



CHAPTER 4: THE PARTICULAR EXAMINATION

“I may stand at the foot of a steep mountain, and I may long to be at the top as often and as long as I want to. There is no comfortable tram going up the mountain of the interior life. Much less can we expect that the dear God and our heavenly Mother will seize us by the scruff of the neck and gently take us up the mountain? No, if we want to reach the peak or want to make just a few steps upwards, we must climb ourselves; we must strive and make the effort. This is the law in the supernatural order, from which we can get no dispensation, no exception.”

(J. Kentenich, 1914).

Particular Examination and the Personal Ideal

The two belong inseparably together. Without the PE, as it is often abbreviated in Schoenstatt, the Personal Ideal would, at best, remain a beautiful idea, a fantasy with no formative influence on life. The Particular Examination without the Personal Ideal, on the other hand, “makes us sick”, as Father Kentenich once pointedly said. Yes, because then one would make resolutions only for the sake of resolutions.

What is meant by Particular Examination?

- It can be understood as a specific resolution, an intention in Confession, which little by little helps me to overcome my faults and strengthens the good in me. It becomes evident in the definition: Particular Examination means “particular” = small part, “examination” = test. I check and reflect upon which partial goal is meaningful for my striving at a certain time, and I examine myself daily if and how I have reached it.
- The Particular Examination gets its true meaning, when, as already indicated above, I use it as a method for the realization of the Personal Ideal in the fullest sense of the word. The word “partial goal” indicates this. If the Personal Ideal is the final goal, then the Particular Examination is an anticipated part of this final goal.
- To recognize the Personal Ideal is one thing, to attain it is another. The first is a great accomplishment, but it is not sufficient. My personal image ought to become clearly perceptible in its outline, it should make visible, in a uniquely personal way, what God had in mind when He envisaged me.
- Unfolding my Personal Ideal requires tools to help me. An especially important one, which cannot be replaced by anything else, is the Particular Examination. “The Particular Examination is the enlightened and effective ennobling of the main passion in the service of my Personal Idea.” (J. Kentenich). What small step can I take today to climb the mountain of my main passion away from selfish love or selfish honor to become that happy, wholesome, holy child the Father created me to be?

The meaning of small steps

Through the PE I learn to focus my view and my effort on one part of my life. Here and now this part of the whole has been assigned to me for its healing and sanctification. “Great holiness”, Father Kentenich says, consists of a thousand little things. Make good use of the time!” That means: **to take the small steps in the “small time” which I have available just now. The present time often seems so insignificant that I do not value it. Yet my life consists of the present moments.** Through the PE I give, in the present moment, the answer of love to the call of love, and I protect myself from false delusions of grandeur as well as from idle drifting. The PE makes self-realization realistic through self-education – daily anew, daily faithfully.

An application of the doctrine of good works

Father Kentenich calls the dogmatic foundation for the Particular Examination “**an enlightened application of the ecclesial teaching about good works**. These (good works) are not only brought about by the divine life, but also a means by which to increase the divine life within us.” **The PE is a tool in the work of self-education**, and at the same time it is a means for a totally personal way of growth in the divine life – **a means to let the covenant of love become concrete**. What is more, it is an excellent tool because **with the Particular Examination the capital of grace can be filled**. There are many opportunities for collecting “contributions”. The Particular Examination is also an **opportunity to mediate graces for others**. In effect it means that I become apostolically fruitful. Through them I can become a blessing to others. Josef Engling stated in one of his letters, “Only through self-sacrificing idealism will the world be renewed. So far I have preserved this for me through the help of my little Mother, by means of the dry PE”.

Characteristics of the Particular Examination

- The Particular Examination must be enlightened, adapted to my personality, to the present state of my soul, and to the circumstances.
 - ✓ Enlightened means: not to grope in the dark but to know, in the light of the Holy Spirit, what I must do now, what is presently, under these circumstances, the most meaningful resolution for me. **What do I confess? What criticism do I get from others? Am I working on a spiritual study for which I can apply myself through small steps?**
 - ✓ Enlightened is the PE when it calls me to joy and points me toward the positive, above all, when on account of a spiritual low I am especially in need of it right now.
- The Particular Examination must be filled with meaning
 - ✓ The great value which the small resolution means to conquer and which is the object of my efforts is the Personal Ideal.
 - ✓ "Don't say so easily, I'll do something someday. My love must always and everywhere move towards my aim in life. Therefore, my actions must lead me in that direction!" (J. Kentenich).
 - ✓ For others there may be other values which motivate their effort. My value is the Personal Ideal. For that I take the constant effort of the Particular Examination upon myself.
- The Particular Examination must be concrete and practical
 - ✓ **If I can easily judge whether I have kept my resolution, then my PE is concrete.**
 - ✓ **I should focus my PE on a concrete occasion, a concrete reflection, concrete practical questions I can work with.**
- The Particular Examination must be achievable with good will
 - ✓ A special resolution which can only be fulfilled with heroism, is not a useful everyday step forward. "God does not demand heroism every hour or every day. He will save that for very special occasions" (J. Vermeegen).
 - ✓ When joy gives wings to the will, the Particular Examination is most easily achieved, with good will. One can and should overcome one's faults. Yet, it is to be considered that besides the weaknesses of my nature, there is much that is positive in my character as well. If I affirm that, and support it with resolutions which give me joy, then the positive, the bright side will gradually outshine the dark sides of my disposition.

Control of the Particular Examination

It is part of the life of a Christian that at the end of a day he gives an account of himself to God. Father Kentenich advises in regard to the Particular Examination, not to wait until evening but to remember it three times a day: "In this case I want to adhere to the old ascetics. According to that, we too distinguish three times, morning, noon and evening. The attitude, which inspires these times, should be a certain enthusiasm. Magnanimity! An everyday enthusiasm in the fundamental orientation of my being towards this one aspect (PE). This is so important for us who want to form ourselves according to the image of Mary."

Joseph Engling writes: "My striving for perfection will most surely be evident in my Particular Examination. It will be the measure of my perfection. Therefore, I will put special emphasis on it. Weekly I will examine myself thoroughly in regard to it. If I can confess weekly, then I will do it in Confession; if not, then I will do it on a specific day, on Sunday." (Letters and Diary Notes, Vol. 1, p. 37).

Prayer

Dear Mother Thrice Admirable, Mother of Schoenstatt! Look upon my entire day's work with all its toil and burdens, with everything I was privileged to do for you. I give it all to you and beg, let it become a blessing for all who make a pilgrimage to your Shrine. Look kindly upon today's faults and weaknesses and restore what I have lost through negligence. Thank you for all the protection and blessings you have given me today. Help me now that I may continue to walk on the path, on which your faithful servant, Joseph Engling, has preceded me. Amen. (from "Nine Days with Joseph Engling").