

# ***Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo***

## The Mystery of the Incarnation and its exemplarity for Christian life in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

***Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti***  
***Pontifical Atheneum of the Holy Cross***

Reflection on the mystery of the Incarnate Word, “the mediator and the sum total of Revelation,”<sup>1</sup> constitutes the main theological reference-point to understand the meaning of the history of salvation and God’s plan of creation. The Word Incarnate, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,”<sup>2</sup> is an inexhaustible mystery that constantly calls theologians and the saints to deeper study and contemplation. And it is precisely the saints down through the centuries, in the rich diversity yet profound harmony with which they have proposed what it means to be a follower of Christ, who have offered us an example of how much light, also for theological reflection, stems from the loving veneration of the Son of God made man. Knowledge of the revealed Word deepens not only through study, but also through “the intimate sense of spiritual realities that they [believers] experience.”<sup>3</sup> From Francis of Assisi to Catherine of Siena, from Ignatius of Loyola to Teresa of Lisieux, from Thomas More to Alphonsus Liguori, the pages dedicated by the saints to meditation on the mystery of Christ have always been a treasure of inestimable value for the *intellectus fidei* of the people of God.

Concerning the teachings of Blessed Josemaría, in the Pontifical Decree on his heroic virtues we read as follows: “Thanks to a profound contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnate Word, the Servant of God understood in depth that the framework of human realities is intimately interwoven in the heart of the person who has been reborn in Christ, with the economy of supernatural life, thus becoming a place and means of sanctification.”<sup>4</sup> In the works of the founder of Opus Dei there is indeed clear evidence of how the consideration of the divine-human perfection of the Incarnate Word led him with surprising naturalness to understand and preach in an attractive and profound way the essential nucleus of the Christian life and condition. His teaching was a con-

1. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

2. *Col* 2:3.

3. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, no. 8.

4. CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF THE SAINTS, *Pontifical Decree on the Heroic Exercise of Virtues of the Servant of God, Josemaría Escrivá*, April 9, 1990. Latin text published in *Romana* No. 6 (1990), pp. 22-25.

tinual invitation to look at Jesus Christ, to see in him true God and true man, and through contemplation of his Sacred Humanity to attain access to the mystery of his divinity.<sup>5</sup> This path, as his writings reveal, had its origin firstly in his personal prayer. This can be easily and briefly shown by recalling the tender devotion that already as a young priest he had for an image of the Baby Jesus that belonged to a community of Augustinian nuns of which he was chaplain. He liked to bring the image home with him, as if moved by an imperious need for a sensible presence that would serve as a help to his prayer.<sup>6</sup>

In the teachings of Blessed Josemaría we come across numerous ascetical and doctrinal implications that derive precisely from the divine-human condition of Christ. In the present study we propose to explore some of the principal theological contents of these implications, limiting ourselves to the works published to date. Given the vastness of the theme—the consequences of the Incarnation involve directly or indirectly every aspect of the Christian faith—many of our observations are offered by way of example only and with a limited purpose. As the title of our study indicates, we confine ourselves to a reading of the mystery of the Incarnation according to a noetic perspective, without being able to develop the consequent salvific implications. This distinction, while useful for theological analysis, should not be sought in the spiritual experience of Blessed Josemaría. In the life of any believer, and especially of the saints, comprehension of the salvific value of the mystery of Jesus Christ, adhesion to his person and its implications for Christian life, always precede any theoretical reflection on the cognitive content of the mystery itself.

Our investigation will be centered on the numerous references to the expression *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* (perfect God, perfect man)—at times present implicitly—in the writings of Blessed Josemaría. We will then look at other texts where the author draws out doctrinal and pastoral implications of the mystery of the Incarnate Word, trying finally to organize the different texts according to the thematic contents in question. The topic studied here is not a new one, since a

5. Significant in this respect is the direct witness of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo: “The spirituality of the founder had a solid foundation: a profound awareness of the richness contained in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. Our founder understood that with the Incarnation of the Word, all good human realities were raised to the supernatural order. Working, studying, smiling, crying, tiredness, resting, developing friendships—all of these things, among so many others, became divine actions in the life of Jesus Christ. They could, therefore, mesh perfectly with the interior life and the apostolate: in a word, with the search for sanctity.” (A. DEL PORTILLO, *Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, as seen by his successor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo*, interview by Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter, Princeton, 1996, p. 58).

6. In the biographies of the founder of Opus Dei, this image is usually referred to as “the Christ Child of Don Josemaría.” It is still preserved in the Church of St. Elizabeth in Madrid. Cf. A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *El Fundador del Opus Dei*, Rialp, Madrid 1983, p. 150; A. SASTRE, *Tiempo de Caminar*, Rialp, Madrid 1989, pp. 138. And more recently, A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *El Fundador del Opus Dei, vol. I* Rialp, Madrid 1997, pp. 406-407. This image of the Child is very probably the source of the autobiographical words of the founder of Opus Dei commenting on the third joyful mystery of the Rosary in his book *Holy Rosary*, Scepter, London/Princeton, third edition, 1978.

number of studies already exist that discuss from different perspectives important aspects of the Christocentrism of Blessed Josemaría.<sup>7</sup>

### 1. The mystery of the Incarnate Word in the economy of revelation.

By way of introduction it may be useful to briefly summarize the principal Biblical and theological coordinates that lead us to see the mystery of the Incarnation as the distinctive truth of Christianity and the hermeneutic principle of the relationship between God and man.

In the first place, St. Paul's letters present us with the divine plan of salvation as a mystery belonging to the Father, hidden for centuries, but which is now revealed in the Son.<sup>8</sup> This mystery is Christ himself in his divine and human natures,<sup>9</sup> a condition for that mediation that permits Redemption to be carried out both in its dimensions of restoring peace between God and humanity, and of re-ordering creation to its Creator. The Incarnation of the Word is thus seen to be a supremely revealing event, not only because of the *form* in which the Word of God is given to humanity—an incarnated divine word, expressed by the words and actions of the Word—but also because it contains the entire *content*: Everything that the Blessed Trinity wanted to reveal and give to mankind is summed up and fulfilled in the Father's gift of the eternal Son, made man by the work of the Holy Spirit. By looking at Christ one can read every word that God addresses to man, and, because of his human mediation, one can find the appropriate words that should characterize our own response to God.

Secondly, the fact that the plenitude of revelation and God's self-giving to the world, as St. John's prologue reminds us, are fulfilled in the person of the Word made man, cannot but characterize in a determining way the relation between God and the world, between God and each human person. In the mystery of Christ the work of creation and redemption is fulfilled. As the model and source of our predestination to divine filiation and our participation in the life of the Trinity,<sup>10</sup> he becomes for us, in the present economy of salvation, the "place of our

7. Given the impossibility of providing all the preceding theological contributions related in some way to the Christocentrism of Blessed Josemaría, we have chosen those that in our judgment are most relevant to our topic: ANTONIO ARANDA, "The Christian *alter Christus, ipse Christus*," in *Holiness and the World*, Scepter, Princeton, 1997, pp. 127-189; J.L. CHABOT, "Responsibility Toward the World and Freedom," in *ibid.*, pp. 197-217; P. RODRÍGUEZ, *Vocacion, trabajo, contemplacion. II: El mundo como tarea moral y V: La economía de la salvación y la secularidad cristiana*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1986, pp. 37-58 and 123-218; *idem.*, "Omnia traham ad meipsum. Il significato de Gv 12:32 nell'esperienza spirituale di mons. Escrivá de Balaguer," in *Annale Theologicæ* 6 (1992), pp. 5-34; *idem.*, "Vivir santamente la vida ordinaria," in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la universidad* EUNSA, Pamplona 1993, pp. 197-258; J.L. ILLANES, "The Church in the world: the secularity of the members of Opus Dei," in *Opus Dei in the Church*, Four Courts, Dublin, 1994; C. FABRO, "Virtu umane e soprannaturali nelle omelie di mons. Escrivá," in *Studi Cattolici* 27 (1983), no. 265, pp. 181-185; F. OCÁRIZ, I. DE CELAYA, *Vivir como hijos de Dios. Estudios sobre el Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1993.

8. Cf. *Rom* 16:25-26; *Eph* 1:3-23; *Eph* 3:9; *Col* 1:13-20.

9. Cf. *Eph* 3:3-4; *Col* 2:2-3.

10. Cf. *Eph* 1:4-5; *Rom* 8:29; *Col* 1:18.

transcendence.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the relationship between the human and the divine is essentially “Christian.” This adjective generates and coherently illumines a broad theological panorama, rich in historical, existential, and even cultural facets. The relation between the human and the divine contains implicitly other wider themes: the relationship between nature and grace, between immanence and transcendence, between history and eternity, between sign and sacrament, between reason and faith, between work and prayer, between the city of man and the city of God. On our understanding of what the Incarnation is depends not only our comprehension of the relationship between nature and grace, but also our view of man and the world, and our very conception of God.

Thirdly, the centrality of the mystery of Christ in the plan of creation, as well as that of redemption, enables the Incarnation of the Word to reveal in a privileged way God’s plan for creation itself.<sup>12</sup> In Him we find the reasons both for the first creation and for the *new* creation. Moreover, precisely because he is the ultimate meaning of creation and the one who makes possible its ordering to the Father in the Holy Spirit, the Incarnate Word’s divine-human condition reveals the capacity that human and earthly realities have of leading to God, and therefore their implicit salvific value, when these are read, but above all lived, in the light of Christ’s life, particularly his paschal mystery.<sup>13</sup> Thus the created world belongs to the mystery of the Incarnate Word and can be fully understood, cared for and guided to its end only in union with Christ, that is, by participation in his mystery and the reproducing in us of its salvific logic.

## 2. Origin and meaning of the expression *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*.

In the writings of the founder of Opus Dei published to date, the well-known formula from the pseudo-Athanasian Creed *Quicumque*, “perfectus Deus, perfectus homo,”<sup>14</sup> is used to refer to Jesus’ perfect humanity and perfect divinity 18 times, either in Latin or in its Spanish equivalent.<sup>15</sup> If we include in this analysis the equivalent expression “true God and true man” and the direct references to the “perfect humanity of the incarnate Word,” the total number rises to 44.<sup>16</sup> Thus,

11. Cf. *Eph* 2:6-7; *Col* 3:1-4. On this topic also see H. SCHLIER, “The Letter to the Ephesians,” *Theological Commentary on the New Testament*, Paideia, Brescia 1973, p. 63.

12. Cf. *Jn* 1:1-3; *Heb* 1:2-3; *Eph* 1:9-10; *Col* 1:16-17; *1 Cor* 8:6.

13. Cf. *1 Cor* 3:21-23; *Col* 1:24-27; *Rom* 8:28-32.

14. “*Deus est ex substantia Patris ante saecula genitus, et homo est ex substantia matris, in saeculo natus; perfectus Deus, perfectus homo ex anima rationali [rationabili] et humana carne subsistens*” (Symbol *Quicumque*, DS, 76).

15. Cf. *Furrow*, nos. 652 and 687; *The Forge*, no. 290; *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 13, 83, 89, 107, 117, 151; *Friends of God*, nos. 50, 56, 73, 75, 93, 176, 201, 241; *The Way of the Cross*, Station VI, no. 1. Chabot finds a slightly smaller frequency (“*non meno di quattordici volte*,” cf. *Responsabilità di fronte al mondo e libertà*, *op.cit.*, p. 199).

16. Therefore the following references could be added: *Furrow*, nos. 421 and 813; *The Forge*, no. 182; *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 13, 14, 61, 95, 96, 109, 120, 125, 164, 166, 168, 169, 180; *Friends of God*, nos. 50, 56, 73, 121, 274, 275, 281, 299; *The Way of the Cross*, Station VI, no. 3. The number would increase if one also added passages that contain an indirect reference to the divine and human natures of the Word: cf. for example, the homily “*Passionately Loving the World*,” in *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, nos. 114-115.

along with the expression *alter Christus, ipse Christus*, referring to the condition of every Christian, this is one of the most frequently used conceptual formulae in Blessed Josemaría's preaching.<sup>17</sup>

But how did this expression originate in the magisterium of the early Church and what was its dogmatic purpose? If we set aside for a moment the Symbol *Quicumque*, which arose around the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century for catechetical and liturgical reasons and in which the phrase *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* is included along with the principal Trinitarian and Christological statements elaborated earlier,<sup>18</sup> the first reference to an expression of this kind is found in a letter of Pope Damasus I from the year 374. In answer to the Arians and the Apollinarists, he objects that the first, when speaking about the Son, "call his divinity imperfect," and that the second, when speaking about Jesus Christ, "falsely affirm an imperfect humanity."<sup>19</sup>

The pseudo-Athanasian formulation appears for the first time in Greek in the year 433 in the so-called "Decree of Union": "We confess, consequently, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, perfect God and perfect man, (*theon theleion kai anthropon teleion*) [composed of] a rational soul and a body, was engendered before all ages by the Father according to his divinity, and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, he was born of the Virgin Mary in regard to his humanity; he is consubstantial with the Father in regard to his divinity, and consubstantial with us in regard to his humanity."<sup>20</sup> Published by Sixtus III, this decree sanctioned the reunification of the bishops of the Church of Antioch with those confessing the orthodox faith, as the natural outcome to the solution to the Nestorian crisis resolved at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Two years before this decree, the council had defined the presence of both natures, human and divine, in the Son of God made man, explaining that they are united in the hypostasis, that is, in the subject (the person) of the Word.

As is well known the efforts of the Church's Magisterium to clarify the "perfect humanity of the incarnate Word" lasted for more than two centuries, from the Council of Chalcedon (in the year 451) to the Third Council of Constantinople (in the year 681), in the face of opinions that were heretical or at least not fully orthodox.<sup>21</sup> Thus, in a letter to Bishop Flavian of Constantinople, Pope Leo the Great taught, against Eutyches, that "in a nature that was integral and perfect as

17. Antonio Aranda has counted a total of 14 uses of the expression "*alter Christus, ipse Christus*," and 16 of each one of these separately: cf. A. ARANDA, *Il cristiano "alter Christus, ipse Christus," op.cit.*, pp. 124-125.

18. For a history of the Symbol *Quicumque*, besides the critical edition of C. H. TURNER, "The Athanasian Creed," in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1910), pp. 401-411, one can consult J.N.D. KELLY, *The Athanasian Creed*, A & C. Black, London 1964.

19. "*Illi imperfectam divinitatem in Dei Filio dicunt, isti imperfectam humanitatem in hominis Filio mentiuntur. Quod si utique imperfectus homo susceptus est, imperfectus Deus munus est, imperfecta nostra salus, quia non est totus homus salvatus*" (DAMASUS I, in DS 146).

20. SIXTUS III, *Formula Unionis*, in DS, 272.

21. For a global view of the development of the Christological dogma of this period, cf. M. SERENTHÀ, *Gesù Cristo, oggi e sempre. Saggio di Cristologia*, LDC, Torino-Leumann 1986, pp. 220-252.

true man, true God was born, integral in what is his, integral in what is ours (*totus in suis, totus in nostris*).<sup>22</sup> A few years later, the Council of Chalcedon, with the use of the term “person” having finally been stabilized, was able to fix the Christological vocabulary with the formula “one person, two natures,” specifying that the two natures subsist *inconfuse, immutabiliter, indivise, inseparabiliter*.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the Third Council of Constantinople defended once again Christ’s perfect humanity against the monothelite error, confirming that in Jesus Christ there is a true human will, and that the assumption of humanity by the Word did not diminish or much less annul that will, but rather gave it autonomy, consistency and foundation: “Just as his all-holy, immaculate, and animated body, by being deified, was not suppressed, but rather retained its proper state and way of being, so his human will, although deified, was not annulled but rather preserved.”<sup>24</sup>

The second Person of the Blessed Trinity, by his incarnation and “during the whole economy of his incarnate life, worked miracles and endured sufferings, not in appearance but in reality.”<sup>25</sup>

It is not difficult to grasp the significance and consequences of this profession of orthodox faith.<sup>26</sup> The primitive Church, with the magisterium of the great councils of antiquity, solidly based on the Gospel message, was fully conscious that only the confession of the incarnate Word’s two perfect natures, the divine and the human, safeguarded the entire value and reality of the redemption. If Christ had not been true God, the universal salvific efficacy of the vicarious sacrifice would be lost. If he had not been truly man, the greatness of God’s love for humanity, shown by the sacrifice on the Cross, would not be fully apparent, nor would a true “solidarity” with fallen human nature have been established, thus undermining the salvific value of the humanity of the Word as an instrument of divine grace.<sup>27</sup> The completeness of the mediation, as well as the authentic meaning of the salvific alliance, required as much the fullness of the humanity as that of the divinity: the Only-begotten of the Father should also be the First-born among men.<sup>28</sup> In addition, only the true humanity of the incarnate Word enables him to be a true model for every human being, one who can truly be taken as an example.<sup>29</sup>

22. “*In integra ergo veri hominis perfecta que natura verus natus est Deus, totus in suis, totus in nostris- nostra autem dicimus quae in nobis ab initio Creator condidit et quae reparanda suscepit*” (Tomus Leonis, in DS 293).

23. Cf. DS 302.

24. THIRD COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE, 18th Session, DS 556.

25. *Ibid.*, DS 558.

26. “The very Son of God came to redeem us, not a subordinate celestial being. But He is truly and without diminution a man of our nature and of our stock. The Antiocheans upheld this against Docetism and against certain tendencies of Alexandrian origin. The Redeemer is not an intermediate being, half-God and half-man; but, at the same time, the true God is the Creator and a real man. The fact that this man is God does not signify any limitation of his humanity, but on the contrary its full actuation.” (P. SMULDERS, “*Sviluppo della cristologia nella storia dei dogmi e del magistero*,” in *Mysterium Salutis*, vol. 5, Queriniana, Brescia 1971, p. 586).

27. These implications are mentioned in the previously cited letter of Pope Damasus I (cf. DH 146); their theological development was especially the work of the Cappadocian Fathers.

28. Cf. *Jn* 1:18; *Heb* 1:6; *Rom* 8:29; *Rom* 5:14.

29. Cf. *Mt* 11:29; *Jn* 13:15, 34.

The confession of the authentic Christological dogma is therefore a necessary and indispensable condition so that the mission of the Church can situate itself within the prolongation of the mission of Christ and propose to all people the universality of Her salvific mediation. In the confession of a *lex incarnationis*, by which a true and perfect humanity is assumed by the true divine Word, there is contained, in a certain way, the very foundation of the universal call to holiness and the ordering of all earthly realities to God. By becoming man in Christ, God “has united himself in a certain way with every man.”<sup>30</sup> No one can feel himself a stranger to Christ; no human happening can be foreign to the events of His earthly life. Everyone is called to participate in the recapitulation whereby the Son leads back to the Father in the Spirit that creation which He himself has redeemed, in virtue both of his divine Person and his true humanity. Hence the particular sensitivity of the entire Christian Tradition—of which the experience and teaching of the saints are living interpreters—in recognizing in the formula *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* an essential assertion for the proclamation and effectiveness of the universality of the salvific mission of the Church.

It seems to us that these considerations have a very special relevance in the case of the founder of Opus Dei. The nucleus of the message that Blessed Josemaría bore in our own times was to remind everyone of the universal call to holiness, of the sanctification and sanctifiability of earthly realities through work carried out in union with Christ, especially ordinary work that imitates the example of Jesus’ thirty years of hidden life.<sup>31</sup> This nucleus is made formally explicit in the particular pastoral mission entrusted to Opus Dei by the Church, when it was established as a personal Prelature.<sup>32</sup> “With supernatural intuition,” said Pope John Paul II in his homily at the Mass of beatification, “Blessed Josemaría untiringly preached the universal call to holiness and apostolate. Christ calls everyone to become holy in the realities of everyday life. Hence, work too is a means of personal holiness and apostolate, when it is done in union with Jesus Christ; for the Son of God, in the Incarnation, has united himself in a certain way with the whole reality of man and with the whole of creation. In a society in which an unbridled craving for material things turns them into idols and a cause of separation from God, the new *beatus* reminds us that these same realities, creatures of God and of human industry, if used correctly for the glory of the Creator and the service of one’s brothers and sisters, can be a path for men and women to meet Christ.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, the call to imitate Christ’s true humanity and the exhortation to divinize ordinary work through a true and sincere filial life, striving for identification with Christ, accompanied every step of Blessed Josemaría’s preaching.

30. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

31. An authoritative synthesis of this nucleus can be read, for example, in the *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, n. 3, § 1, in *Opus Dei in the Church*, *op.cit.*, Appendix II. By way of illustration, one might also look at the following texts from the founder: *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 45, 122; *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, nos. 24, 26, and the homily “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Ibid.*, no. 116.

32. Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, Nov. 28, 1982, in AAS 75 (1983), p. 423.

33. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Homily at the Beatification of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá,” May 17, 1992, in *Romana* 8 (1992), pp. 19-20.

### 3. The Incarnation of the Word, the “law of condescension” and the sanctification of ordinary life.

Let us now look at the first group of texts from Opus Dei’s founder containing the pseudo-Athanasian formula (or its equivalent). In these, the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ, true God but also true man, is held up as the model for the life of every Christian. Most occur in the context of a catechesis on the virtues, especially those related to work, which will be the topic of the next section. A second context, equally representative, is that in which the unhurried contemplation of Christ as true man “moves” the Christian to enter into contact with God, stirring up feelings of gratitude, but also of contrition and a desire to correspond, since the perfect humanity of the Word “reveals” the magnitude of God’s love for each human being.

In this last context, the divine-human condition of the Son of God is presented as a “law of condescension,” a mystery “that should move Christians,”<sup>34</sup> making the imitation of Christ and access to the Father’s love easier: “In order to bring men his message of salvation and show them God’s love, Christ, who was perfect God and perfect man, acted in a human and a divine way. God comes down to man’s level. He takes on our nature completely, except for sin. It makes me very happy to realize that Christ wanted to be fully a man, with flesh like our own. I am moved when I contemplate how wonderful it is for God to love with a man’s heart.”<sup>35</sup> From the humanity of Christ to the Person of the Word: this is the ideal path that reveals to us his divinity through the contemplation of the condescending love shown by the assumption of a perfect humanity. “All this human behavior is the behavior of God. Christ is God become man: a complete, perfect man. And through his human nature, he shows us what his divine nature is. . . . We are discovering God. Everything Christ did has a transcendental value. It shows us the nature of God and beckons us to believe in the love of God who created us and wants us to share his intimate life.”<sup>36</sup>

This law of condescension and revelation reaches its culmination in Christ’s redemptive passion: “I give you thanks, my Jesus,” we read in *Furrow*, “for your decision to become perfect Man, with a Heart which loved and is most lovable; which loved unto death and suffered; which was filled with joy and sorrow; which delighted in the things of men and showed us the way to heaven.”<sup>37</sup> And we read in *The Way of the Cross*: “Our sins were the cause of the passion: of that torture which defigured the most lovable countenance of Jesus, *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*. And again it is our wretchedness that impedes us now from contemplating our Lord, and makes his figure appear dark and distorted.”<sup>38</sup>

34. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 13.

35. *Ibid.*, no. 107.

36. *Ibid.*, no. 109.

37. *Furrow*, no. 813.

38. *The Way of the Cross*, Sixth Station, no. 1. See also *Furrow*, no. 687. Also see the use of the word “*mirar*” [to look] in the commentaries on the sorrowful mysteries in *Holy Rosary*.



Blessed Josemaría's writings make mention of his custom, right from the early years of his priesthood, to give to others copies of the Gospel and books on Christ's passion. This practice was associated with the desire to move others to contemplate the greatness of the divine-human love of God made man: "In order to draw close to God we must take the right road, which is the Sacred Humanity of Christ. That is why I have always advised people to read books on our Lord's passion. Such works, which are full of true piety, bring to our minds the Son of God, a Man like ourselves and also true God, who in his flesh loves and suffers to redeem the world."<sup>39</sup> Again in the context of the passion, Christ's perfect humanity is seen as the source of his deeply human desire to remain forever with his disciples, despite their imminent separation, a desire that Jesus' perfect divinity makes possible by the gift of the Eucharist.<sup>40</sup>

The Word's humanity, which reveals the love of the Son for the Father and the love of the Father for all mankind in the Son, moves the Christian to follow the example of Christ's whole life. From the consideration of the episode of his temptations we draw strength to better fight against our own shortcomings and passions;<sup>41</sup> from the admiration of his accessibility, seen in his hunger, his thirst, his weariness, all so like our own, we feel ourselves encouraged to speak to the Lord, to establish a personal relationship with God in Christ. "St. Matthew described how Jesus, 'returning to the city, was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside he went up to it' (*Mt* 21:18-19). How wonderful, Lord, to see you hungry! To see you thirsty, too, by the well of Sichar! (cf. *Jn* 4:7). I contemplate you who are *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*, truly God, yet truly man, with flesh like my flesh. 'He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave' (*Phil* 2:7), so that I should never have the slightest doubt that he understands me and loves me. 'He was hungry.' Whenever we get tired—in our work, in our studies, in our apostolic endeavors—when our horizon is darkened by lowering clouds, then let us turn our eyes to Jesus, to Jesus who is so good, and who also gets tired; to Jesus who is hungry and suffers thirst. Lord, how well you make yourself understood! How lovable you are!"<sup>42</sup> In another homily he returns to the same theme in analogous terms: "He was hungry. The Maker of the universe, the Lord of all creation, experiences hunger! Thank you, Lord, for inspiring the sacred author to include this small touch here, a detail that makes me love you more and which encourages me to desire ardently to contemplate your sacred Humanity! *Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*, perfect God and perfect Man, of flesh and bone, just like you and I."<sup>43</sup>

The central position of the sanctification of work and one's daily duties in the preaching of Opus Dei's founder led him to insist on the redemptive value of

39. *Friends of God*, no. 299, See also *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 107.

40. "What we cannot do, our Lord is able to do. Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect man, leaves us, not a symbol, but a reality. He himself stays with us" (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 83). The same idea appears in other places: cf. *ibid.*, no. 151.

41. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 61; cf. *The Forge*, no. 182.

42. *Friends of God*, no. 201. Cf. *ibid.*, no. 176.

43. *Ibid.*, no. 50.

Jesus of Nazareth's ordinary life. He places its theological basis, once more, on both natures, divine and human, of the Son of God: "If you consider the many compliments paid to Jesus by those who witnessed his life, you will find one which in a way embraces all of them: *bene omnia fecit* (Mk 7:37), he has done everything exceedingly well: not only the great miracles, but also the little everyday things that didn't dazzle anyone, but which Christ performed with the accomplishment of one who is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*. Our Lord's whole life fills me with love for him, but I have a special weakness for his thirty hidden years spent in Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth. That period, so long in comparison with his public life and which the Gospels hardly mentions, might seem empty of any special meaning to a person who views it superficially. And yet, I have always maintained that this silence about our Lord's early life speaks eloquently for itself, and contains a wonderful lesson for us Christians. They were years of intense work and prayer, years during which Jesus led an ordinary life, a life like ours we might say, which was both divine and human at the same time."<sup>44</sup> There are many similar texts highlighting the redemptive value of ordinary work, especially work that is hidden and made up of apparently unimportant things, carried out in union with Christ. And many of these take as their starting-point the mystery of the Incarnation or the divine-human condition of Jesus of Nazareth. These are considerations often recounted with the emotion of someone eager to share a discovery that has deeply marked his own life. "When we behave this way, acting quite normally (just the same as our fellowmen do) and with a supernatural outlook, we are simply following the example set by Jesus Christ, who is true God and true Man. See how full of naturalness his life is. For thirty years he passes unnoticed as just another workman, without calling attention to himself, and he is known in his village as the son of the carpenter. ... I must say that I am deeply moved by the conduct of our Lord, who passed through life as just one more among men."<sup>45</sup>

#### **4. The Incarnation in view of the relationship between nature and grace: no one should surpass a Christian in humanity.**

As already mentioned, many references to the pseudo-Athanasian formula occur in the context of teachings on the virtues. As other authors have suitably shown, this theme contains important aspects of a vision of the nature-grace relationship which is rooted precisely in the Incarnation.<sup>46</sup>

44. *Ibid.*, no. 56.

45. *Friends of God*, no. 121. See also, for example, the texts in *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, nos. 10 and 55; *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 20, 14, 183-184; *Friends of God*, no. 81. The ordinary work of Holy Mary also shared, and by a special title, in the same human-divine economy established by the Incarnation: "Let us also contemplate his blessed Mother, who is our Mother too. We find her on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross, praying. This is nothing new for Mary. She has always acted like this, as she fulfilled her duties and looked after her home. As she went about the things of this earth she kept her attention on God. Christ who is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*, wanted us also to have the example of his Mother, the most perfect of creatures, she who is full of grace, to strengthen our desire to lift our eyes up to the love of God at every moment" (*Friends of God*, no. 241).

46. Cf. CORNELIO FABRO, *Virtù umana e soprannaturali nelle omelie di mons. Escrivá*, op.cit.: "Hence Msgr. Escrivá's insistence that the Christian should be 'universal': not only in the sense that his ideal of perfection should embrace every social class, from the humblest laborer to the highest positions in government,

Msgr. Escriva's homily "Human Virtues," given in 1941 and included in *Friends of God*, contains at least seven allusions to the pseudo-Athanasian creed, inviting us first and foremost to penetrate deeply into the mystery of the incarnate Word.<sup>47</sup> The unity of his two natures is presented as the paradigm of the harmony that should exist between human and supernatural virtues, between nature and grace: "Christ is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*. He is perfect God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and perfect man. He comes to save, not to destroy nature."<sup>48</sup> The same idea is found in a point of *Furrow*: "*Jesus Christus, perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*. There are many Christians who follow Christ astonished by his divinity, but forget him as man. And they fail in the practice of supernatural virtues, despite all the external paraphernalia of piety, because they do nothing to acquire human virtues."<sup>49</sup>

It seems to us that the relationship between nature and grace can be grasped in two directions, one ascending and the other descending. In the first, the right exercise of human virtues constitutes the foundation of the Christian virtues (We deliberately use the adjective "Christian" instead of "supernatural" because of its greater noetic-positive weight). An example of this is found in the following text: "In this world of ours there are many people who neglect God. It may be that they have not had an opportunity to listen to his words, or that they have forgotten them. Yet their human dispositions are honest, loyal, compassionate, and sincere. I would go so far as to say that anyone possessing such qualities is ready to be generous with God, because human virtues constitute the foundation for the supernatural virtues. It is true that in themselves such personal qualities are not enough, for no one is saved without the grace of Christ. But if a man fosters and cultivates the seeds of virtue within him, God will smooth out his path, and such a person will be able to become holy because he has known how to live as a man of goodwill."<sup>50</sup>

In one who "fosters and cultivates the seeds of virtue," letting the talents he has received bear generous fruit, it is easier for nature to be elevated by grace, assisted by the self-denial and generosity that every authentic human virtue carries with it. This entails committing one's freedom, striving to live not for oneself but for others, cultivating the capacity to recognize the good and noble values con-

but also because it offers the possibility of practising all the virtues in the entire gamut of moral and theological virtues. A Christian must be 'a whole man.' The mystery of the Incarnation is central here, as the foundation of his theological-mystical synthesis" (p. 183).

47. "While I am talking I would like you, on your own, to keep up a conversation with our Lord. Ask him to help us all, to encourage us to penetrate more deeply today into the mystery of his Incarnation, so that we too, in our own flesh, may learn how to give living witness to our fellowmen of him who has come to save us" (*Friends of God*, no. 77).

48. *Friends of God*, no. 73.

49. *Furrow*, no. 652.

50. *Friends of God*, no. 74-75. Cornelio Fabro comments on this text: "This page is worth a treatise of ascetic and mystical theology. It expresses, in my view, the evangelical originality of Opus Dei, rising above abstract categories and grasping the self-giving each *person* is called to. Even though a person may be far from God, only the breath of grace is needed to awaken the divine vocation he bears as created in the image of God and transfigured by Christ's passion and death (CORNELIO FABRO, *Virtù umane e soprannaturali nelle omelie di Mons. Escrivá, op.cit.*, p. 184).

tained in earthly realities. Without this foundation, Christianity would remain a 'disincarnate' reality, a pure spiritualism impossible to integrate into a true unity of life, inadequate not only to confront the challenges of history, but also to carry out the tasks proper to the Church's mission *in the world*.

In the descending line, the relationship between grace and nature, starting from the principle of the Incarnation, tells us that Christ proposes nothing to man that does not constitute, for this very reason, an authentic promotion of the profoundly human. Thus every believer should be led to work in the concerns of the world without complexes or inhibitions, without watering-down his faith, because it is precisely by *being Christian* that he can make the world *more human*: "Christians are ordinary people, but their hearts overflow with the joy that comes when we set out to fulfill, with the constant help of grace, the will of the Father. Christians don't see themselves as victims, underrated, or restricted in their behavior. They walk head on high, because they are men and children of God."<sup>51</sup> Thanks to Revelation, the Christian knows that his condition of having been *created in Christ* has definitively revealed to him the truth about human nature.<sup>52</sup> Similarly the created condition—that is to say the condition of being ontologically grounded on God—of the world and of history has revealed the meaning and the truth of all realities. This is where, in our opinion, one finds the true meaning of the "naturalness" that every Christian, precisely because he is a Christian, is called to live in the middle of the world.<sup>53</sup>

The grace and light received from divine Revelation is not something juxtaposed to nature, nor much less something superfluous. The Christian virtues enable the "natural" virtues, which serve as their foundation, to understand their origin and end. By imitating Christ, true man, the Christian is therefore a complete man. Only by keeping well present these two poles and their mutual harmony, can reason be given for the *truth* of the Incarnation: "There is a certain type of secularist outlook that one comes across, and also another approach that one might call 'pietistic,' both of which share the view that Christians somehow are not fully and

51. *Friends of God*, no. 93.

52. Cf. *Eph* 2:10; *Eph* 4:24; *Rom* 5:14. This truth is stressed in *Gaudium et Spes*: "Christ ... fully reveals man to himself" (no. 22); "Whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man." This perspective certainly includes the relationship between creation and redemption and, in anthropological terms, the healing dimension of Christian grace.

53. Referring to the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá about the "naturalness" of the Christian's situation in the world, José Luis Illanes comments: "Creation and redemption are all-embracing and overlapping realities and can be fully understood only in terms of their reference to each other: creation, the act whereby God causes the entire universe to be, is not simply a matter of causing existence; it is initiating a history, it is a calling to a destiny to which God is channeling created things. Christian consciousness of belonging to the world and of its being possible (and a duty) to act in the world in a spontaneous, natural way not only *qua* man but indeed *qua* Christia—this is really an existential reflection of a dogmatic truth; it shows that redemption and creation, holiness and world, eternity and time, are not heterogeneous things: they actually compenetrate. ... When viewed and appreciated from the vantage point of the Incarnation, from the fact that God made the human condition his own, naturalness is seen as something completely theological, implying both normality (membership of a society and a milieu and all that that means) and, at the same time, Christian witness, bearing testimony before that milieu and that society (or, to put it better, from within that society) to the message of the Gospel and all its life-giving power" (PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, FERNANDO OCÁRIZ, JOSE LUIS ILLANES, *Opus Dei in the Church*, Four Courts, Dublin, 1994, pp. 149-150).

entirely human. According to the former, the demands of the Gospel are such as to stifle our human qualities; whereas for the latter, human nature is so fallen that it threatens and endangers the purity of the faith. The result, either way, is the same. They both fail to grasp the full significance of Christ's Incarnation; they do not see that 'the Word became flesh,' became man, 'and dwelt among us' (*Jn* 1:14).<sup>54</sup>

The topic of the human virtues as the foundation for the Christian ones, of nature as the prerequisite for grace, requires a few clarifications. The emphasis of the founder of Opus Dei on the human virtues—for example, his love for loyalty and sincerity as authentic values, or his insistence on the need for study and professional competence—is certainly not a *naturalistic* view. It would be a false interpretation, of a semi-Pelagian bent, to think that a more noble and stronger nature would constitute a better foundation for the action of grace, thus erroneously justifying a concern for human nature as though it were an end in itself. In such an outlook, virtue could easily come to be seen as merely an expression of balance or human efficacy. But when nature is seen as pointing to a fulfillment beyond itself, and human qualities as aiming for a perfection that surpasses one's private interests, then the human virtues find their true goal not in nature itself but in a reality transcending nature, thus opening themselves to the gratuitous action of divine grace. Only in this light can we come to understand, through Revelation and faith, the true meaning of every *human value*. "Our faith," writes Blessed Josemaría in the same homily on human virtues, "brings out the full meaning of these human virtues, which no one should ever neglect. Christians should be second to none as human beings. Those who follow Christ are able—not by their own merits but by the grace of God—to communicate to those around them what they at times suspect but cannot quite grasp: that true happiness, a genuine spirit of serving our neighbor, can only come by passing through the Heart of our Redeemer, *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*."<sup>55</sup>

Thus the mystery of the Incarnation, present in every dimension of God's plan for creation, teaches us that there are only two ways of living on earth: one either lives a divine life, or an animal life, be it more or less humanly 'enlightened': "Let us never forget that for all men, and, therefore, for each and every one of us, there are only two ways of living on this earth: either we lead a divine life, striving to please God; or we set him aside and live an animal-like existence, guided to a greater or lesser degree by human enlightenment. I have never given too much credit to the 'do-gooders' who pride themselves on their unbelief. I love them truly, as I do all mankind who are my brothers. I admire their goodwill which in certain aspects may even be heroic. But I also feel sorry for them because they have the immense misfortune of lacking the light and the warmth of God, and the indescribable joy that comes from the theological virtue of hope. The true Christian, who acts according to this faith, always has his sights set on God. His outlook is

54. *Friends of God*, no. 74.

55. *Ibid.*, no. 93. See the restatement of this in *Furrow*, nos. 771, 772.

supernatural. He works in this world of ours, which he loves passionately; he is involved in all its challenges, but all the while his eyes are fixed on heaven.”<sup>56</sup>

### 5. Consequences of the “*lex incarnationis*”: being in the world without being worldly, in order to bring the world back to God through work.

The logic taught us by the Incarnation reveals that the world in itself is good, *ordainable* to God. As a consequence, through his work the Christian should be present in the world and in all human activities to help bring about this ordering in union with Christ. In human history, marked as it is by sin, such ordering necessarily takes on a redemptive character. Since the Word has taken upon himself a nature identical to our own, with the exception of sin, the Christian, fully immersed in the realities of the world, takes those realities upon himself and should share in them completely, with the exception of sin. Nevertheless, the Christian, like Christ, is asked to assume the *consequences* of sin, so as to purify and restore all reality to God’s original plan. This task can rightly be called *co-redemption with Christ* of these same realities.<sup>57</sup> “And so I keep on repeating to you that the world can be made holy. We Christians have a special role to play in sanctifying it. We are to cleanse it from the occasions of sin with which we human beings have soiled it. We are to offer it to our Lord as a spiritual offering, presented to him and made acceptable through his grace and with our efforts. Strictly speaking, we cannot say that there is any noble human reality that does not have a supernatural dimension, for the divine Word has taken on a complete human nature and consecrated the world with his presence and with the work of his hands. The great mission that we have received in baptism is to redeem the world with Christ.”<sup>58</sup> The connection between human work and the Incarnation of the Word is not limited only to the sphere of exemplarity. The Christian is not called to work only because Christ himself, true man, chose to work on this earth. Although a noble reason for working, it does not exhaust the full reality involved. Work belongs to the mystery of Christ since by working, the Christian reproduces within himself the salvific economy inaugurated by the Incarnation, that of the Son sent by the Father *into the world* with a true humanity in order to join himself to the creation that he redeems and saves. This is especially true for the lay faithful, whose proper task is to work *in the world*. Blessed Josemaría summarizes these consequences of the *lex incarnationis* in terms analogous to those just quoted: “Nothing can be foreign to Christ’s care. If we enter into the theology of it instead of limiting ourselves to functional categories, we cannot say that there are things—good, noble or indifferent—which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and death. . . . We must love

56. *Friends of God*, no. 206.

57. The “co-redemption” is a frequent topic in Blessed Josemaría’s preaching, and would merit a separate study. See, for example, the following passages: *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 2, 3, 121, 126; *Friends of God*, nos. 9, 49; *Furrow*, nos. 255, 863, 945; *The Forge*, nos. 26, 55, 374, 674; *The Way of the Cross*, commentaries on Stations XI and XIV.

58. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 120.

the world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam's sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God."<sup>59</sup>

The consciousness of the descending relationship between grace and nature, between what is Christian and what is human, means that there are no areas of cultural or social life in which believers cannot confidently propose solutions based on the light of their faith: "It would be a very sad thing if anyone looking at the way Catholics in society behave, concluded that they were sheepish and easily imposed upon. Never forget that our Master was, indeed is, *perfectus Homo*—perfect Man."<sup>60</sup> The call for a Christian involvement that enlightens and makes a real mark in the social sphere is explicit in Blessed Josemaría's writings: "The apostolic task that Christ entrusted to all his disciples leads to specific results in social matters. It is inconceivable that a Christian, in order to fulfill his task, should have to turn his back on the world and become a defeatist with regard to human nature. Everything, even the smallest occurrence, has a human and a divine meaning. Christ, who is perfect man, did not come to destroy what is human, but to raise it up. He took on himself our human nature, except for sin. He came to share all man's concerns, except for the sad experience of willful evil. A Christian has to be ready, at all times, to sanctify society from within. He is fully present in the world, but without belonging to the world."<sup>61</sup>

Constant reference to the Word's divine-human perfection, without either a confusion or a separation of both aspects, is a major help to a right comprehension of what an authentic Christian "praxis" should be. A clear and convinced affirmation of the *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* avoids both the error of "materialism" and that of "spiritualism."<sup>62</sup> The divine must not be absorbed by the human, to the extent of dissolving grace in nature, nor can the human be overshadowed by the

59. *Ibid.* no. 112.

60. *Furrow*, no. 421. Commenting on this aspect of the teachings of Opus Dei's founder, Pedro Rodriguez affirms that renouncing the possibility of Christianizing the structures of society "would mean, in reality, to renounce the public and social dimension of the Christian. But this dimension is an essential consequence of the *lex incarnationis*, expressed in the Christian vocation and in the doctrine of the sanctification of work. If such a renunciation were to prevail, Christianity would no longer be the religion of Christ, the Word made man, true man, but a spiritualistic religion of mere interiority, open to the soteriological judgment of the Greek fathers in regard to the integral nature assumed by the Son of God: 'what has not been assumed, has not been saved'" (PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, *Vocacion, trabajo, contemplacion*, op.cit., p. 58.).

61. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 125. This stance of the Christian, which is simply his awareness of being a citizen both of the city of man and the city of God, is forcefully presented in *Furrow* under the heading of "Citizenship" (nos. 290-32). As Blessed Josemaría once said: "The day will come when Christians who live in the world will decide to be consistent with their faith, to show with deeds that that they can be at the same time fully Christian and fully faithful to their human task" (words spoken in 1948, cited by PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, *Vocacion, trabajo, contemplacion*, op.cit., p. 214).

62. "Christ appears as the supreme *exemplar* and Christian existence as *exemplified* in our Lord. In this way, imitating Christ—the essence of Christian perfection—is equivalent to seeking unity in ordinary life, the redemptive synthesis of the most divine and the most earthly; but without confusing these planes, without the manipulating of one by the other, as would be done by a "clericalist" of Monophysite inspiration; and without separating and juxtaposing them, as would be the tendency of a 'spiritual' Nestorianism" (PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, *Vocacion, trabajo, contemplacion*, op.cit., p. 125).

divine to the point of losing its own consistency. Work that does not become prayer would soon cease being *Christian* work; human conduct that does not nourish itself with the sacraments of grace would end up hiding Christ instead of making him present in the world. For its part nature, in order to serve grace, should continue to be nature, created good by God. The new creation does not destroy the first creation, but reconciles it with the Father, leading it to its true end. Jesus does not abandon his human body to corruption; on the contrary, he has made it present at the right hand of the Father.

This perspective, at times expressed with forceful language, appears frequently in the founder of Opus Dei's writings. He speaks, for example, of a good "anti-clericalism," or of a true and proper "Christian materialism" opposed both to a false spiritualism and to a materialism closed to the action of the Spirit. He distinguishes a "good divinization" from a "bad divinization" to distinguish a nature open to grace from a nature which, with the pretext of uniting itself to the divine, neglects the duties and demands proper to its state.<sup>63</sup> All these points, as others have noted, are developed with special clarity and depth in his homily *Passionately Loving the World*.<sup>64</sup>

The consequences of the *lex incarnationis* and the analogy between Christian life and the divine-human condition of the Word, are most fully grasped when we shift from the "objective" relationship between nature and grace to the "subjective" dimension. In other words, our reflection moves from the consideration of the two natures, human and divine, to focus on the one *person* of the Word. In the person of Jesus it is always the divine "I" who acts, which is precisely what makes his actions *salvific*. Therefore a Christian's actions, if he wants them to participate fully in the economy of salvation and thus co-redeem, have to be carried out in union with the person of Christ, as it were within the prolonging of His humanity.<sup>65</sup> This helps to understand why, in the teaching of Opus Dei's founder, it is practically impossible to separate the mystery of Jesus as *perfectus Deus, perfectus hom*—with all its consequences for the sanctification of ordinary life and bringing the world back to God—from his urgent call to identification with Christ, seeing the Christian as *alter Christus, ipse Christus* (another Christ, Christ himself). And it is here also that the doctrine of divine filiation finds its dogmatic place, since it is nothing other than the modality of this identification, that is to say as *sons in the Son*. It is the Son who brings the world back to the Father in the one Spirit, and Christians can do so only insofar as they are "one," by means of the Spirit, with this Son.<sup>66</sup>

63. This teaching is too extensive to refer here to specific points. By way of example one could look at references in *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 160, 184; *Friends of God*, nos. 94, 107; *The Way*, no. 337.

64. This homily is found in *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, nos. 113-123. For a theological commentary on this homily see PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, "Vivir santamente la vida ordinaria," *op. cit.* Similar reflections, taken from other homilies, are presented by J.L. CHABOT, *Responsabilità di fronte al mondo e libertà*, *op.cit.*, pp. 198-210.

65. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 96, 103-105, 112.

66. There are numerous studies on the centrality of divine filiation and identification with Christ in the preaching of the founder of Opus Dei. See FERNANDO OCÁRIZ, "La Filiación divina, realidad central en la



## 6. Being human in order to be divine: Christ's divine and human condition as a model for the Christian's unity of life.

The writings of the Founder of Opus Dei as well as his oral preaching, contain numerous exhortations to maintain the unity between the earthly-human and heavenly-divine dimensions proper to every Christian existence. The union of these two dimensions is not merely one of co-existence, but of a reciprocal dynamism. Phrases such as "be contemplatives in the middle of the world," "make the paths of the world divine," "transform the prose of every day into heroic verse," "have one single heart to love God and men," "have one's feet on earth and one's head in heaven," "be human in order to be divine," appear so frequently that we refrain from specific citations here. The intuition that we can take as an example and model the simultaneous presence of the divine nature and the human nature in the Son of God made man is common to all these expressions. Many passages where these phrases occur contain a reference to the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>67</sup> In the homily already cited on the human virtues, we find some of these ideas explicitly linked to a new mention of the pseudo-athanasian formula: "If we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realize that God wants us to be very human. Our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground. The price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human nor of abandoning the effort to acquire those virtues which some have even without knowing Christ. The price paid for each Christian is the redeeming Blood of our Lord and he, I insist, wants us to be both very human and very divine, struggling each day to imitate him who is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*."<sup>68</sup>

The conviction that the Christian must know how to combine being human and being divine, is at the heart of Blessed Josemaría's teaching. Or, to put it more precisely, we are faced with the certainty that so as to be divine, we must know how to be very human. "He who is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*—perfect God and perfect man—and who enjoyed every happiness in heaven, chose to experience fatigue and tiredness, tears and suffering . . . so that we might understand that if we are to be supernatural we must also be very human."<sup>69</sup> And again: "To become God-like, to be divinized, we must begin by being very human, accepting from God our condition as ordinary men and sanctifying its apparent worthlessness."<sup>70</sup> Aside from the sanctification of ordinary life, this parallelism is also

*vida y en la enseñanza de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer,*" in Mons. J. Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei, EUNSA, 2a Ed., Pamplona 1985, pp. 173-214; ANTONIO ARANDA, "The Christian *alter Christus, ipse Christus* in the teaching of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá," in *Holiness and the World*, op.cit.; C. BERMÚDEZ, "Hijos de Dios Uno y Trino por la gracia: la filiación divina, fundamento y raíz de una," in *Annales Theologicae* 7 (1993), pp. 347-368; J. STÖHR, "La vida del cristiano según el espíritu de filiación divina," in *Scripta Theologica* 24 (1992), pp. 879-893; JUTTA BURGGRAF, "Awareness of our Divine Filiation," in *Holiness and the World*, pp. 107-126.

67. On the Christocentric value of Blessed Josemaría's exhortation to "be very human and very divine," see I. CELAYA, "Unidad de vida y plenitud cristiana," in Mons. Josemaría Escrivá y el Opus Dei, op.cit. pp. 329-331.

68. *Friends of God*, no. 75.

69. *The Forge*, no. 290.

70. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 172.

developed in the context of a heart in love: “But note that God does not say: ‘In exchange for your own heart, I will give you a will of pure spirit.’ No, he gives us a heart, a human heart, like Christ’s. . . . I shall never tire of repeating this. We must be very human, for otherwise we cannot be divine.”<sup>71</sup> This ascending line (a human heart in order to love in a divine way), corresponds to a descending one (a heart filled with God to be able to love in an authentically human way). “There is no heart more human than that of a person overflowing with supernatural sense.”<sup>72</sup>

But what does the expression “learning to be human in order to be divine” mean? In our view this is a richly synthetic way of expressing a precise vision of the nature-grace relationship, once again centered on the Mystery of the Incarnation. We have to know how to be human because “humanity” is the language God used to speak to the world, the language of work and suffering, of ordinary life and faithfulness, of love and death. Only someone with a deep experience of human life can understand what God, in Christ, wanted to reveal to us. Again, we need to know how to be human so as to be divine, because humanity is the place of our sanctification, the matter we can offer to God, the “condition” for uniting ourselves to Christ in work and in rest, in joy and in sorrow. In a word, we cannot not be human if we want to be divine, because “*human*” is our way of recognizing Love and human is our way of loving. The crucial point is in the realization that all these human realities are not insignificant, because Christ himself has lived them—and hence we try to live them in union with Him—and moreover that these same realities acquire a divine meaning and even *status*, capable of *coredeeming*, because they are associated to the mystery of Redemption. “We are ordinary Christians. We work at the most varied professions. All our activity takes place amid everyday circumstances. Everything follows a customary rhythm in our lives. The days seem the same, even monotonous. But don’t forget that our condition that is apparently so common has a divine value. God is interested in everything we do, because Christ wishes to become incarnate in our things, to vivify from within even our most insignificant actions.”<sup>73</sup> The work, the virtues, the heart, the love of a person who lives in the grace of filial charity, are no longer just any work, or virtues, or a merely human heart or a human love. Rather, these are transfigured, divinized, giving rise to a divine way of working, of loving, of living. For this divine-human dynamism to come about in the life of each person, identification with Christ, is, as we said in the previous section, absolutely central. Indeed it is the condition for its very possibility: “When we strive to be really *ipse Christus*, Christ himself, then in our own lives the human side intermingles with the divine. All our efforts, even the most insignificant, take on an eternal dimension, because they are united to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.”<sup>74</sup>

71. *Ibid.*, no. 166. Cf. also *The Way of the Cross*, Station VI, no. 3. See also the homily “Finding Peace in the Heart of Christ,” dedicated to the feast of the Sacred Heart: “The greatest superficiality that can beset this devotion would be a lack of humanity, the failure to understand the reality of an incarnate God” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 164).

72. *Furrow*, no. 801.

73. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 174. Cf. *ibid.*, nos 14, 20.

74. *The Way of the Cross*, Station 10, no. 5.

In light of the mystery of the Incarnation, the particular coherence of a Christian's behavior in the middle of the world can rightly be called "unity of life." This entails a consciousness of the moral and theological implications of his secular condition, as well as a harmony between work and prayer, between dedication to family, professional and social duties and continuous dialogue with God.<sup>75</sup> Unity of life means being a contemplative in the midst of the world, making the paths of the earth divine, being at the same time both on earth and in heaven, with the wonder, perhaps, of being involved in a divine work, but without, for that reason, living in the clouds: "As I have often reminded you, we must be both in heaven and on earth, always. Not *between* heaven and earth, because we are of the world. In the world and in paradise at the same time! This can serve as a formula to express how our life must be while we are *in hoc saeculo*. In heaven and on earth, divinized; but knowing that we are of the world and that we are earthly, with the fragility proper to things made of earth."<sup>76</sup>

Similar teachings appear in the context of "presence of God," that is, the continual prayer that converts the most material and ordinary earthly realities into the occasion of a filial dialogue with our Father God, elevating them to a divine plane. Also in this context the founder of Opus Dei highlights the polarities of earth and heaven, human life and divine life, often centered on a Christological reference.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps the best example of this is his frequent call to be contemplatives in ordinary life, using "the trinity on earth" as a spiritual path to the Trinity in heaven, going from the holy Family of Nazareth to the mystery of God One and Triune. "I strive to reach the Trinity in heaven through that other "trinity" on earth: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They are, as it were, more accessible. Jesus who is *perfectus Deus* and *perfectus homo*. Mary, who is a woman, the purest, the greatest of creatures: greater than her, only God. And Joseph, who is there right beside Mary: clean, manly, prudent, trustworthy. O, my God! What models for us! Just to look at them makes me want to die of sorrow, for, my Lord, I have behaved so badly. I haven't lived up to where you have placed me and become divinized. You gave me the means; and you are giving me them, and will go on giving them to me. For to live humanly on this earth, we must strive to live in a divine way."<sup>78</sup> The key to this path is Jesus Christ himself, true God and true man, associated through his human nature with the life of Mary and Joseph, and through his divine nature with the mystery of the intra-Trinitarian life.

75. Cf. for example, *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 10, 126; *Friends of God*, no. 165; *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, no. 114. On the concept of "unity of life" in the teachings of the founder of Opus Dei, see the study already cited by I. CELAYA, "Unidad de vida y plenitud cristiana," in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá y el Opus Dei*, op.cit., pp. 321-340.

76. Unpublished homily "Gathered together in unity," March 27, 1975. Cited in SALVADOR BERNAL, *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Life of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Scepter, London-New York, 1977, p. 342. These same words were cited by Bishop Álvaro del Portillo in the homily given at the solemn Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría, May 18, 1992, in *Romana* 8 (1992), p. 30.

77. Cf. *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 126:13; *Furrow*, no. 292.

78. Homily "Gathered together in unity"; cf. SALVADOR BERNAL, *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, op.cit., p. 319. On this topic see also JUTTA BURGGRAF, "Awareness of our Divine Filiation," op.cit., pp. 93-94.

The filial charity proper to the children of God, which is called created grace, is the “intrinsic formal cause” that makes possible such a unity of life, since it gives a “filial form” to a Christian’s every action. The coexistence of the human and divine natures of the Word is in some way the “formal exemplary cause.” Thus unity of life is the reflection of Christ’s life in the Christian.<sup>79</sup> Unity of life, divine filiation, the Christian’s condition as *alter Christus, ipse Christus*, contemplation-imitation of Christ as *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*, are in reality different ways of attaining the deepest core of Christian existence and practice admirably summed up by St. Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”<sup>80</sup> The mystery of the Cross is thus the place *par excellence* where this identification takes place, and where its filial nature is fully revealed. The implicit dogmatic coherence of Blessed Josemaría is seen in the many pages written on this last implication.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusion

The Christocentrism of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá is a deeply coherent vision. From whichever vantage point it is perceived—divine filiation, unity of life, identification with Christ, Jesus’ example for us as true God and true man—the essential content of his spiritual message remains the same: the life of prayer and the sanctification of work, the universal call to sanctity and the effort to co-redeem with Christ. But rather than speaking of different vantage points, it would be better to speak of understanding Christian life from one vantage point: Christ himself and the mystery of his Incarnation, seen in parallel lines of inquiry.

We have argued that reflection on the Word’s perfect humanity and perfect divinity is one of the most fruitful of these lines: both because of the high frequency of references present in Blessed Josemaría’s works, as well as its capacity to embrace the principle themes of his teaching. This reflection centers above all on exemplary causality understood in the strong sense as expressed in the formula of St. Leo the Great: *totus in suis, totus in nostris*. It functions as an intuition, a constant reference-point for his reasoning-process, an analogy on which to base

79. “This ‘unity of life,’ according to the founder of Opus Dei, is a reflection of the mystery of Christ in the Christian. Therefore, the passage from the *Quicumque* symbol or creed which presents Jesus as *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* was habitual in his words and in his writings to explain ‘unity of life.’ The mystery of Christ—the duality of nature in the saving unity of the Person—is, seen from this angle, the *exemplar supremum* of the image of the Christian in the spiritual teaching of Msgr. Escrivá: to imitate Christ in ordinary life is to continuously seek, through prayer and ascetical struggle, for unity, the redemptive synthesis of the most divine and the most earthly” (PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, *Vocacion, trabajo, contemplacion*, op.cit., pp. 119-120).

80. *Gal* 2:19-20.

81. “Lord, you have made me understand that having the Cross means finding happiness, joy. And I see the reason now more clearly than ever: having the Cross means being identified with Christ, it means being Christ, and therefore, a son of God. Christ is on the Cross, and you have to lose yourself in Him! There will be no more suffering, no more hardships. You mustn’t say: Lord, I can’t go on, I’m such a wretch. No! That’s not true! On the Cross you will be Christ, and you will know you are a son of God” (Words cited by Antonio Aranda, “The Christian, *alter Christus, ipse Christus* in the teaching of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,” in *Holiness and the World*, p. 129). Cf. also *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 96.

different themes. At the same time, it is important to realize that we are being presented with a *living model*, not just a theory or a simple hermeneutic principle. All of Blessed Josemaría's teachings stem from his contemplation of Christ's life, from the desire to dialogue with him and be united to him, embracing the entire horizon of his earthly life, without ever losing sight of his eternal condition. This gives rise to fruitful uses of the *lex incarnationis*, seen as a revelation of divine self-lowering, as a model for the Christian's unity of life, as a paradigm for grasping the relationship between nature and grace, and as a principle that sheds light on an historical involvement in the world that can truly be called "Christian." Reference to the incarnate Word as *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* is never an expedient to "conceptually resolve" these topics, but rather the best way to make clear their *mysteric* content, that is to say, their association with the mystery of the God-Man. In no sense, therefore, is it an impoverishment of the mystery by a facile simplification of the reality of Christ. Rather, it is the recognition that all that belongs to that event, and to the history that stems from it, must necessarily be seen in the horizon of the mystery of Christ.

Although this is not the place to do so, it would be useful to compare Blessed Josemaría's teachings on this subject with the magisterium of the Second Vatican Council and of recent popes, especially Pope John Paul II. What makes this comparison all the more interesting is that the published works of Opus Dei's founder used here as the basis for our study largely include material written not only before Vatican II, but also before the theological discussion that accompanied the preparation for this ecclesial Magisterium.