or for another, and was not intended to do so. Hence, words are never idle when spoken for any useful purpose, or when meant to serve the good of one's own soul or that of another, of the body or of temporal possessions. Nor are they idle because one speaks of matters that do not pertain to his

state, for example, if a religious speaks of wars or of commerce. In all we have mentioned, there will be merit if what is said is directed to some good purpose; there will be sin if it is directed to an evil purpose, or if engaged in for no good end.

41. (Lying, false testimony, detraction are also sins of the tongue.) Nothing should be said to lessen the good name of another, or to complain about him. For if I reveal a hidden mortal sin of another, I sin mortally; if I reveal a hidden venial sin, I sin venially; if his defect, I manifest my own.

If, however, my intention is good, there are two ways in which it is permissible to speak of the sin or fault of another:

1. When a sin is public, as in the case of a woman openly leading a shameless life, or of a sentence passed in court, or of a commonly known error that infects the minds of those with whom we live.

2. When a hidden sin is revealed to some one with the intention that he help the one who is in sin to rise from his state. But then there must be some grounds or probable reasons for believing that he will be able to help him.

(Among sins of the tongue may be considered ridicule, insults, and other similar sins, which the one giving the Exercises may discuss if he judges it necessary.)

Appendix I (3 of 3)

42. *Deeds*

The subject matter for examination will be the Ten Commandments, the laws of the Church, the recommendations of superiors. All transgressions of obligations arising from any of these three groups are more or less grievous sins according to the gravity of the matter.

By recommendations of superiors is meant crusade indults and other indulgences, such as those for peace on condition of confession and reception of Holy Communion. For to be the cause of one acting against such pious recommendations and regulations of superiors, or to do so oneself, is no small sin.

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313. RULES FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

I

Rules for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul and for recognizing those that are good to admit them, and those that are bad, to reject them. These rules are more suited to the first week

314. 1. In the case of those who go from one mortal sin to another, the enemy is ordinarily accustomed to propose apparent pleasures. He fills their imagination with sensual delights and gratifications, the more readily to keep them in their vices and increase the number of their sins.

With such persons the good spirit uses a method which is the reverse of the above. Making use of the light of reason, he will rouse the sting of conscience and fill them with remorse.

315. 2. In the case of those who go on earnestly striving to cleanse their souls from sin and who seek to rise in the service of God our Lord to greater perfection, the method pursued is the opposite of that mentioned in the first rule.

Then it is characteristic of the evil spirit to harass with anxiety, to afflict with sadness, to raise obstacles backed by fallacious reasonings that disturb the soul. Thus he seeks to prevent the soul from advancing.

It is characteristic of the good spirit, however, to give courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations,

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and peace. This He does by making all easy, by removing all obstacles so that the soul goes forward in doing good.

316. 3. SPIRITUAL CONSOLATION. I call it consolation when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord, and as a consequence, can love no creature on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all. It is likewise consolation when one sheds tears that move to the love of God, whether it be because of sorrow for sins, or because of the sufferings of Christ our Lord, or for any other reason that is immediately directed to the praise and service of God. Finally, I call consolation every increase of faith, hope, and love, and all interior joy that invites and attracts to what is heavenly and to the salvation of one's soul by filling it with peace and quiet in its Creator and Lord.

317. 4. SPIRITUAL DESOLATION. I call desolation what is entirely the opposite of what is described in the third rule, as darkness of soul, turmoil of spirit, inclination to what is low and earthly, restlessness rising from many disturbances and temptations which lead to want of faith, want of hope, want of love. The soul is wholly slothful, tepid, sad, and separated, as it were, from its Creator and Lord. For just as consolation is the opposite of desolation, so the thoughts that spring from consolation are the opposite of those that spring from desolation.

318. 5. In time of desolation we should never make any change, but remain firm and constant in the resolu-

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tion and decision which guided us the day before the desolation, or in the decision to which we adhered in the preceding consolation. For just as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us, so in desolation the evil spirit guides and counsels. Following his counsels we can never find the way to a right decision.

319. 6. Though in desolation we must never change our former resolutions, it will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation. We can insist more upon prayer, upon meditation, and on much examination of ourselves. We can make an effort in a suitable way to do some penance.

320. 7. When one is in desolation, he should be mindful that God has left him to his natural powers to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy in order to try him. He can resist with the help of God, which always remains, though he may not clearly perceive it. For though God has taken from him the abundance of fervor and overflowing love and the intensity of His favors, nevertheless, he has sufficient grace for eternal salvation.

321. 8. When one is in desolation, he should strive to persevere in patience. This reacts against the vexations that have overtaken him. Let him consider, too, that consolation will soon return, and in the meantime, he must diligently use the means against desolation which have been given in the sixth rule.

322. 9. The principal reasons why we suffer from desolation are three:

The first is because we have been tepid and slothful

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or negligent in our exercises of piety, and so through our own fault spiritual consolation has been taken away from us.

The second reason is because God wishes to try us, to see how much we are worth, and how much we will advance in His service and praise when left without the generous reward of consolations and signal favors.

The third reason is because God wishes to give us a true knowledge and understanding of ourselves, so that we may have an intimate perception of the fact that it is not within our power to acquire and attain great devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation; but that all this is the gift and grace of God our Lord. God does not wish us to build on the property of another, to rise up in spirit in a certain pride and vainglory and attribute to ourselves the devotion and other effects of spiritual consolation.

323. 10. When one enjoys consolation, let him consider how he will conduct himself during the time of ensuing desolation, and store up a supply of strength as defense against that day.

324. 11. He who enjoys consolation should take care to humble himself and lower himself as much as possible. Let him recall how little he is able to do in time of desolation, when he is left without such grace or consolation.

On the other hand, one who suffers desolation should remember that by making use of the sufficient grace offered him, he can do much to withstand all his enemies. Let him find his strength in his Creator and Lord.

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325. 12. The enemy conducts himself as a woman. He is a weakling before a show of strength, and a tyrant if he has his will. It is characteristic of a woman in a quarrel with a man to lose courage and take to flight if the man shows that he is determined and fearless. However, if the man loses courage and begins to flee, the anger, vindictiveness, and rage of the woman surge up and know no bounds. In the same way, the enemy becomes weak, loses courage, and turns to flight with his seductions as soon as one leading a spiritual life faces his temptations boldly, and does exactly the opposite of what he suggests. However, if one begins to be afraid and to lose courage in temptations, no wild animal on earth can be more fierce than the enemy of our human nature. He will carry out his perverse intentions with consummate malice.

326. 13. Our enemy may also be compared in his manner of acting to a false lover. He seeks to remain hidden and does not want to be discovered. If such a lover speaks with evil intention to the daughter of a good father, or to the wife of a good husband, and seeks to seduce them, he wants his words and solicitations kept secret. He is greatly displeased if his evil suggestions and depraved intentions are revealed by the daughter to her father, or by the wife to her husband. Then he readily sees he will not succeed in what he has begun. In the same way, when the enemy of our human nature tempts a just soul with his wiles and seductions, he earnestly desires that they be received secretly and kept secret. But if one manifests them to a confessor, or to some other spiritual person who

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understands his deceits and malicious designs, the evil one is very much vexed. For he knows that he cannot succeed in his evil undertaking, once his evident deceits have been revealed.

327. 14. The conduct of our enemy may also be compared to the tactics of a leader intent upon seizing and plundering a position he desires. A commander and leader of an army will encamp, explore the fortifications and defenses of the stronghold, and attack at the weakest point. In the same way, the enemy of our human nature investigates from every side all our virtues, theological, cardinal, and moral. Where he finds the defenses of eternal salvation weakest and most deficient, there he attacks and tries to take us by storm.

328. RULES FOR DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

II

Further rules for understanding the different movements produced in the soul. They serve for a more accurate discernment of spirits and are more suitable for the second week

329. 1. It is characteristic of God and His Angels, when they act upon the soul, to give true happiness and spiritual joy, and to banish all the sadness and disturbances which are caused by the enemy.

It is characteristic of the evil one to fight against such happiness and consolation by proposing fallacious reasonings, subtilties, and continual deceptions.

330. 2. God alone can give consolation to the soul without any previous cause. It belongs solely to the Creator to come into a soul, to leave it, to act upon it, to draw it wholly to the love of His Divine Majesty. I said without previous cause, that is, without any preceding perception or knowledge of any subject by which a soul might be led to such a consolation through its own acts of intellect and will.

331. 3. If a cause precedes, both the good angel and the evil spirit can give consolation to a soul, but for a quite different purpose. The good angel consoles for the progress of the soul, that it may advance and rise to what is more perfect. The evil spirit consoles for purposes that are the contrary, and that afterwards he might draw the soul to his own perverse intentions and wickedness.

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332. 4. It is a mark of the evil spirit to assume the appearance of an angel of light. He begins by suggesting thoughts that are suited to a devout soul, and ends by suggesting his own. For example, he will suggest holy and pious thoughts that are wholly in conformity with the sanctity of the soul. Afterwards, he will endeavor little by little to end by drawing the soul into his hidden snares and evil designs.

333. 5. We must carefully observe the whole course of our thoughts. If the beginning and middle and end of the course of thoughts are wholly good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they are from the good angel. But the course of thoughts suggested to us may terminate in something evil, or distracting, or less good than the soul had formerly proposed to do. Again, it may end in what weakens the soul, or disquiets it; or by destroying the peace, tranquillity, and quiet which it had before, it may cause disturbance to the soul. These things are a clear sign that the thoughts are proceeding from the evil spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal salvation.

334. 6. When the enemy of our human nature has been detected and recognized by the trail of evil marking his course and by the wicked end to which he leads us, it will be profitable for one who has been tempted to review immediately the whole course of the temptation. Let him consider the series of good thoughts, how they arose, how the evil one gradually attempted to make him step down from the state of spiritual delight and joy in which he was, till finally he drew him to his wicked designs. The purpose of this review

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is that once such an experience has been understood and carefully observed, we may guard ourselves for the future against the customary deceits of the enemy.

335. 7. In souls that are progressing to greater perfection, the action of the good angel is delicate, gentle, delightful. It may be compared to a drop of water penetrating a sponge.

The action of the evil spirit upon such souls is violent, noisy, and disturbing. It may be compared to a drop of water falling upon a stone.

In souls that are going from bad to worse, the action of the spirits mentioned above is just the reverse. The reason for this is to be sought in the opposition or similarity of these souls to the different kinds of spirits. When the disposition is contrary to that of the spirits, they enter with noise and commotion that are easily perceived. When the disposition is similar to that of the spirits, they enter silently, as one coming into his own house when the doors are open.

336. 8. When consolation is without previous cause, as was said, there can be no deception in it, since it can proceed from God our Lord only. But a spiritual person who has received such a consolation must consider it very attentively, and must cautiously distinguish the actual time of the consolation from the period which follows it. At such a time the soul is still fervent and favored with the grace and aftereffects of the consolation which has passed. In this second period the soul frequently forms various resolutions and plans which are not granted directly by God our Lord. They may come from our own reasoning on the relations of

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our concepts and on the consequences of our judgments, or they may come from the good or evil spirit. Hence, they must be carefully examined before they are given full approval and put into execution.