

## Whose Authority Examen

*Dear Soul,*

*You are precious to Christ. When you take up His Authority, you will find an astounding freedom and a clarifying simplicity in your life. I pray that the Holy Spirit will speak to you as you ask yourself these questions. May He guide you to a deeper self-knowledge and a deeper relationship with Christ and the Catholic Church.*

*The three sections that follow are modeled on Fulton Sheen's three differences between the authority of Christ and the authority of Stalin.<sup>1</sup> If you find yourself to be under an authoritarian faith, there is freedom in Christ's Truth. Step boldly into His loving arms.*

*I recommend reading Abandonment to Divine Providence<sup>2</sup> by Jean Pierre de Caussade and Learning the Virtues that Lead You To God by Romano Guardini. They will lead you into a spiritual life that is balanced in the temporal while radical in the spiritual, and you will be made whole.*

*Venerable Fulton Sheen, pray for us.*

*-Helen*

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<sup>1</sup> Fulton Sheen, *Peace of Soul: Timeless Wisdom on Finding Serenity and Joy by the Century's Most Acclaimed Bishop* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1996). 271-275.

<sup>2</sup> Ignore editor footnotes present in some versions that directly contradict Caussade's text.

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## FIRST

*Christ's authority is primarily internal. It respects our reason and our lived experience.*

- ❖ What are the fruits of my faith in my lived experience? The fruits of the Holy Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.
- ❖ In what ways does my faith support and complete my personality? Are there pieces of me that are suffocating or cut off because of how I practice my faith?
- ❖ Do I feel my faith pressed upon me in externals? Are there ways or times I feel pressured to act a certain way or perform certain pious acts because of the influence of another?
- ❖ Have I been told to stop certain practices (for example recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet, or a personal devotion to a saint) because it is not a group practice?
- ❖ Am I settling for peace of mind, rather than pursuing peace of soul? Peace of mind uses faith to create a tidy black and white world and often relies on a checklist spirituality to feel assured of heaven. Peace of soul is born of the tranquility of true order, wherein my senses are subject to my reason, my reason to my faith, and my whole personality to the will of God for me; its goal is a personal relationship with our loving God.
- ❖ Do my acts of faith align with the Truth of Christ and my reason?
- ❖ Are there times when my conscience is against the rules or routines I use to govern my faith life? If yes: What is my conscience pointing out to me? What are these rules/ routines and where do they come from? For example, taking a cold shower every morning when you know that it is making you cranky with your loved ones, or you are sick, or it is making you resent God, or it is coming from a sense of "I deserve this punishment".
- ❖ Am I able to fully attend to my primary vocation and state in life? Do my spiritual practices take me away from my work, family or parish? For example, do I find myself refusing my children's requests to read a book in order to pray

for them? Or do I live reading to them as a prayer? Do I find myself going to daily mass sick, rather than caring for myself? Are my pious activities leaving my work unfinished or unattended? Am I present to my religious group or spiritual director but not my family?

- ❖ Am I free to ask questions, doubt, or otherwise wrestle with what is before me?
- ❖ Do I give my reason and lived experience a seat at the table along with those who advise me? Do I have a healthy trust in myself? Do I believe my own experience?
- ❖ Am I free to change course in my life in accord with what God places in it?
- ❖ Is my time, prayer, reading, or social time dominated by or limited to one group/ faith charism/ spiritual director?
- ❖ Do I find myself using or subject to thought-terminating cliches or platitudes? An example would be the phrase "offer it up." To one soul, this phrase may stand for a depth of uniting suffering to Christ and bring meaning and strength to enter into suffering. To a soul where it is a thought-terminating cliché, this phrase truncates acknowledgement of suffering and shunts the soul's experiences and needs to the side. Rather than helping the soul enter into the salvific power of suffering, it prevents the soul from receiving the help and support needed and causes resentment towards God.

## SECOND

*Christ asks for us to celebrate and live out the unique talents, preferences, and desires that He has placed in our hearts.*

- ❖ Am I becoming more and more uniquely myself because I am entering into a deeper relationship with God?
- ❖ Does my life and lived faith fit with my God-given desires and preferences?
- ❖ Do I isolate myself from others or look down on those who practice the Faith differently? Does this lead me away from parish life?
- ❖ Do I or my faith community have an insider/outsider mentality? Are the outsiders considered less holy, less likely to get to heaven?

- ❖ Do I govern my own thoughts and feelings, or am I told/ expected to think and feel a certain way?
- ❖ Are there things in the way I practice my faith that keep me from realizing when my heart is discordant with its direction?
- ❖ Do I feel excessive or persistent guilt, shame or unworthiness?
- ❖ Am I celebrating and living out my unique talents, preferences, and desires God has placed in my heart? Or am I under pressure to conform to another person/ ideal/ saint?
- ❖ Do my spiritual practices ever conflict with my primary vocation which is the path God has given me to Himself?
- ❖ Does my faith free me to live in reality; can I enter my experiences, emotions, hurts and joys knowing that God is in them and speaking to me?
- ❖ Am I free to respond to God's love and invitations in ways unique to my soul?
- ❖ Do I see my limitations as blocking me from God, or a way God speaks to me? Can I accept my weaknesses, personality and circumstances as God at work and adapt my spiritual life accordingly?
- ❖ Are my acts of piety or submission to spiritual things motivated by a desire to escape responsibilities or weaknesses?
- ❖ Am I seeking to become Saint Me, or am I trying to become Saint Somebodyelse?

### THIRD

*Christ's authority draws out our love.*

- ❖ Do I feel fear or anger when I think about God, my faith community, or my faith? Why might there be fear or anger around this?
- ❖ Do I feel estranged from my own heart? Any numbness or confusion that might be a sign I am rejecting fear or anger because they are unsafe?

- ❖ Am I afraid of being an outcast?
- ❖ Am I afraid of isolation or rejection by my spiritual community or my relationship(s)?
- ❖ When I experience excitement, joy or fulfillment, do they cause me to turn inward on myself, or do I bloom outward to share them generously? Do I feel like they will be stolen from me unless I guard them carefully, and feel that another participating lessens my joy? Or do I see they are a generous gift from a loving God Who wants to multiply them?
- ❖ Are the results of positive personal experience an outpouring of the fruits of the Spirit? The fruits of the Holy Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.
- ❖ If this devotion, group, mentor was taken from me, would I still trust Christ to be living in me and guiding me? Or would my spiritual life die?
- ❖ Love requires freedom. Am I free to leave and free to return to my spiritual practices/ acts/ community?
- ❖ Am I expected to gather others to follow a spirituality, group, or mentor also? Are my friendships with others out of genuine Christ-centered love, or do I have an agenda?
- ❖ Do I surrender to God to let Him enter my heart to dwell? Or am I slogging through life fashioning my own virtue?
- ❖ Do I try to justify myself by the law?
- ❖ Do I identify with the group/ act of piety/ devotion as my main identity? OR is Christ my identity?

*Read about my journey in Cloud of Witnesses: 25 Stories of Sainly Inspiration and Intercession published by Write These Words.*