

103. Examination of Conscience

By Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D.

1. To insure an orderly and progressive growth in the spiritual life, *we must know ourselves*. We have to consider our sins, our weak points, our evil tendencies, as well as the progress we have already made, the favorable results we have attained, and our inclinations to good. This knowledge of our interior state is obtained through the *examination of conscience*. The examen considered in this way becomes one of the most important exercises of the spiritual life, since its object is to help the soul to rid itself of everything that might obstruct or delay its journey to God, and to stimulate it to quicken its pace toward Him. Just as we cannot wage war with an unknown enemy, or make conquest of an unknown region, in the same way it is impossible to fight the evil in ourselves if we have not previously identified it. We can never attain sanctity if we have not looked for an efficacious means of acquiring it. In other words, the examination of conscience attains its end when the soul who has faithfully practiced this exercise can say to itself: these are the inclinations which I must watch more carefully to avoid falling into sin; these, the weak points which I must strengthen; these are the virtues that I must practice most of all. In this way the soul will be able to formulate practical, firm resolutions which will then become the special subject of its subsequent examinations.

It is clear that we must first recognize and combat any tendencies which could lead us to mortal sin, but then, those that could bring us to venial sin or to simple voluntary imperfections must be similarly treated. Everything that constitutes a deliberate fault must be progressively and energetically rooted out of the soul which aspires to divine union.

2. Instead of trying to seek out all the faults it has committed, the soul living an interior life—one we assume to be free by now from mortal sin—should fix its attention on the degree to which its faults have been voluntary, even in the case of slight imperfections, because it is these deliberate faults that present the greatest obstacle to spiritual progress and to union with God. The soul must carefully investigate the cause of and the motive for these failures. It must realize that while its exterior faults are of various kinds—faults against charity, for example, or patience, or obedience, or sincerity—all of them, nevertheless, have one and the same cause, one common root which may be, for example, pride or sloth. It is precisely against this root of our sins and imperfections that we must direct our efforts, not simply to lessen it by mortification, but rather to fight it directly by the increase of the opposite virtues in ourselves. In other words, we must struggle against our dominant passion or fault; this is very important, for by aiming to destroy the evil at its root, we eliminate at the same time many actual faults.

When the soul has reached the point where it no longer has to reproach itself for deliberate faults and imperfections, it should turn its attention to those failures of surprise or inadvertence from which it has not yet succeeded in freeing itself, in spite of its sincere and often renewed resolutions. In these cases the soul, besides continuing the struggle against the root of its faults, will find it very useful to continually reinforce its firm purpose to overcome self. The more determined the soul is to correct its faults, the less voluntary will those be which escape it. They grow slighter and slighter and are often only the residue or the purely natural movement of habits once contracted but now detested.

Another important point that must not be overlooked in the examination of conscience is the remembrance of our duty to sustain and guard the desire for sanctity and to enliven our determination to do always what is most pleasing to God; here is the heart of the spiritual life, of generosity. It is also an excellent method to examine ourselves from God's point of view instead of our own, to ask ourselves if God is pleased with us and how He will judge our conduct.

Text taken from [Divine Intimacy](#) (Baronius Press, 2015), pp. 292-294.