



REFLECTIVE LIVING

**God's Plan
&
The Examen**

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"... And so, for the first time in my life perhaps (although I am supposed to meditate every day!)

I took the lamp

and leaving the zone of everyday occupations and relationships where everything seems clear,

I went down into my inmost self, to the deep abyss whence I feel dimly

that my power of action emanates.

But as I moved further and further away from the conventional certainties by which social life is superficially illuminated.

I became aware that I was losing contact with myself.

At each step of the descent a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me.

And when I had to stop my exploration because the path faded from beneath my steps,

I found a bottomless abyss at my feet,

and out of it came - arising from I know not from where - the current which I dare call my life".

Teilhard de Chardin "The Divine Milieu" (1)

(1) Quotation from "The Divine Milieu" by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., London.

INDEX

FOREWORD	4
REFLECTIVE LIVING	5
THE DRAWING OF THE HEART	10
LOOKING BACK	13
GOD'S PLAN	15
REFLECTING ON THE PLAN	20
REFLECTING GOD	23
THE MIND OF CHRIST JESUS	25
THE EXAMEN	29
1. Coming into the presence of God	30
2. Prayer for light	30
3. Thanksgiving	31
4. Review of the day	32
5. Expression of sorrow	34
6. Hope for the future	34
SUMMARY	35

FOREWORD

"God does not exist", many say nowadays. Or, granted that God exists, He/She could not be in that terrible event that happened today.

On the contrary, this SUPPLEMENT TO PROGRESSIO, is saying indefatigably within the Christian tradition and particularly from within the Ignatian spirituality: "God is within all things".

To say this in an intelligible way, this booklet proposes again a classical method: the Ignatian examination of consciousness - its practice and its theological and spiritual foundations.

In the spirituality of the Christian Life Community this is a crucial point: the Three Divine Persons have loved me today, They have called me and They have forgiven me today.

May this supplement (*) help many people grow in their capacity to discern, and may it stir up or confirm in many the desire of following Jesus Christ, whether in a religious or a lay community.

PROGRESSIO

(*) First published in Ireland by "Irish Messenger Publications", 37 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2.

REFLECTIVE LIVING

THE TREASURE IS WITHIN

Your life may appear to you as very ordinary, dull and commonplace, a life of no great significance: yet there are deep and hidden dimensions to it which can be explored to release your vast potential for good in this world. This booklet offers a set of pointers to help you to unearth ever more of the richness of what seems to you so ordinary and unremarkable. To adapt the title of a recent Latin American book on spirituality, you can learn to "drink from your own well" - your own rich inner life - rather than from another's. The reservoir is there - learn to tap it. There is in each of us a capacity to grow in appreciation of how well we are loved by God, how close He is - "nearer to me than breathing, closer than hands or feet" - how much we mean to Him, how much He hopes for us and how much He needs us to join with Him in His plans for the world.

The Indian poet, R. Tagore, begins one of his works with the line: "Thou hast made me endless". Each of us is endless in our richness because we are rooted in God. In the world to come, that richness will be unfolded in its fulness. You will see your own unique role in the scheme of things as arranged by God, the full meaning He was trying to give to every event in your life. Everything that has touched and shaped you, even the tiniest event, will then be revealed in its full significance. You will see in joy and wonder how every detail has contributed to the completion of the work of art that is you. Even now you can come to see how God is working in all events, even the bad ones, to turn them to your advantage, so that it is right for you "always and everywhere to give Him thanks". (Eucharistic Prefaces).

YOUR DIVINE CONNECTIONS

In G. M. Hopkins' happy phrase, you are God's "immortal diamond". For beyond the relationships which give meaning to your everyday life, there lies a deeper

level of relationships; partly hidden because they are so deep, yet also revealed to some extent. There are three Divine Persons who love you endlessly and all that happens to you lies within Their loving designs for you. They work through all the ordinary events of your life, thus no event is insignificant or meaningless; each event is pregnant with Divine meaning and purpose. These Three are the Authors of the cosmic drama which we call human history and of the personal drama of your life. Reflective living is concerned with attending to and noticing the meaning of the events and occurrences which make up your days. But why would you do this? Not simply to find the meaning of past events, although that is valuable and leads to gratitude; more importantly, the point is that you want to see where you are being led, what call is being made to you and what part of you are to play in the unfolding of the drama of the world's salvation.

SHOULD YOU READ ON?

This booklet is for you if you want to fulfil St Paul's challenge to lead a life worthy of your vocation (Eph 4:1). Groups and individuals, lay people and religious, Christians of all traditions who want to make sense of their lives and who are prepared to give some time to reflection may be helped by it. We are writing for busy people who feel perhaps that God is remote from their daily lives, that long periods of prayer are not for them or that they do not know what to talk to God about. This booklet attempts to show the link between "ordinary" life and life before the living God. Many people today are aware that to think of their spiritual life as something apart from the rest of their life is a mistake. Grace is everywhere and all is redeemed! Nothing occurs which is outside the scope of God's concern, which is why St Paul says that "by turning everything to their good, God cooperates with those who love Him" (Rom 8:28). Can we catch on to this process in which God turns everything to good? We can indeed and so cooperate better with God's work. This booklet, then, is for you if you find yourself puzzled, intrigued or upset by the things which happen in your life, things which force you to ask: "Where is all this

leading me?". It is not that we are trying to explain away the mystery of God working in our lives but to live creatively within that mystery; always advancing "further in and higher up", as C. S. Lewis puts it. The mystery of God's plan challenges us at every hand's turn to examine our life's stances and to adjust accordingly so as to live in harmony with God. We are addressing people who want such a challenge.

MY WAYS TO BE THEIR WAYS

The context of Christian reflection as we propose it here is trinitarian. It must always look to the all-embracing plan of the three Divine Persons within which "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The Three have a preferred way of acting in our world: in baptism we are swept up into this divine arrangement in all its magnificence but we know nothing of it. As we grow, we are meant to become more and more conscious of what They are about. We should try to attend to Their endless and unwearied drawing, gesturing and calling of us out of our own narrow confines into Their infinite light, life and love. Then we may truly be given over to a world in need, as They are.

You are invited to reflect on your own life, its events and non-events, but always within a context: the context of Their intentions and designs, not simply your own. You are invited to be like Mary, who treasured all the things that happened to her and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2: 19, 51). She reflected on the events of her life in order to become more and more available to what God wanted of her. Reflection, then, is linked to right action and right response to Their desire for you as They indicate it daily. In the climax of St John's Gospel, Jesus says to His disciples: "As the Father sent me, so am I sending you" (John 20:21). Reflectiveness is dynamic; it helps us to discern the concrete shape of this sending or mission which is given to each of us.

True Christian reflection is a transforming activity. It changes your outlook, desires and values from

being self-centred to being focussed on those of Christ Himself. Putting this another way, the Christian is meant, not simply to reflect about God and Christ, but to reflect Christ Himself. Jesus reflected His Father's attitudes perfectly and we, who are made wonderfully as the images and likeness of God, can each reflect a unique aspect of God to the world. We do this by reflecting God-made-visible in Christ. This is the work of a life-time: it is the central, unifying and most worthwhile occupation of our lives. We are "to live the same kind of life as Christ lived" (1 John 2:6) and so play our full part in the world's completion.

HOW TO READ THESE PAGES

Some central themes recur throughout these pages; when you find something helpful, stay with it and return to it instead of moving on. Read reflectively and sip slowly! Perhaps underline a phrase that speaks to you; give it a home in your heart. Look at you own experience in the light of what is said here and ask: "Now, is that true for me?" In this way, your life, so ordinary and yet so rich, will be progressively illuminated. They are attending to you all the time: They do not forget you. "God's looking after me!" This is a great discovery. Not that reflectiveness yields its fruit immediately: it is the patient work of a life-time. Growth is gradual and often imperceptible as we inch our way along; first having little sense of God's involvement in our lives; then noticing that we are finding Him in some things; and then in more and more of the events of our lives. Progress, happily, is geometric. All events are linked together in God's design for you and if you see this at any particular moment (e.g. to see the value of illness) it illuminates many other events in your own life and in those of others. The goal of finding God in all things is achieved slowly and almost without notice.

If reflectiveness is a patient process, it is quietly exciting too. It carries the joy of people who find that, against all the odds, someone wonderful is in love with them. The exploration of that love, received and

responded to in a myriad of details, symbols and gestures, becomes the glad task of a life-time. St Ignatius says in his Autobiography that God taught him as a schoolmaster teaches a child. We can be slow learners but deep within us is a hunger to know the Why of things. "Do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this thing?", the Lord said to Julian of Norwich in the fourteenth century. "Know it well, love was His meaning!" Most of all, that is what we need to know and the deeper we know it, the more love becomes the meaning of our dealings with others.

REFLECTIVENESS AND THE EXAMEN

Reflectiveness, we have said, can be the task of a life-time. It cannot be limited simply to one short period of the day which is traditionally called the examen. Rather the examen is to be the high point of the day's reflectiveness. Any attempt to overload the examen itself will lead to breakdown! The day's decisions must be discerned as they come up. This may involve meetings, discussions with others and personal study of the data involved in the particulars issues. All such labour is part of Christian discernment, so long as it is set within the basic framework of seeking to know what God wants done in each situation. We are to keep God always before our eyes. As the Letter to the Hebrews says cryptically: "Let us not lose sight of Jesus" (12:2). The examen, then, is not to be an isolated quarter of an hour with God in a busy day spent away from Him but rather a review with God of a day spent seeking Him in all that happened. Teilhard de Chardin divides life into two categories: the things I undertake (activities) and the things I endure and undergo (passivities). These categories cover everything and God speaks through both of them and so the material for my reflection is virtually inexhaustible. Time given to developing the habit of reflection is rewarded by growth in wisdom; we become steadier people who can find our way along with greater security. We accomplish more with less effort and we do what better pleases Them and better serves the world They love.

We will now outline two modes of growth in reflective living: the first is to attend to the drawing of the heart; the other is to look back on some aspect or segment of our past. Both can help us get in touch with the "soundless music" which is the playing of God in our lives.

THE DRAWING OF THE HEART

God draws us to Himself and to His plans in all the events of our lives. But He has one major plan only. It embraces all events, both good and evil. This idea of "drawing" is rich in St John's gospel: Jesus says that He will complete the plan of the Father by being lifted up and drawing all mankind to Himself (12:32). Earlier, He speaks of the Father's work in the world as "drawing": "No one can come to Me unless the Father draws him" (6:44). So the work of Father and Son is that of drawing us to Themselves. It would be strange if we did not experience this drawing within our hearts. In fact, this drawing of the heart can be attended to more and more. By attending to it, we can learn to cooperate and go along with it, so that our fragmentary melodies become more and more harmonious with the cosmic symphony of God.

"I FEEL DRAWN TO..."

What is this "drawing" like? We experience ourselves being attracted to one thing rather than another. Some examples: you are reading this booklet because you were attracted to it. Perhaps you were searching for God or for something that would give more meaning to your life. You picked up this booklet in hope of finding help. If you have persevered this far, you will have experienced encouragement and gladness because you have found something of what you were seeking. This is an example of the drawing of your heart to God and you can notice it. Again, we experience ourselves being drawn by the life of Teresa of Calcutta and we are repelled by the tyranny of the South African government. We notice peace, joy, happiness, encouragement attaching to one possible course of action, e.g. when we think of giving some time to the service of

others. We can notice also a sense of flatness, boredom, dissatisfaction if we focus exclusively on ourselves, e.g. in a heavy drinking bout or in buying things we do not want. Yet again, but on a more subtle level, a person may feel little joy in giving regular time to prayer when it is dry but there is a sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction without it. "I feel bad when I pray and worse when I don't". The drawing of God is present here and yet it is easy for us to miss it. People may have a sense of fear and of vulnerability in making a lonely stand for justice or honesty. Yet if they attend to their hearts, they can notice a sense of rightness and of peace. This is, again, the experience within them of the drawing of God.

As we grow in awareness of Their drawing, we become more aware of other tugs and attractions which before seemed quite innocent but are now revealed as opposing forces in our hearts. Our hearts are revealed as a welter of desires: some are good, others are not from God. Sifting or discerning these desires is hard work. What helps best, perhaps, is to notice in what direction a desire is leading. If I follow it, will it bring me closer to God and the things of God or will it weaken my relationship with Him and draw me into myself; into darkness, alienation, agitation, loss of confidence and inner peace? Here we need to pray to Them for the wisdom to catch on to the golden thread of Their drawing and to let go the clanking chain that would drag us into a downward spiral, away from the love of God and of those around us.

LETTING GO

It is Plato who uses the metaphor of the golden thread and the clanking chain. The chain can be some basic compulsion that drags us along for much of our lives. Then, exhausted, we let go of it and are relieved of the illusion that we have to be the authors of our own salvation. I may have lived by the belief that, to be loved by God and others, I needed to be either perfect, always helpful, successful, different, wise, dutiful, strong or settled. Any such compulsion is a clanking chain. The golden thread is the endless yet gentle music

of God telling us that He loves us first and, therefore, we are loveable. He is telling us that He is to be fully trusted because He is Good and that all will finally be well, not because of our efforts but because He can and will make it so. Growth in relationship with God requires letting go of illusions and compulsions, and yielding to the invitations and promises of Them Who are pure love and goodness.

"I WILL DRAW ALL"

The work of God in our world is not a selective drawing: They labour for us all, since all are well-beloved, though most do not know it. I need to be sensitive, then, not only to the drawing of God in my own life but also in the groups to which I belong, whether family, club, parish, neighbourhood, business, religious community or others. It is easy for a whole group to be missing the true point of their existence by being oriented rather to a group selfishness than to the good of the wider community, especially that of the deprived and the voiceless. Groups, like individuals, suffer from bias and have a sinful as well as a graced history. Strategies need to be found for common reflection on the meaning and role of the group in the light of Divine designs. These always involve fostering an ever wider community and, like the good Samaritan, meeting the needs of the less fortunate with sensitive love. The stance of any group of Christians must show a balance between self-concern and concern for others, precisely because the Three Divine Persons have that breadth of concern. Often in a group, only one or two catch on to this wider concern and it then becomes their painful task to help the others to see it. At this point, despair looms up very quickly but they can know that their efforts are backed powerfully by God's and that They are tugging at the hearts of the members of the group, setting up situations to jolt them out of drifting mediocrity into alert responsiveness to the needs of the world. It is here that the right blend both of energetic commitment and of patience are required. We are meant to labour untiringly to reverse the evil in the world but we are not promised success in the short run. Many good people never see the

reward of their labours. The evil of the system overwhelms them, as we see in the struggles for liberation today. Why, then, keep going? Because God Himself keeps going and it takes Him all the time in the world to undo fully the effects of evil. We must believe that nothing done in love is ever lost. It has an eternal quality or seed in it that will bear fruit eventually.

LOOKING BACK

Jesus' invitation to His disciples to "come apart" (Mark 6:31), shows His reverence and appreciation for times of reflection. He saw it as essential that His followers, like Himself, should take time apart with God, if their busy lives were to have meaning and depth. He Himself had a busy life and He would later tell the disciples to be busy "teaching all nations". All the more necessary, then, would it be for them to give time to reflecting on what was going on; from noticing the patterns of God's leading them in the past, they would more surely be able to see their way forward.

As events are occurring in our lives, we often cannot see their purpose. We trust that God is working in them but we live through them by faith: we believe without seeing. Later, when they are past, we can see something of their divine meaning: the hand of God becomes less hidden from us. This looking back can be a central aspect of our reflective living, for our past is full of divine meaning.

"CHRIST MANIFESTED IN REMEMBRANCE"

The heading is the title of a sermon of Newman's. God's presence, he says, is not discerned at the time when it is upon us but, afterwards, if we look back at what has passed, we can see it. A variety of scriptural examples illustrates his point. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had missed God's presence in the Passion but saw it then when Jesus spoke with them. Again, Jesus washes Peter's feet and says: "At the moment you do not understand what I am doing but later you will understand" (John 13:7).

Jacob, after his dream, cries out: "Surely, the Lord is in this place and I knew it not!" (Gen. 28:16). Later, when he seemed to have lost Joseph and also Simeon and now Benjamin, he laments: "All these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). So, indeed, in a sense they were because they were the work of evil: yet the Lord was working in a mysterious and hidden way, as he saw later. His son, Joseph, sums up the episode in the words: "God did send me before you to preserve life... It was not you who sent me but God" (Gen. 45:5).

EXPERIENCE AND MEANING

We can, then, search for God in time and memory and catch on ever more to the pattern of God's dealings with us, to the tapestry of grace that is the divine weave of our lives. Instead of seeing life as a random succession of "mere facts" or "brute events" we develop a "sense of God". What we thought before were chance happenings or mere coincidences are now interpreted rightly as the sensitive but serious love of the Three Divine Persons shaping our lives with infinite artistry and resourcefulness, so that They carry out Their purposes beyond all our hopes and dreams. To catch on to Their working in us is to experience true joy. It enables us to move away from that attitude of quiet desperation in which, as Thoreau remarks, most of us live out our days.

FROM PAST TO FUTURE

Looking back and remembering is a graced event because we come to recognise how Christ was there and this leads us to wonder, gratitude and praise. And more. The past, properly understood and accepted, gives orientation for the future. We gain confidence and can go on with a deep security that God will not fail, that He will bring order out of what seems chaotic to us. "So long Thy power hath blessed me, sure it still will lead me on" (Newman). It is not that we come to see the Why of every event and detail in the past but we can see enough to know that They do look after us and lead us "with leading-strings of love" (Hos. 11:4). This enables us to set our hearts on

Them in loving surrender as we move onward into the darkness which is the darkness of God.

A young and zealous priest brought the Eucharist to a destitute woman in her hovel. There was no altar-cloth, no candle, only squalor. The question sprang to his mind: "Should I do this?" He could have done it, gone away and forgotten the incident. Instead, he pondered it and saw slowly the sinfulness of his own attitudes and what Christ was teaching him in the event.

We often experience reluctance to look back on certain aspects of the past. We are afraid of what we will see. Soured relationships, empty years, sinfulness, failure - all these can oppress us. But "grace is everywhere", as is affirmed in the closing lines of Bernanos' Diary of a Country Priest. Jesus is found on Calvary and sinners will find His footsteps on the flagstones of hell. By following Him, they will come to salvation and joy.

GOD'S PLAN

"ANYBODY OUT THERE?"

We move on now from considering the ways of getting in touch with present and past experience and its richness of meaning. For it is God who arranges everything in our lives and it is He who sets up our myriad experiences. We live in what Chardin calls a "divine milieu". We are enfolded, enveloped within divine designs. We are the objects of a conspiracy of infinitely wise love. But this is not at all obvious and so we need to give time to exploring God's mind, God's plan "so kindly made in Christ" (Eph. 1:9).

A recent workshop participant said: "There is something profoundly terrifying about being here!" This sense of chaos is a theme of modern philosophy: the world seems like a vast building-site in which everyone is labouring but the plans are lost and the architect seems to have gone away. The TV news each night encourages such

a feeling. An alternative vision of the world can only be based on a deep grasp of the plans of the Architects who labour tirelessly to bring our world to rights and Who, with infinite reverence, draw each of us to play our part in its reconstruction.

"COMPREHENSIVE WISDOM" (Eph. 3:10)

The most succinct account of the plan of God is in Ephesians 1: 3-14. St Paul here "gets it all together" but, of course, throughout his letters he is exploring and commenting on what he calls the "mystery" or plan of God as revealed in Christ. You are invited to read the passage for yourself, to savour it slowly, to admire it and be grateful for it. Like great music, appreciation of it comes gently but deeply. Note two things especially in the text: how often Christ is referred to and how the term "everything" or "all" recurs in verse 10.

The word "plan" cannot carry the fulness of meaning that is involved: plan here connotes loving designs, dreams, vision. When a man falls deeply and irrevocably in love, his intentions are good towards his beloved. He dreams good dreams for her, her happiness is his central concern. He will do all he can to secure what is best for her and her lack of appreciation, no matter how shown, will not deter him from his loving concern to bring her to what is truly good. This is also true of the Trinity and ourselves. They are the great Lovers and we are Their well-loved daughters and sons. Their plan, rich in kindness, compassion and inventiveness, is to satisfy the deepest yearnings of humankind for happiness, fellowship and peace.

Here we can make only a few remarks on the essential aspects of this plan, leaving you, the reader, to reflect further in quiet wonder on this account of God's intentions for you and for the world.

1. "I KNOW MY PLANS FOR YOU" (Jer. 29:11)

The plan, then, exists. It is a world plan, a

cosmic plan which overarches and encompasses all human plans. St. Paul calls it "a plan for the fulness of time". Human history is the account of the myriad plans of men and women, so often selfish and in mutual conflict, disastrous in their consequences, e.g. World War Two and the exploitation of the Third World by the First. But beyond all these plans and including them, is the divine plan which works towards the good of all humankind at the expense of none, the one plan which can make all people happy: "everlasting joy on men and women's faces" (Is. 61:7) is its goal. Beyond the world order which politicians of East and West, North and South seek to impose on human affairs is a divine world order. This, St. Paul says, came into action with the arrival of the Son of God into our world, fulfilling against all hope the promise: "I know the plans I have in mind for you, plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you".

2. THE NEWS IS GOOD!

The revealing of the plan was and still is good news for humankind. What made St. Paul and the first Christians so excited was the fact that the downward spiral of human history into chaos, emptiness and death was reversed, turned upside-down by the resurrection of Jesus. Against all appearances, hope is now justified, not just for a few who might be thought of as "good" but for all those who could be classified as helpless, lost, dead or sinful. All, even the most miserable or despised, are included.

The news was good in the first century A.D. But ours of the twentieth century is the same world as that of the early Christians. Left to ourselves, our world situation is hopeless, futile, chaotic; misery is piled on misery and there is no sorting out of the human dilemma; sustained progress is impossible. Yet, this is the world for which the Three Divine Persons care infinitely: They have not despaired of us. A recent graffito ran: "God is alive and well and working on a less ambitious project". But They are not any less ambitious than They were, for They do not change. They work on steadily and serenely;

there is no change of plan. You and I are meant to take heart from this and to guide our course by it. This is what most gives Them joy, that we should catch on ever more fully to that plan "so kindly made in Christ" for ourselves. To catch a glimpse of it is a great privilege which we then wish to share with all our brothers and sisters, that our joy may be theirs.

3. ONE FINAL COMMUNITY OF LOVE

The heart of the plan is Their desire to form one community of love in which all, both divine and human, are joined together in joy. The dominant New Testament image is that of the final banquet in which hosts and guests are gathered in mutual joy and friendship. What the statesmen of the world grope towards in the United Nations is a dim image of what They have in mind. The implications of this divine intention for us all are radical. We are made, not for mutual destruction, nor domination, nor oppression, nor exploitation, nor terrorism. What They intend, and will achieve, is not "a tale, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing", but a symphony of joy and happiness resounding throughout the universe. We, who have laboured under the law of tears, will laugh (cf. Luke 6:21) - and not at the expense of others. Cosmic joy will encompass us all together: everlasting joy will be on the faces of all people.

4. WHAT THEY THINK OF US

The plan reveals clearly what God thinks about mankind. We are all the objects of divine choice, blessings and concern. We may think little of ourselves. Others can make us feel unimportant in the scheme of things. Nothing big seems to happen to us. We spend our time just moving along and we make no impact on world affairs. Yet we are chosen. Their heart is set on us and the infinite richness of Their grace is opened up to us through Christ. In Their eyes, we are very important people indeed. We are totally loved from the beginning, with an unconditioned love which exists prior to our being good and which endures when we are not good. This love works on in us and

in the world. Its action is transforming. It is undismayed by our failure to respond though it yearns for our response. It is not anxious or insecure but wise and powerful enough to carry out its vast purposes beyond our hopes and dreams. It works on steadily and is infinitely resourceful. It is respectful of us and allows our human freedom to exercise its choices both good and bad. Yet it works to reverse the evil we do and bring good out of it. We can see in the lives of St. Peter, St. Paul and St. Augustine how God wins us over from sin to repentant love. Everything, even what is furthest from the sacred, is to be transformed by the saving touch of God and so play its part in our redemption.

5. AN EFFECTIVE PLAN

What hope of success has this plan? From a human viewpoint, the fragile forces working for good in an evil world seem hopelessly outnumbered by the well-marshalled forces of darkness. The oppressive structures of injustice and tyranny seem here to stay. And yet, the plan is backed by infinite resources because the Three Divine Persons have invested Themselves fully in this plan. By doing so, They are trying to encourage us to lay aside our fears and to engage with Them in the work of transforming our world and bringing about the final community of love. We easily forget that They are the "All-powerfull and ever-living God" (Eucharistic Prefaces). They cannot be defeated. St. Paul saw this and asked: "With God on our side who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31-39). All Three play Their roles well: the Father made the plan; the Son is the central actor in it; and the Holy Spirit is accountable to the Father and the Son and will not fail.

Since God makes everything, nothing is outside His control, nothing comes as a surprise or a shock to Him, nothing is unforeseen. Everything that happens is allowed for, even though God did not wish it to happen. God can accommodate the worst of evil and bring good from it, as in the case of His Son's death, the worst of evils. The two main obstacles to God's design of bringing about a universal community of love are sin and death. They are

not God's work but His Plan must take account of them. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, both sin and death are radically overcome.

6. ONE SINGLE PLAN

We think, wrongly, that God is interested only in the "spiritual side" of our lives, not in food, cars, mortgages and prices. But God has only one plan. However vast the world is, His plan embraces all events, persons, places and objects. God has one purpose and He keeps persistently at it by using all things for our good. He makes humankind have an ineradicable desire for Himself: nothing less will satisfy us. We are the images of God always and, as St. Augustine found, the human heart can rest only in Him. Every detail in creation is sacred. All things are to be used insofar as they help us and can bring us into harmony with the plan. God waits for us in all things. Better still, He advances to meet us, showing us how to move forward through using or avoiding them. Our world is full of God.

REFLECTING ON THE PLAN

It will help to reflect on the plan of God in the light of the three divine gifts of faith, hope and love. These, too, are part of the plan and enable us to make our way out of the otherwise impossible morass in which we find ourselves. Insofar as these three virtues are strong in us, we are close to Their mind, energy and heart. Faith is the divine answer to the reality of our darkened intellects. It enables us to see properly by catching on to the trinitarian vision of ourselves and our role in the world. Through faith we see things Their way, we accept what They tell us and so we understand rightly. Hope is the divine counterbalance to that fear and despair which so often paralyse even well-thought-out enterprises. Hope enables us to say: "I can. I can do what I am called to do through Their power". The gift of love strengthens our weakened and wayward will and enables us to love rightly and steadily as They do.

FAITH

If God thinks so highly of mankind, I must also. If God is so full of care about us all, then I must be too, whatever way They invite me to play my role and use my talents. They are totally invested in this plan, this dream of Theirs, and so must I be. This is the true basis for all reflection on how to be involved in the cares of mankind on the levels of justice and equal distribution of goods, etc. I must, by prayerful and graced pondering, learn to see the world as They see it and feel for it as They do. My involvement in it must be in harmony with Theirs. A privatised spirituality which, either consciously or unconsciously, opts out of real concern for the plight of the world has no place in the life of a Christian. What the pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council on "The Church in the Modern World" says in its opening sentence must be central in our reflection and must ring true in our living:

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well." (Gaudium et Spes)

If a privatised and individualistic spirituality won't do, neither will a purely secular activism. This, indeed, works for the good of the world but without the enrichment of God's perspective. Social activists proceed by their own light and that light is not enough to pierce through the darkness. Only God can show us things as they are - both the depths of sin and human waywardness but also the infinite possibilities within each person. The meaning of our lives is defined by God alone, since He made us. Our destiny is that which God dreams for us and it is by faith-filled reflection on God's plan that we come to the truth of things and can act rightly in our world in the causes of justice, equality and peace.

HOPE

Allied to divine vision, which is faith, we are given divine energy, which is hope. We can shoulder the world's burdens only if we have a hope that is big enough. The arguments for despair are eloquent and our fears of becoming involved are well-grounded. To take a stand against injustice is a fearful thing and those who do often pay the penalty. Privatised Christians have too limited a hope. They look to their own salvation but can be passive, despairing or even condemnatory of those who try to "get involved" in changing the face of the earth. The energy and drive of the secular reformer is not enough to match the situation and so ends in frustration and bitterness. But Christian hope is rooted in God rather than in one's abilities; its source is the All-powerful and ever-living God.

The plan of God is not an empty dream; it is well under way. It is visible in the Church which is the beginnings of that final community of God and His people gathered together in joy and reconciliation, sharing the one vision, one hope and one love. The Church is "a school for the makers of history" (Puebla, 1979). If we focus on ourselves, the task will rightly seem beyond our powers. If we, on the other hand, focus on the Three who are the Makers of History, we gain unlimited hope and remain undismayed by obstacles and reversals.

LOVE

With the gift of love which is so richly given us, because we have the Holy Spirit, who is Love itself, in our hearts, our limited and selfish love is turned outward to embrace the whole world as the Trinity Themselves do. We now can love as They love and all the qualities of love given in 1 Cor. 13: 4-7 are to be the colour and texture of our love. There is, then, a single criterion to judge the real value of all human activity, whether it be that of nations and super-powers, neighbourhoods and businesses, groups or individuals. Does this action promote the final community of love which God has

in mind? Does it contribute to the improvement of human relationships or is it divisive and, so, out of harmony with the work of God? Is it basically selfish or does it take account of the needs of others as best it can?

On a personal level, do I "live through love in God's presence" (Eph. 1:4)? This means both living in an awareness of how well I am loved by Them and how intimately present They are to me always, for I am never removed from the influence of Their love. On my part, it means doing all I do in a spirit of responding and grateful love.

The Trinity work in our world out of pure love, a love that is undeterred by our hardness of heart and our waywardness. They work out of a love that is not discouraged by the mass of evil that it finds in its path, by the spoiling and blighting of so much that is good and precious in our world. Theirs is a wise love that is strong through suffering; that brings evil to an end not by eliminating its proponents but by embracing them, enveloping their evil in its arms stretched out wide on the Cross. This is "the love that moves the sun and the other stars", as Dante puts it, and brings the dreams of God and the deepest yearnings of our hearts to a happy fulfilment.

REFLECTING GOD

Earlier on we hinted that Christian reflection goes beyond reflecting about another person or about Their plans for us, though it includes that. The reflection to which the New Testament calls us is transforming and dynamic. It involves reflecting Christ Jesus Himself, taking on His mind and values, living "the same kind of life as Christ lived" (1 John 2:6).

What an extraordinary thing it would be to work with people whose hearts were set on the good of others; who saw how things should be in the world; who were happy to live in simplicity of lifestyle and who were open, at whatever cost, to doing whatever needed to be done, within

the range of their gifts and talents; a group whose eyes were on God always and on what He wanted done. It would be a joy to be considered worthy to belong to such a group even though its demands were high. Yet this is what a Christian community is meant to be because this is how Jesus lived. We are to reflect Him and His attitudes of heart and mind and live them out in deeds. He "went about doing good" and so must we.

LETTER AND MIRROR

St. Paul stresses the importance of the Christian becoming "an altogether new creature" (Gal. 6:15). "For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here" (2 Cor. 5:17). He used the metaphors of the letter and of the mirror to illustrate the fact that we are to reflect Christ Himself. A letter reveals the mind and heart of its author. We, St. Paul says, are letters from Christ and so we are to reveal to the world, when it reads us, the mind and heart of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3). The metaphor of the mirror is equally telling (3:18) because Jesus mirrored the Father perfectly. He revealed perfectly to the world the mind of His Father. He could say to Philip "To have seen Me is to have seen the Father" (John 14:9). We are made in the image and likeness of God and for us it is the work of a lifetime to reflect God to the world. This is the central, unifying and most worthwhile occupation of our lives.

WHAT ARE THEY READING?

It is alarming to ask oneself: "When people 'read' me, are they reading God?" That is: "Do they catch on to the sort God is by seeing and hearing me? Do I portray to them unconditional love, true forgiveness, compassion and hope? Do they sense that I am on their side, concerned, interested, accepting and that I would be willing to put myself out for theirs sakes?" I am a mirror: faced towards myself, I will reflect myself. Faced simply towards others, I will reflect them and their values. But faced towards Christ I will reflect His values

and so I will reflect God to the world. "Reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, we grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect" (2 Cor. 3:18). This brightness brings light to a darkened world in which we are meant to shine like bright stars, helping those who live "in darkness and the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79).

THE MIND OF CHRIST JESUS

"In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). What is the mind of Christ Jesus? What are we trying to notice when we catch Him in the Gospels and when we contemplate Him in prayer? What is the inner secret of His life that makes sense of all He does and suffers?

For Jesus, the secret lies in the fact that His heart is set on another person, His Father. He is totally in love and this is the heart of the matter. For Him, the Father is simply the best of all; there are no competitors, no rivals. The Father is the most important person in His life and to be in harmony with His plans, since He is so good, is all that matters. To please Him is what is important, more so than pleasing the Pharisees, or Peter, or even Mary, or Himself. To please the Father is more urgent to Jesus than to hold on to life itself. The determining attitude of His life is summed up in the six words: "I always do what pleases Him" (John 8:29).

GLORY

Jesus often refers to the "glory" of His Father. It means "importance", "greatness", "prominence" - the attributes of a great person. By His yielding totally to the Father in everything, Jesus shows how important the Father is to Him and so He gives Him glory in everything. His life and death reveal dramatically to the world the importance He attaches to being totally available to the Father and His will. He shows this in every possible way until, finally, we see Him on Calvary, stripped of

everything, and so most fully revealing the glory or importance of the Father. What He intends for us is that we would enter into this attitude of mind and heart, that we too would allow ourselves to be caught, entranced, enraptured, fascinated, drawn out of ourselves by the Father's goodness, as Moses, Isaiah, Ezechiel, Mary, Paul and so many others were. They came to see that God is good, that His plans are the best and that, by yielding to them, we attain the gift of joy for ourselves and for others.

SPACE AND TIME

What Jesus caught on to from the beginning, we learn more slowly: "I must be busy with my Father's affairs" (Luke 2:49). We gradually and often reluctantly "make space" for God, whereas Jesus IS space for the Father, He has no private space of His own. There is nothing in Him that must be "cleared out" first so that the Father may take possession of it only later. Nor has Jesus any private time. We learn laboriously that it is good to "give God time", so sometimes we "find time" for prayer but more often we don't. Jesus simply IS time for the Father. He is complete transparency and so all the colours of the Father show at their best in Him. He is unrestricted openness and availability to Another; nothing of His own intervenes or obstructs. This emptiness, self-abandonment and poverty of spirit; we see it in the nativity and on the Cross. Thus, ALL God's glory shines through Him, and the person of open mind can see clearly what the Father means to Jesus and so is led to the Father and to doing His will. This is what happened to Peter. He met this man, Jesus, and came to love Him. Slowly he realised that there was Someone in Jesus' life, the mysterious "Father" who motivated every action of Jesus. So Peter, through Jesus, came to love the Father and to serve Him with the same unrestricted openness as he saw in Jesus his friend. And so grace was liberated for the good of the world.

"TO THE UTTERMOST" (John 13:1)

Jesus never grumbles at the Father's requests of Him. No matter how heavy the Father's hand is laid on Him,

He accepts it with love and patience. "What more could God do to me?", a woman complained recently, having lost a child soon after her husband left her. Indeed, the pain in many people's lives is frightening. How could Jesus accept what the Father asks of Him? It is that He knows the Father loves Him totally and has entrusted everything to Him. Nothing is held back by the Father from His Son and so the right response is to give it all back in love. For Jesus, the Father's arrangements are wise, right and suitable. This is how He reads the Passion to the surprise of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:26). Jesus is confident that His Father's wisdom is great enough to bring good for the world out of a disastrous event. The Father's arrangements are to be trusted because He is so wise and loving and He is totally dependable and faithful in all His works. Jesus, then, seizes every opportunity to mirror the Father's love by His own response, though this leaves Him at risk, open, vulnerable, defenceless and exposed. He is like a blank cheque or a set of scrabble counters, to be moved and shaped as the Father sees best. He is happy to be used up, burnt out like a candle that gives all the light it can, till there is nothing left. He does this because He wants to. He shows in deeds that He thinks the Father is best of all. Thus, He glorifies Him. In return, the Father who thinks His Son is best of all, calls Him "My beloved Son", glorifies Him, gives Him the name which is "above all other names" and makes Him Lord (Phil. 2:9-11).

"BE THE SAME!"

We watch Jesus and see what was going on in Him. We admire and wonder and are filled with gratitude that another human could be so open and available to the Father. Then we look at ourselves and sense the gap between Jesus and ourselves. Could it be possible that we might become like Him: as open and available to the service of mankind as He?

This is indeed what God has in mind, that we in our place and time would reflect Christ more and more completely. The Son's way is the Father's preferred way of

bringing this world to its happiness. The elements are all there. The Father loves us as He loves His own Son. The Son has already caught us up into Himself and so His response, His song to the Father, is already ours though we barely hear the melody yet. All that we need is given us, for we have been given "all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). The Spirit that motivated the Son is given to us also, so that the life-spirit of Christ is ours. Through the sacraments, the pondered and assimilated Word and every event undertaken or accepted in love, that spirit grows. The Church is the community in which we are set. In it the company is good and the example helpful. We are sustained and prayed for by this community and by Christ Himself. Everything is in our favour. We have what Christ had: we are infinitely loved. We are immortal diamonds because we are in the Son, the Immortal Diamond. The Three work on our behalf in all events; no situation is impossible, no psychological inadequacy is such that God does not reach deeper. We have our story of ourselves but Theirs is a better one, told with infinite grace and love and bringing the best to birth in us. "The glory of God is man fully alive: the glory of man is the vision of God" (Irenaeus). By reflecting Christ, we give glory to God and become most fully ourselves. The plan of the Father is radically achieved in Christ and the Three Divine Persons watch to see if we are following this lead. We can imagine Them turning to one another with glad smiles when at last the penny drops and we let go of our narrow and warped vision of ourselves and stride out on the Way which is Christ.

THE EXAMEN

"SEEK AND FIND!"

We come now to reconsidering a very practical way through which one can become this kind of reflective person. We need some method which will help us to be present to the world, to be witnesses to the truth about God's life in us, to be of service to the poor, to take our place in the struggle for justice, to truly reflect God. The examen (of conscience, of consciousness, of awareness, as it is variously called) can help us. It can be an exercise for individuals or for a group. Here the focus is on the individual. For communal reflection, the examen would take in more explicitly the dimensions of solidarity with the rest of mankind, with the parish and with the Church. In summary, the examen is one way of trying to let the statement of Jesus in John 10:10 become a reality in our lives. He said there: "I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly". The examen helps us to integrate our lives in all their aspects, to seek and to find God in all situations. This is the goal of our lives but the process is slow. We have, however, the assurance that "when you seek me, you shall find me; when you seek me with all your heart I will let you find me" (Jer. 29: 13-14). God is waiting to be found.

"HERE I AM!"

The examen is a time when I ask God to re-focus my life so that I may be turned towards Him in every area. The first beatitude sums this up well: "Happy are you who are free to be totally mine". The examen is about becoming and remaining free. Freedom is about having an unencumbered heart that can respond with joy to the invitations of God to take our part in His plans. Freedom is for service. The examen can be made at any time and for any length. A usual time is the evening for about 15 minutes. It is made up of different parts, any one of which can be taken up but not necessarily all at the one time. Pick a line, a sentence, an idea for today, and use another one tomorrow!

The main thing is that you meet God. Each of us has a unique journey to Him, a unique story to tell. In order that the examen be real, try to formulate your own examen using, perhaps, the guidelines given here in which the examen is divided into six parts: Becoming present to God; Asking for the light of the Holy Spirit; Thanksgiving; Review of the day; Expression of sorrow; Looking with hope to the future.

1. COMING INTO THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The stresses and strains of the day may cause in me a loss of my deepest identity. By becoming aware of the presence of God, I am coming back to the truth that I am loved by God. I will be restored by calling to mind the steady plan of God. I am called to "live through love in His presence" (Eph. 1:4), so in this part of the examen I am becoming conscious of His total presence to me at all times. One way to become aware of His presence is "to see Him looking at me, lovingly and humble" (St. Teresa). He is always present to me, always gazing on me with infinite love and reverence. I can forget this, although, as life moves on, this awareness of being loved can grow ever deeper. Another way to realise Their presence is to think of the Trinity as enfolding me in Their love. I can rest in the truth of that. In a busy day, this can easily be obscured but the examen brings me back to the true reality of my relationship with Them. I may rest in this for quite a long time. It is a central truth about Their Presence to me. They gaze on me and They smile. I bring a smile of joy to the face of God! I can dwell on how They see me, scripture is rich on this theme. I am the "image and likeness of God", "salt", "light", "friend" and "the blessed of the Father".

2. PRAYER FOR LIGHT

In order to see myself as They see me, I need to ask for the Spirit of light. God is light and in Him there is no darkness but I am not yet fully light, not yet transparent. My deepest orientation is towards Them and Their designs but They cannot yet fully have Their way with me.

My perception of Them and of what They Want of me is dim because of my blindness. Today, They wanted me to help Them and Their people, Their world. They wanted me to do this in certain ways, which They made known to me. They do not "play games" with me, asking me to do something but not telling me what and so making me feel guilty and frustrated. They have a will of Their own. They gestured to me today through the faces and lives of the needy. While much of Their plan may have been hidden from me, what I needed to know, in order to respond rightly to Them today, was shown me. So with my dim understanding and weak will, I need to ask Them now for light to see where They were and where was I.

3. THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is the context in which I am called to live out my life. Everything I have is a gift. There is nothing that I have not received. On some days the giftedness of life may be obvious; on others, it may help to focus on some particular gift, such as that of life, of health, of beauty or of nature. Creation, for example, is the "monstrance of God" (von Balthasar) and I can thank Him for it. I can thank God for relationships, friendships, work, food and drink, kindnesses received, moments of grace, good and helpful events. Since I have my own unique salvation-story, there is a pattern in God's drawing of me and I can reflect on this pattern, this unique story, and give thanks. I might want to thank God for some motto or phrase of scripture that sums up in a few words my relationship with Them, e.g. "The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing" (Ps. 23:1). Turning my attention to God, I might give thanks for Their presence to me at all times, for giving Themselves to me in so far as I allow Them. I might focus on Their Goodness, which is the source and origin of Their gifts, and thank Them for being Who They are, total goodness, understanding and love. The more I give thanks, the more grateful I become. I can give thanks, too, for the ability to give thanks! "Our desire to thank you is itself Your gift" (Eucharistic Preface). Slowly, everything can be seen as a gift; my heart becomes a grateful heart, easy to please, sensitive and apprecia-

tive and able to rest in God's goodness. "We do well always and everywhere to give thanks" (Eucharistic Preface). Gratitude is a sign of maturity in the human and in the spiritual life. The Eucharist itself teaches me gratitude and it is good that I thank God for His gift of Himself to me there. I am a very gifted person!

4. REVIEW OF THE DAY

Since all is redeemed, I can look back on any experience in the day and be sure that God is hidden there somewhere, waiting to be found. I may not be able to see why this or that happened but I can come to see that I was not alone in the event. They were with me, They touched that event and They have found a place for it in my growth towards Them. The touch of God always brings life and healing.

The review is twofold. First, I think of the good and graced times in the day, when I was in harmony with Them, when I acted in love, joy and patience and produced fruits worthy of the Spirit that is in me. This review leads again to gratitude for the particular graces of the day.

Secondly, with Their eyes and in Their company, I look at the negative experiences of the day: the times when I was living in fear or undue anxiety; the times of intolerance when I forgot Their compassion; the situations where I failed Them in faith or hope or love. I have been called to freedom - this is a favourite theme of the New Testament - but quite often my fear, my self-interest or my all-too-human view of things dominates me. It is hard to stay with these moments but They have compassion on my weakness and call me through these very failures into Their truth and the truth sets me free. It may take days, weeks or months for freedom and healing to come in a particular area of my life, e.g. in impatience, worry or unforgiveness, but if I stay with the truth, I know what I need to ask for in prayer. I grow in honesty and in dependence. St. Augustine's prayer: "May I know Thee, may I know

myself", is fulfilled in me. God, Whose strength is sufficient for my weakness, is seeking to help me and is working in me at a depth beyond knowledge or feeling. Sometimes I notice after a lapse of years that I now see or act differently; it is a happy surprise. I hardly know how I came to this change of heart but I did want it and now God has brought it about. There is nothing that I cannot ask Them for. They want to be asked.

Another aspect of this review is to call to mind the way in which God has been drawing me uniquely to Himself. We have seen earlier that this drawing is for service. It is a special grace, it is my way of being drawn into the plan. "Each one of you has received a special grace... so put yourselves at the service of others" (1 Peter 4:10). For God to draw me, I must trust ever more in Him as Jesus did. So I look to see in what way have I allowed myself to be drawn today.

Yet again, I can recall the day's events and notice at what times were They and I together, when I was alone and when did I part company from Them. "You were with me but I was not with you" (St. Augustine: Confessions 10:27).

Whatever way I enter into this part of the examen, I should talk honestly with Them about how I am feeling, whether disappointed, ashamed, lonely or peaceful and strong. I ask Them how They feel towards me. I ask to believe that Their loving gaze remains steadily on me, that They have not lessened Their hopes and desires for me, that They are "constant in Their affection for me" (Jer. 31:3). They will remind me that "Their power, working in me, can still do infinitely more than I can ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20). This frees me to live again in Their truth and light. Living "in the light" may involve pain and sacrifice. A decision may have to be made, perhaps to avoid a situation of sinfulness or to make a change which involves others. Such decisions can be lonely events and may bring pain to someone I love. But if I am turned towards Them in truth and honesty I can believe that the pain will give birth to new life both in myself and others.

5. EXPRESSION OF SORROW

In failing to have Their vision of things and of myself, I have in some way shifted Them from the centre. Under their loving gaze, I now realise that I am still precious; I am a sinner and yet totally loved. Passages from scripture may help express the sorrow I feel. I might feel like the lost sheep being carried on the shepherd's shoulders - this is a privileged place to me, for the 99 others have not experienced this closeness (Luke 15:5). I am being carried back to the source and to the centre. I might find myself before Jesus on the Cross and see Him giving His life totally for me in costly love. He never lost sight of the Father's vision of things, nor did He lose hope or give up. He was never wanting in love towards others. I have failed in these ways and now before Him I ask forgiveness and the grace of renewal. I am aware of my poverty but I have hope. I am aware that instead of placing my security totally in Them I have been building my own tower. I beg for a change of heart.

6. HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

I look to the time ahead and once again I turn to the Spirit, for I need His power at work in me in order to be totally turned towards the Father. I have learnt in this time of reflection that I have to begin again. I am now re-focussed on Them and on Their plan and I have more of Their vision of things. I choose once more to live through love in Their presence. At this point, I might call to mind phrases, words or images which give me hope and security, e.g. "I hold you by the right hand. Do not be afraid, you are mine. If you walk through the waters I will be with you" (Is. 43:1). In the strength of this newly-won freedom, I gain hope of being more wholly Theirs in the time ahead. I live in a renewed spirit of surrender and openness to hear Their unwavering call to me: "Happy are you who are free to be totally Ours" (cf. Matt. 5:3).

SUMMARY

Our journey began by noticing that we are not alone. There are Other Persons in our lives, more deeply involved with us than we could have dreamed. Someone said recently: "I never dared to think that God could be so personally and deeply involved with me. It's overwhelming to think of Him present and behind everything in our world!"

"We had the experience but we missed the meaning" (T.S. Eliot). To overcome this problem, two suggestions were made. Notice the present drawing of the heart and, also, look back to find "Christ present in remembrance". Seek for the patterns of Their dealings with you, for They tug and attract us to Themselves and Their plan in all events, even when we feel little, when nothing stirs, when all seems dead like Lazarus in his tomb. As we catch on, life takes on its intended meaning, and joy and peace follow, for everything speaks of Them.

We moved on to look beyond our personal experience. We explored what is on Their minds and sketched out Their plan to bring us all to eternal joy. They are out to please us! And so it should be our central concern to try to understand Those who love us most and who care for us with infinite attention. We looked at Jesus to see how we are to play our destined roles in helping to complete the plans of the Trinity. He is the person who best grasped the plan and whose attention to it never faltered. Like Him, we would wish to say at the end of life: "I have finished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Our life and prayer is to be gradually transformed into the simplicity of loving surrender to the dreams of God.

Our journey concluded with the examen, a simple practice to help us in the ongoing sincerity of effort to be at Their disposal and to carry Their plan forward as best as we can. The examen keeps us in touch with Love, which is the atmosphere of the new world order which They labour to bring about; love acknowledged in gratitude, love rejected but now restored through repentance. We take Their touch daily in the examen, and we rise from it a little more like Them and are more ready to share all we have and are with others, as They share Themselves with us.

"We need some method which will help us to be present to the world, to be witnesses to the truth about God's life in us, to be of service to the poor, to take our place in the struggle for justice, to truly reflect God. The examen (of conscience, of consciousness, of awareness, as it is variously called) can help us. It can be an exercise for individuals or for a group. The examen is one way of trying to let the statement of Jesus in John 10:10 become a reality in our lives. He said there: "I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly". The examen helps us to integrate our lives in all their aspects, to seek and to find God in all situations. This is the goal of our lives but the process is slow. We have, however, the assurance that "when you seek me, you shall find me; when you seek me with all your heart I will let you find me" (Jer. 29: 13-14). God is waiting to be found."

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