

EXAMEN



Based on an original article by
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This guide to the Examen is an abbreviation of an article by Father George Aschenbrenner. The present format was prepared by Father John English and his team at Guelph and has been further amended by members of the British Province of the Society of Jesus. Fathers Aschenbrenner and English have kindly given their consent to this reprint.

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ANOTHER LOOK AT THE EXAMEN

THE FATHER DRAWS US

'No one can come to me

unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me.'

(John 6:44)

We are aware that the Father is continually drawing each one of us to Himself in and through Christ. We experience his action in our feelings, moods, impulses and desires.

God reveals Himself in our feelings as much as He does in our clear and distinct ideas. If we want to find God more intimately we must let Him draw us at the core of our being, which means becoming more aware of our feelings. Here we recognise God's ceaseless invitation to come closer, to be more like Him, to be at one with Him. We are also conscious of the resistance to Him, which arises from sin in ourselves and in the world about us.

Which of my feelings and moods are leading me to God ?

Which of my feelings and moods are leading me away from Him ?

FEELINGS ARE IMPORTANT

We are not talking about feelings on the surface, but about movements deep in our hearts, where God has placed His Word.

If we stay away from the depths where we are truly ourselves, we shall miss much that the Spirit is saying to us. At the level of our deeper and more lasting feelings we discover ourselves and our real relationship with God. We see what has to be faced, understood, decided and acted upon.

There are times when each of us has to face such questions as:

Is God real ?

What does Jesus mean to me ?

The answers we give from the heart make us more mature and give us a clearer idea of our identity and our relationship with God.

Some moments of renewed conviction can be described as a deep-felt, personal experience of faith. These are times when we surrender to God. To begin with there may be fear, but peace and joy eventually tell me that God makes His home in me and I make my home in Him.

I have to learn to take each present experience and to place it at a level where I am trying to live out my complete surrender to God. If my present pre-

occupations fit into the deeper attitude of surrender there will be a sense of harmony, peace and joy. If I experience disturbance, anxiety or sadness I am not at home with God and I am going in the wrong direction.

We have to be in touch with our feelings in order to sort them out and avoid being blown about by them. The Examen is a good way of knowing my true self and after the Eucharist it provides one of the best opportunities for a daily, intimate meeting with Christ.

THE REAL GOAL OF THE EXAMEN

A DISCERNING HEART

God is drawing each one of us to Himself in a unique and intimate way. The purpose of the Examen is to recognize this fact and to see how I am responding. When I am aware of my feelings I can discern two spontaneous forces within me: good and evil.

The Examen is a daily, prayerful exercise in discernment, helping me to respond to God's loving invitation in all my daily activities. It helps me to find God in all things. The Examen is not primarily concerned with good and bad actions, but rather with the impulses that underlie them.

In our deeper feelings
the Father draws me to Himself
while sinful nature and a sinful world
take me away from the Father.

I can become increasingly sensitive to the quality of my new relationship with the Father, whose call can take a new form at different stages of my life.

Over the years I have come to know God's special ways of drawing me to Himself and to be aware of my responses. I see how my life has been shaped by this interplay of call and answer. Each day the Father is asking me to deepen and develop my true identity as a companion of Jesus; not any companion of Jesus, but the companion of Jesus that I am at this moment.

EXAMEN and PRAYER

In countless ways God reveals Himself and His wonderful plans for all humankind in Christ. In prayer I experience His personal challenge to me. Examen is prayer; it is a preparation for other forms of prayer and flows naturally from them; it helps me to sense God's action and to find Him not only in times of prayer, but in every incident of my life.

THE SHAPE OF THE EXAMEN

I THANKSGIVING

'All that I have is yours' (John 17:10)

Examen is prayer and every prayer we make through Jesus Christ; cut off from Him we can do nothing. The stronger my faith the greater my sense of emptiness and of God's goodness. Gratitude for God's love-in-deeds was a powerful element in the life of St Ignatius. I can remember the sweep of the Exercises and savour my last retreat. I can be thankful:

For the covenant: God's irrevocable gift of Himself to me in Christ; His gift of everyone as a brother and sister.

For myself: chosen with these qualities and failings in Christ.

For everything: even the harsh and painful aspects of life which lead me to the Father through the Cross and Resurrection of His Son.

Thanksgiving will help me to discover God's daily gifts and gradually to recognize that all is gift:

What have I got to be grateful for today ?

How much do I take for granted ?

What has made me ungrateful, dissatisfied, frustrated ?

Am I becoming more grateful and contented ?

II PRAYER FOR THE LIGHT

‘The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything.’ (John 14:26)

Only the Holy Spirit can help me to know myself as a son/daughter of the Father and a companion of Jesus. I need to have my eyes opened: I need light to see whether my gratitude is in proportion to the worth of so many gifts. The Holy Spirit teaches me each day about Christ, about my life in Christ and about my use and acceptance of gifts. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal.5:2).

III EXAMINATION

Too much attention to our own victories and failures can make us self-absorbed and confirm us in the illusion that we manage our own lives. Examination is rather a question of asking how I respond to God’s loving action in my life:

How was I drawn to God today: a friend, an event, a book, the beauty of nature ?

Have I learnt anything about God and His ways: in ordinary occasions, spare moments ?

Did I meet Him in: fears, joys, work, misunderstandings, weariness, suffering ?

Did His Word come alive in: prayer, scriptures, liturgy ?

Did I bring Christ to my community ? Did they bring Christ to me ?

Have I been a sign of God's presence and love to the people I met today ?

Did I go out to: the lonely, the sorrowful, the discouraged, the needy ?

Was I aware of God's work in my own locality, my country, in other nations of the world, in the Church at large ?

Have I had a keener sense of being loved, of sinfulness, of desire to give back what I have received, of dependence ?

Is there some part of my life still untouched by Jesus Christ and where He is calling me to a change of heart ?

IV SORROW

A true awareness of my sinfulness is still a gift granted in love by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I can express sorrow for the ways in which I have failed to respond to His love at work in me. This can lead to:

Wonder at constantly being brought home.

Joy and gratitude because I share in the victory of Christ.

Mistrust of self and trust in God.

Serene acceptance of my weakness.

Conviction that I am being converted from a sinner into a son/daughter of God.

V HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Gifts in the past and gifts in the future; all the meetings and events of the next few hours will be full of gifts and full of their Giver. How do I face the future?

With apathy, distaste, fear, despondency? Which parts of my life particularly call for the Lord's healing and protection? The more I trust in God and allow Him to lead me the more I experience hope in Him, who raises me up from weakness, poverty and pain to the joy of His Resurrection.

**'I forget the past and strain ahead
for what is still to come.
I am racing for the finish,
for the prize
to which God calls us upwards
to receive in Christ Jesus.'**

(Phil. 3:14)

Further copies of this guide are available from
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