

DAY #39: Conference

PARTICULAR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE [SE#24-31]

We have discussed “examination” quite a bit, both in the context of preparation for confession, as well as a daily ‘general’ examination. Now we will examine – primarily following Fr. Fuentes’ work *The Particular Examination and Dominant Defect*¹ to go deeper into this important topic. This conference is divided into four parts:

1. Importance of our effort in the spiritual life
2. Some images of the “dominant defect”
3. The Particular Examination according to St. Ignatius (text from the exercises)
4. Fr. Fuentes on the Particular Examination (excerpt from his book on the same topic).

PART I – IMPORTANCE OF OUR EFFORT IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE***The Mystery of Freedom***

It is important for us to realize that we have a **role**, a duty, some work to do in our spiritual life. St. Maximilian Kolbe described it as a formula: “W” (God’s will) + “w” (my will) = S (sanctity/holiness).

- W (God’s will):
 - God wants to save us, this is clear in Holy Scripture: *-This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who **desires everyone** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* (1 Tm 2:3-4)
- w: (our will) – What is our role?
 - Follow the commandments / go and sell to the poor / feed the hungry / celebrate the liturgy
 - St. Thomas’ sister once asked him, how to be a saint? He replied: **will** it, i.e. **want** it / **desire** it (or “choose” it).
 - St. Therese wrote in her act of merciful oblation: *“I **desire** to **accomplish** Your will perfectly and to reach the degree of glory You have prepared for me in Your Kingdom”*
 - **Side note** → this is why Marian Consecration is so important, we give our will to Mary, who is most closely united to Jesus’ will that is the same.
- this is something **personal**. Jesus calls us each. What is my response?
 - compare rich young man (Mt. 19) (follow the commandments; sell all you have) who then leaves and goes away sad.
 - Jesus to St. Matthew (“follow me”), who leaves everything to follow Him.

We have to do something (the mean between Pelagianism and quietism)

There have been varying heresies in the history of the Church – some “quietists” think the answer was to sit back and do nothing. Other (for example, Pelagius) think we can do *all* the work of sanctification by ourselves.

Seeking holiness – what does that mean? It is to *stay close* to Jesus – *remain in my love*. (cf. John 15)

But “how” do we *remain in His love*? Is this some sort of ABSTRACT thing?

¹ Available for purchase [here](#). *Catholic Voice* has a short video series on this work as well, the first video is [here](#).

False Idea: “just sit back and let God do the work” (without me, you can do ‘nothing’) – quietists.

But Jesus is constantly showing and telling us how to do things:

- His apostles to go 2 by 2, to stay in this place or that
- To do works of mercy
- “take this and eat”
- His entire life is **showing** His apostles, disciples, and us HOW TO LIVE
- Particularly on the cross (how to love – gift of self)

What is the measure?

In other words, how do I know, or how can I judge how I’m doing in the spiritual life?

- Is it based on my feelings?
- Or something else?

One of the great means for growing in holiness is the *Particular Examination of Conscience*. We will go into more details on this shortly, but first, let us consider the ‘what’ that we are to examine, that is, our ‘Dominant Defect’.

PART 2 - IMAGES OF THE “DOMINANT DEFECT”

The basic idea behind the dominant defect, is that we have a certain vice or defect, that is the driving factor for other sins. In other words, two people may commit the same sin, but for different reasons. So, the identification of the dominant defect is understanding the “**why**” of my sins. We have hopefully (particularly in week 1) seen some of our regular sins. But when we seek to find our dominant defect, we search for the underlying cause of sin that we may attack that directly.

Some thoughts to help us understand the work of fighting our ‘dominant defect’:

- Imagine uprooting a **huge tree**
 - If we cut down one little branch at a time with a pair of scissors, it would take forever. We want to go for the *root*.
- A deep festering, infected wound
 - Simply treating the outside, putting a band aid (this is not getting to the deep cause of the infection)
- We typically have a dominant defect that is the ‘source’ of our other problems:
 - E.g. perhaps two men commit similar sins of not accomplishing their responsibilities (e.g. caring for their children).
 - One is proud and decides it isn’t his job to do certain things.
 - One is lazy (sloth) and doesn’t want to work hard.
 - So we have to treat the **source**
 - *we will hopefully discover this more in these spiritual exercises

A Note on Conscience

We are talking about examining our conscience...but what is our “conscience”? We read from the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (16)

*In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged.⁽⁹⁾ **Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man.** There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.*

So we can say it is a **moral compass**, a compass that must be formed in accord with the Truth, a place where we are alone with God. As St. Augustine says in his *Confessions: Late have I loved you, Beauty so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! And behold, you were **within me** and I was without, and I sought you there, and I, though uncomely, rushed upon the comely things you have made. **You were with me, but I was not with you.***” (Confessions, Book X, ch. 27)

The **Catechism** emphasizes the importance of **examining our conscience**:

1779 *It is important for every person to be sufficiently **present to himself** in order to bear and follow the voice of his conscience. This requirement of **interiority** is all the more necessary as life often distracts us from any reflection, **self-examination** or introspection:*

(St. Augustine) *Return to your conscience, question it.... Turn inward, brethren, and in everything you do, see God as your witness.*

We read in Sacred Scripture:

(1 Tim 1:5) *...whereas the aim of our charge is **love** that issues from a pure heart and a **good conscience** and sincere faith.*

(2 Cor 13:5) **Examine** yourselves, to see whether you are holding to your faith. **Test** yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

The practice of regular examination of conscience is longstanding in the Church, and is a major part of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Hopefully, we have been practicing this, but if not, or we have started to slide, we will now take it up again.

Mt. 7:3-5 - ³*Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not **notice the log** in your own eye?* ⁴*Or how can you say to your neighbor,^[b] 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye?* ⁵*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.*

We can think of this exercise as “noticing the log in our own eye”. Let us see better how we can put the examination into practice. First, let us see the text St. Ignatius gives us [24-31] and then see Fr. Fuentes’ commentary.

PART 3- THE PARTICULAR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE IN THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

The following text is directly from St. Ignatius in the book of the Spiritual Exercises:

[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.

[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.
2. [28] 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.
3. [29] 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.
4. [30] 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

PART 4- THE PRACTICE OF THE PARTICULAR EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

(Excerpt from the Particular Examination of Conscience and Dominant Defect by Fr. Miguel Ángel Fuentes)

The Particular Examination of Conscience

The classics of Christian spirituality, beginning from the desert monks in the first centuries of our era, but especially starting from Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century, have considered daily work on

one well-established point in our spiritual or emotional life to be the most outstanding way to educate the will, that is, to acquire virtues, to uproot vices, and to correct defects.

1) Importance

I think that this is the most useful way a person can combat not only common defects, but also deeply rooted vices and even problems of addiction (provided that, in this case, it is done in conjunction with the necessary or appropriate therapies).

It seems to me that this method, which is at once simple but demanding, is most fitting for the one who wants to progress in the spiritual life. Moreover, it is absolutely indispensable for anyone who wants to resolve emotional conflicts. Each spiritual director—just like each therapist—is free to choose his own methods, and perhaps many of them do not like this one (“to each his own,” as the saying goes). Respecting the freedom of each one to choose for himself, I propose this instrument which has already given abundant spiritual and psychological results throughout the centuries.¹

Saint Ignatius himself, its great organizer and promoter, carefully practiced it. As Fr. Laínez reported to Fr. Polanco: Ignatius took “so much care of his conscience that each day he compared week with week, month with month, day with day, seeking daily to advance.”² Fr. Narciso Irala cites “Dr. Schleich, a Protestant, professor of the Faculty of Medicine at Berlin, [who] asserts even more. ‘I say with all assurance and conviction that with these norms and exercises in our hands we could even today transform our asylums, prisons, and mental institutions, and prevent the commitment of two thirds of the people who are today within their walls.’”³

This method is at once the measure of one’s will and productive of the will: “this is truly a control and stimulus to the will.”⁴ By this he means that it focuses a person’s attention and energies on one precise point, which increases the will’s capacity to perform acts that will culminate in the achievement of the desired goals.

It is a shame that so few people resort to this method, which is truly a walking stick for the journey in the formation of the will, for the effective uprooting of defects, and for growth in virtue. It’s a still greater shame that this is the sad reality that we observe in so many lay Catholics, men and women in religious life, and priests who, all the while knowing and being fully aware of its importance and necessity, nonetheless disregard it, perform it with amazing indifference, and even abandon it entirely—then they are surprised when they continue dragging their vices and defects with them or, even more simply, that their spiritual life is at a standstill!⁵

This is to be attributed to several factors: in part it is a result of the general abandonment of the spiritual life, both on the part of the faithful as well as the pastors. Likewise, it is owed in part to the prejudice against any serious spiritual project, and this examination is undoubtedly an essential element of a serious spiritual project. It’s also in part a consequence of ignorance regarding the examination’s nature and end. Indeed, as Casanovas points out, the examination “becomes a complicated and fastidious device, like a sort of spiritual penance,”⁶ when the reason for it is unknown.

2) What it consists of

The examination is at once both a “state” and an “operation of the spirit.” It is a state of the spirit in the sense that it is “a general disposition of man that makes him always and intensely interested in knowing, discerning, and perfecting the reactions produced in his soul when they arise.”⁷ Here we have the first benefit for a person with deeply rooted defects or emotional disorders: the person’s

attitude becomes an interest in changing, improving, and consciously living their life and its interior movements (which doesn't happen when a person is drowning in the well of unhinged emotions).

The examination is also an operation that “requires set times and precise rules for carrying it out. The operation without the spirit ends up becoming an annoying and sterile routine; the spirit without the operation has no practical efficacy.”⁸

Casanovas continues by pointing out that “there are two classes of people who err in the understanding of Saint Ignatius's examination: those who only seek to multiply the practical details, demanding their fulfillment in an almost superstitious way, and those who scorn it, taking it for a system of accountability, improper for spiritual affairs and one that weakens hearts. Both positions are equally superficial and unjust.”⁹

In short: the examination “seeks to keep the spirit awake and active at all hours of the day, so that man might achieve the end he has proposed for himself, in the way that is most serious and effective. This is what is primary and principal, since it is, we could say, the spiritual life of the soul. Whatever comes after this is secondary, no matter how important it might be, and it should be seen and treated as secondary by whoever wants to give things their proper value, without sinning either by excess or defect.”¹⁰

3) The way to practice it

The best way to practice this examination is the way that Saint Ignatius of Loyola explains it in his *Spiritual Exercises*.¹¹ The saint distributes the work into three fundamental moments:

1st: In the morning, after getting up, among the very first things that must be done, the goal of the work must be precisely determined, meaning, the resolution or personal spiritual project that is at hand, that is, that which must be corrected, uprooted, or acquired, be it this or that defect, this or that virtue, this or that habit or custom. It is an awareness of the work at hand. Moreover, every Christian knows that the success of the work depends on God's help, and must therefore also ask for that help in this first moment so that he can perform his work well. For those for whom this step is very difficult, it can be very beneficial for them to write a small prayer that makes mention of what they want to achieve and why. For example, for a person who wants to work on humility, the prayer could be something like this:

“My Lord Jesus Christ, I ask for Your light and grace in order that this day I might direct my efforts to obtain and grow in the virtue of humility. Today I want to be humble especially by practicing humility in words, both in those that I say of myself, as well in those that I use to speak of my neighbor. I want to live in humility in imitation of Your Most Gentle and Humble Heart. I ask for this grace through the intercession of your holy and humble Mother.”

Note that in this possible prayer, I have not only pointed out the virtue that is to be sought, but also the concrete act in which we want to incarnate or realize it today. Further on we will see the importance and the way to determine the possible concrete acts that we practice one by one.

2nd: At the middle of the day (before or after lunch, more or less, or whatever is easier in each case) two things should be done:



a) Recall how many times I have failed in the particular resolution (or if positive acts that were proposed were carried out). For this, it might be convenient to review what was done during the morning, hour by hour, or place by place, and to record it in a little book or notebook. Some complain about the “materiality” of this work, and prefer not to lower themselves to such a detail, limiting themselves to keeping their work in their memory. However, they forget that the end of this task is to overcome laxity and laziness. For this reason, I advise that the examination be made as it is indicated here, at least by those who suffer from emotional illnesses or have very deeply rooted defects. On the other hand, it is appropriate not only to observe and write down how many times one has fallen, but also the reasons why these falls occurred, in order to correct them and to build up prudence for the future.

b) In addition to this step, one should renew the resolution for the rest of the day. Saint Ignatius proposes the following method of writing down the falls (which each person can adjust as best suits them):

Day	1
m
a	
Day	2
m
a	
Day	3
m
a	
Day	4
m
a	
Day	5
m
a	
Day	6
m
a	
Day	7
m
a	

There are two lines for each day: on the first line, the falls (or, on the contrary, the fulfillment of acts that were proposed) of the morning should be noted, whereas those of the afternoon on the second. **3rd:** Lastly, as the day reaches its end, one should make the examination again, considering the falls that have occurred since mid-day until that moment. Record this on the corresponding line.

Saint Ignatius himself teaches that it is appropriate, when one realizes that he or she has failed in the resolution, to make some external sign, the meaning of which only the one with the resolution knows (for example, to gently beat the chest), in such a way as to manifest one's sorrow at having fallen. The same could be said when one performs an action that had been proposed.

Casanovas indicates that this being aware of the act itself by means of which one falls into their defect (that we had proposed to avoid) or practices a virtue (that we had proposed to practice) has great importance: "after said foresight [that is, of foreseeing the acts that we will do or avoid], there is nothing more important than being aware of one's own actions; likewise, there is nothing more fatal than being unaware of one's falls or falling into routine in one's actions... This being attentive to the falls must be entirely conscious, and that careful awareness must be manifested even with an external action, leading one to, for example, place one's hand on their chest. This external gesture indicates repentance, if one has fallen into their defect, and it is, furthermore, a renewal of the resolution not to fall. It is simply not possible for someone to get used to falling if they are aware of every time that they do, they repent after each slip-up, and they take strength from each fall in order to renew their spirit. If this renewal is made as is appropriate, perhaps the very slip itself will serve as a stimulus and incentive to take a step forward, as tends to happen in physical slips."¹²

This is not far from the so-called healthy rituals of those who fight against serious and deeply rooted problems.¹³

I am aware that some spiritual directors (often clumsy ones) consider this type of work as a mechanization of the spiritual life; nevertheless, even good psychologists consider it at least an effective method. It is beyond doubt that this examination, when poorly carried out, can convert spiritual or psychological work into a useless automation; this is why we warned about the need to create a spirit, since the letter without the spirit kills (cf. 2 Cor 3:6).

Furthermore, in the nightly examination, the person must examine if his or her conduct has improved when compared to that of the morning. Each day (or at least once a week) a comparison should be made between that day and other days, seeing if the behavior has improved or worsened. Then the person should look for the reasons why: if it has improved, the person should continue working in that direction; if it has worsened, the person will know how to correct those things that have made him or her slide back in the work. Lastly, every so often compare one week with the previous ones, in order to see if the goals are nearer to or further from being accomplished.

With a solid work by means of this method, in a few months even defects that have been deeply rooted for a long time can be corrected. However, this requires perseverance and tenacity, as well as sufficient humility in order to start anew when the person becomes aware that they have fallen again. The effects of this examination are so important for behavior that I firmly believe that this type of work must be incorporated even into the treatment of those people with addictions and emotional disorders.

4) Matter: What to examine?

In regards to the matter of the examination, it should always be something very precise and specific, as well as sufficiently known by the one who is doing the examination.

First and foremost, it must be some specific good. The main mistakes in work regarding the will (and also in other areas) come from proposing very general plans (for example, “to want to be humble,” or “to want to be generous”). Even if humility and generosity are concrete virtues, they are still just general resolutions. Dealing with things in a generic way can never lead to advancement in the spiritual life. For this reason, the particular resolution must always be something concrete, and the more particular, the better. If, for example, a person desires to grow in humility, the resolutions must be focused: which concrete acts of humility (in looks, words, or deeds?), or with respect to whom (superiors, subordinates, spouse, friends, parents), or in which moments of the day, etc. After a time of work, once a certain habit with respect to this act has been formed, the person can move on to new acts of humility. What is true in other fields is true here as well: the fundamentals (meaning, the little things) must be mastered in order to later master the big things.

Secondly, **how** does one choose the matter on which they should work? I reproduce a text from the above-cited Casanovas:

“Generally ascetical authors emphasize the need to choose with certainty the particular defect or virtue regarding which the particular examination should be carried out. In order to be certain about this point, they established the theory of the dominant passion, affirmed that first the principal vice should be attacked,¹⁴ then secondary ones, and then, lastly, the virtues should be sought.

All of this is very well established when seen as a theory based on the value of the vices and virtues; however, if attention is paid to the end towards which the spirit of Saint Ignatius’s particular examination is ordered, perhaps it is fitting to follow a different criterion. Given that the end of the particular examination is to keep the desire for holiness alive and active, what pertains to the person’s class and circumstances that surround them is to be given preference since it is more effective in stirring up that desire, even though this might break the molds of the objective order with which we give value to the vices and virtues. The variety of circumstances in which souls find themselves, even with respect to the same degree of perfection and imperfection, is so great that it is very difficult to decree a priori which is the most beneficial method. Let us never lose sight of the fact that holiness is a life and not a theory, no matter how well-thought-out that theory might be, and that the particular examination is not an end to which a soul’s life must be conformed, but rather a means to maintain and perfect that life.”

Thus, **what** a person should examine themselves about must be determined **according to the needs** of that concrete person “here and now.” For this reason, for example, a person dominated by a vice like lust or alcohol, despite the fact that their dominant passion or vice is lust or alcohol, should perhaps examine themselves, at least at some point in their lives, regarding their confidence in and abandonment to God (since without these attitudes recovery is impossible), or regarding humility (when there is some inferiority complex at the root), or regarding other, different acts when the examination is being used primarily to strengthen or intensify the will.

5) Preliminary work

Again, I maintain that a virtue cannot be acquired, nor a vice fought, if the territory upon which one will work is not well known. A good military officer studies his own army, his enemy, and the land upon which the battle will take place in great detail; if he doesn’t, his defeat is all but assured. In our case, something similar happens; if a person wants to acquire a virtue, he or she must become, in a certain sense, an “expert” in it.

When someone tells me, for example, “I think that I need to work on meekness, because my biggest problem is anger,” I usually reply, “That seems like a good idea; now give me fifteen different acts that you could put into practice in order to achieve this goal.” The majority of people are simply left confused; at most, one or two actions come to mind. This means that they know little or nothing about that virtue. If that’s the case, however, then serious work isn’t possible, because the people won’t realize when opportunities to practice that virtue arise if they don’t know, and know well, what that virtue is and the different situations in which it acts. The same can be said of vices.

Anyone who wants to work hard must (according to their possibilities and abilities) study the topic. Thus, for a serious work, I recommend, before anything else, reading what the classics of spirituality or moral theology have to say about the virtue that is sought or the vice that needs to be uprooted (for example, some of the works of Antonio Royo Marín, Tanqueray, Garrigou-Lagrange, Merkelbach, Prümmer, etc.).

Once this is done, the person will be able to make a list, as exhaustive as possible, of all the acts that they see as connected both directly and indirectly with the virtue or vice that is their subject matter, and this as it is found in the daily life of the person who is doing the work. A list of fifteen to twenty acts is the ideal. Here I offer, as a sort of example, some lists to serve as guides regarding chastity (and its opposed vice, lust), sloth (and its opposed virtue, diligence), and humility (and its opposed vice, pride). The way that these lists are structured can inspire other possible outlines:

Example 1

Material for work regarding chastity and lust

a) The main cause of sins of lust are the **occasions of sin** that present themselves to the sight. Therefore:

- I will never watch television alone.
- I will set a time limit for going to bed, and after that hour I will never allow myself to keep watching television or to go on the Internet.
- I will never go on the Internet in any place where I can’t be seen by others; I will use filters against pornography and (if I am a religious) also programs that make it clear to my superiors the sites that I enter.
- I will never use online chats, or I will do so only in the sight of other people or family members.
- I will take care of what I see in magazines, the newspaper, etc.
- I will flee from dangerous places or settings.
- I will break off this or that friendship which is purely superficial and frivolous.

b) Another main cause of falls into lust is **sensuality** (or weakness of the senses); thus, in order to overcome this problem:

- I will seek to be mortified in what I eat.
- I will perform corporeal penances, in the measure that it’s possible for me, in order to maintain control over my body.
- I will mortify my senses, depriving myself occasionally of things that are good (for example, from looking at something that’s ok to see, from smelling a pleasant perfume, from feeling the soft touch of something; and this, not because these things are bad, but rather to learn to renounce something licit, which will make me stronger when I must say “no” to illicit temptations).
- I will maintain my bodily hygiene, not seeking my own comfort but rather to form my will:

mortifying my senses (for example, with a splash of cold water when showering), giving a brief time to washing, being ordered in my things, etc.

c) Another source of falls into lust is **idleness**; therefore:

- I will seek to always be occupied, even when I have no obligations: thus, I will try to have good books to read, to practice some hobby, to work on something practical, etc.
- I will try to do some physical exercise at least twice a week: to work, do sports, go to the gym, etc.

d) Many fall into sins of lust as a **punishment for pride**; therefore:

- I should keep a careful eye on this point, trying to be ever more humble; I will take advantage of the opportunities to humble myself with work and tasks that are “lowly” in the sight of others and in my sight as well.
- I will ask God for the grace to humbly accept the humiliations that others inflict upon me.

e) I cannot aspire to the **virtue of chastity** without God’s help; hence:

- I will frequently receive communion, even daily if possible, and go to confession weekly.
- I will never set aside devotion to Our Lady, especially the daily Rosary.

f) Scripture says that the one who considers the **nature of sin** and their dying moments will not sin; hence:

- I will consider the malice of the sin of lust, the degradation that it imposes on my body.
- Each day, above all before going to bed, I will recall that one day I must die, and that I do not know the day or time, and then I will be judged for all my deeds, and, according to the way I have acted, good or bad, I will be saved or I will be condemned.

g) Chastity is a virtue that is acquired with **positive acts**, even indirect ones; hence:

- I will be modest in the way I dress.
- I will be decent in my way of speaking and in my gestures (nothing of vulgarity or vanity to call attention).
- I will be prudent and balanced in my emotional dealings with others.
- I will be pure in my looks: I will look at each person as I want others to look at my brothers and sisters and mother and father.
- I will ask for the grace of modesty and in everything I do I will act with modesty.

Example 2

Material for work regarding sloth and diligence

a) Acedia is sorrow for spiritual things. For this reason, I will ask to be **happy for spiritual things** (Mass, prayer, trials, illnesses, failures). In order to do this, I will include my daily failures in my daily thanksgiving.

b) Sloth inclines us to perform our spiritual acts with **negligence**, to shorten them, or even to omit them entirely, and all these for trivial reasons. Hence, I propose:

- To not shorten any of the acts in which I am attacked by sloth, typically in every act of piety and prayer.
- To not omit any act for any reason whatsoever that does not come from obedience, the urgency of

charity, or pastoral duties.

- On the contrary, I will seek to do these things with the utmost perfection.

c) Sloth makes me rush to finish what I don't like to do. Hence:

- I will not rush in those offices that are the most repugnant to me.
- I will give prayer the time it deserves, especially time for thanksgiving after Mass, my examination of conscience, and preparation for Mass.
- I will never do any of the things that I find more pleasant when these activities would take the place or the time of other activities that I must do because of my state.

d) Sloth also makes us choose offices according to the delight that they produce. Hence, I will choose my activities according to **urgency**, the help they will be to my neighbor, or to the request of my superiors.

e) The daughter of sloth is **despair**, meaning, repugnance or flight from what is difficult. Thus, I must fill my soul with the hope of being able to accomplish the works that God asks of me, even when they seem to me to be very annoying, difficult, or impossible to fulfill.

f) Sloth gives rise to **pusillanimity** for undertaking what seems difficult. Hence: I will confront, with great energy and generosity, the detailed works of my daily sanctification.

g) Sloth gives rise to **resentment and bitterness** towards those who give us commands or who ask us for things that are difficult for us or that we don't like. Therefore:

- I will be **obedient** and have a **good attitude** towards the one who orders me (my superior) or who asks me to undertake a task that displeases me. This implies not complaining about what was asked, and not making it known that I was asked something difficult or unjust (a way of getting back at the superior by making him or her feel like a tyrant).
- With an **exquisite charity** and patience I will deal with those who ask me for things that are difficult or change my plans (those who, for this reason, I treat badly, so that they don't come back to ask me for something else or so that their requests will be brief).

h) Sloth gives rise to "**digressions**," curiosity, verbosity, bodily restlessness . . . that is, things that are "palliative," amusements by which we make up for the efforts of duty. In this, I will do everything possible not to distract myself or to seek to "run away" into amusements. I will leave recreation for when it's time for recreation. During the time of work or prayer, on the other hand, I will put all my effort into doing my duty well.

j) In order to combat the desolation that accompanies some spiritual acts, I should meditate on the value and importance that these acts have for my life. I will increase whatever gives rise to charity, since it is opposed to sloth:

- Devotion to the Eucharist.
- Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- Reading and meditating on Sacred Scripture.

k) The temptation to sloth can be a **divine purification**. Hence, I will ask God for patience . . . a lot of patience!

Example 3

Material for work regarding humility and pride

a) Humility flows from a correct understanding of myself, of my sins, and of God's action in my soul, and this is a grace that I must ask for. Therefore, I must:

- Ask for the grace to grow in humility.
- Pray the litanies of humility by Cardinal Merry del Val.

b) I must also put **into place the means to know myself**. For this, I must:

- Recall my sins.
- Recall that all of the good that I have in me, God gave me gratuitously.

c) Pride makes **obedience** difficult, above all obedience to those who are my equals or under me. Hence, I should:

- Docilely obey those who are my equals and my inferiors.
- Ask others to tell me what to do, i.e., to seek obedience.

d) Pride makes me feel that **mockeries and humiliations** are **unjust**. Therefore, I must:

- Bear mockeries and humiliations in silence.
- “Go with the flow” when others make fun of me (to learn to laugh at myself).

e) Pride leads me to think that I am **superior to others**, to judge others, and to refuse help from others. For this reason, I will make the effort to:

- Ask others for help in the form of advice, opinions, or explanations.
- Seek the company of those who make me feel “overshadowed.”
- Not to amuse myself by thinking of the defects of others.
- To speak well of others.

f) Pride leads me to seek the vainglory that people give. Therefore, I will attempt to:

- Not speak of myself, especially if it is in praise of myself.
- To not pay attention when others speak well of me.
- To not give my opinion if it's not asked for or if it's not necessary.

g) Pride makes it difficult for me to **accept my mistakes**. Therefore, I propose to:

- Accept corrections in silence.
- Personally ask pardon of those whom I offend.

h) Christ is the supreme model of humility; therefore, I must contemplate Christ's humiliation in the Passion.

i) Pride makes me enjoy thinking of myself, in how others should think well of me. Therefore I will not allow myself to think about myself.

j) In order to grow in humility, one must know what it is and how to come to possess it. Accordingly, I will read and meditate on this virtue.

6) The work itself

The above lists are only **suggestions**. Each person can add or remove elements or make an analogous plan for other virtues or for other defects, as was indicated above. As can be seen, in order to come up with a list for the other virtues or vices, it's enough to make a list of the main elements of that virtue: its nature, cause, ways to acquire it, main acts, secondary acts, effects, occasions to practice it, the vices that are opposed to it, and so on. Later the various concrete acts can be determined in order to feed that particular aspect or to uproot it. The aforementioned examples are **eloquent** enough in themselves.

With these ideas in mind, the person who is to work on this attitude must examine themselves on only one of those points during whatever amount of time is needed until that element is uprooted. After that, he or she can move on to another. A person **must not work on several points at a time**, because this would be contrary to the goal of the particular examination (since the objective is to concentrate the will's energy and the intellect's attention on only one focus). It's understood as well that when the person begins to examine a new act to perform, the exercise of those acts that have already been acquired must be kept alive. The person should gain new ground with each examination. In this way, in a short time, a person can completely change, from apathetic to energetic, and from vicious to virtuous.

7) Effects

The work carried out in this way not only conquers or overcomes a defect or vice, or makes that virtue upon which attention had been centered grow, but rather, at the same time, it has another important effect: it strengthens the will itself, which, with each firm and energetic act, becomes more invigorated and consolidated.

Moreover, above and beyond this benefit in the will, it also produces another, more important effect which, according to some authors, is its main fruit: it keeps the interest in one's personal sanctification and perfection awake and alive.

Above all, we must remember a great truth: with great frequency (to avoid saying, "almost always"), without a serious particular examination, all good desires and efforts are condemned, sooner or later, to utter failure, and the Christian ends up incarcerated in lukewarmness and mediocrity. For this reason, not giving the examination the importance that it deserves could be taken as a sign of foolishness.

May God bless you.