

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá's Christocentrism

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The Christocentrism of the Founder of Opus Dei is central to an understanding of his work and thought. It is a fascinating topic. The first part of my talk will attempt to describe and analyse the main concepts in Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism, with reference to some of its more important academic exponents,¹ and especially his successors, Monsignor Alvaro del Portillo² and Monsignor Javier Echevarría,³ the current Prelate of Opus Dei.

While there are other approaches that can be taken to Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism, the approach I prefer emphasises three major aspects described in Anglo-Saxon shorthand as the devotional, the practical (encompassing asceticism, Church doctrine, and the apostolic life) and the personal (comprising the existential and the mystical).

¹ Many authors have worked on this topic: A. ARANDA, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo*, Madrid 2000, esp. pp. 153-178; J.L. ILLANES, *On the Theology of Work*, Dublin 1982; S. GAROFALO, *Il valore perenne del Vangelo*, in AA.VV., *Santi nel mondo. Studi sugli scritti del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Milano 1992, 156-193, esp. pp. 170-173 and 183-185; P. RODRÍGUEZ, *Omnia traham ad meipsum. El sentido de Juan 12, 32 en la experiencia espiritual de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer*, in "Romana" 13 (1991) 331-352; G. TANZELLA-NITTI, *Perfectus Deus, perfectus Homo. Reflexiones sobre la ejemplaridad del misterio de la Encarnación del Verbo en las enseñanzas del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, in "Romana" 13 (1997) 360-381.

² Of particular importance are the following: the Introduction to *Christ is Passing By, Friends of God, Furrow, The Forge and The Way of the Cross*; his short but profound reflections found in "Significado teológico-espiritual de Camino", at the beginning of the work coordinated by J. MORALES, *Estudios sobre Camino*, Madrid 1989, pp. 45-56; some articles in *Una vida para Dios. Reflexiones en torno a la figura de Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Madrid 1992; and *Immersed in God: Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, as seen by his successor, Bishop Alvaro Del Portillo*, with C. Cavalleri, Princeton NJ 1996.

³ Specifically, I would refer to *Memoria del B. Josemaría Escrivá*, Madrid 2000; and to his reflections on Christian life based on the thought and writings of the Founder of Opus Dei, *Itinerarios de vida cristiana*, Barcelona 2001.

One point I will discuss in the second part of the talk is whether we might add a fourth aspect, the hermeneutical. More theological in nature than spiritual, more theological than spiritual in nature, this fourth aspect is based on the implications of Blessed Josemaría's thought, rather than his explicit teachings. I will examine it as part of my consideration of the originality and novelty of Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism.⁴

1. THE SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF BLESSED JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ'S CHRISTOCENTRISM

Christocentrism means an understanding of the centrality of Christ to whatever order or context in which we find ourselves. This centrality is internal rather than external, and constitutes the meaning of a particular order or context. On the supernatural level, Christocentrism means that everything refers to and depends on Christ. The Christocentrism of the faith of the New Testament is related to the Christocentrism of Revelation, and, ultimately, to the Christocentrism of the plan of Salvation, that has its fulcrum and foundation in Him (Col 1, 15-18; I Cor 3, 10-11)⁵.

We should be quite clear here that the Christ we are following is the Christ of the Gospels, of the New Testament, especially as clarified for us in the great ecumenical councils of the fourth and fifth centuries from Nicaea to Chalcedon.

It is no small part of Blessed Josemaría's intuitive religious genius that he allows this Christ, true God and true man, (presented with the full authority of the Church and defended by the Church through the centuries) to speak for Himself. He did not enter into that maze where so many were lost, searching for the historical Christ, who emerged as a different image in successive generations, reflecting the predominant ideological concerns of each period, from the romantic hero to the revolutionary of liberation theology.

Christocentrism has both spiritual and theological ramifications. All Christian spiritualities, unless they have been stripped of their true nature, are Christocentric. In this, Christocentrism refers to the configuration that the different elements of a specific spirituality, charisma, vocation or mission receive in relation to Christ⁶. For the moment, I would like to concentrate on the spiritual ram-

⁴ For a short summary on the spiritual thought of the Founder of Opus Dei, see P. MASI, *Il pensiero spirituale di Josemaría Escrivá*, en "Rivista di Vita Spirituale", 54 (2000) 60-89.

⁵ For a synthetic and precise view of this topic, see M.L. COOK, *The Jesus of Faith. A Study in Christology*, New York 1981; G. BIFFI, *Approccio al cristocentrismo*, Milan 1993; F.L. MATEO SECO - F. OCÁRIZ - J. A. RUESTRA, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, Dublin 1994, pp. 43-89.

⁶ Related to this, see B. DE MARGERIE, *Christ for the World - The Heart of the Lamb. A Treatise*

ifications of Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism, leaving the theological elements for the second part of this talk.

a) Piety and Devotions

It may be a surprise to some, but Blessed Josemaría Escrivá does not recommend any particular devotions. He encouraged customary devotions, especially those to Mary and the Eucharist, and advised people to read books on Christ's life, particularly on his Passion. It is a token of his own devotion to Christ that he gave these sort of books as gifts. Blessed Josemaría always had a great devotion to the Cross, and he encouraged those who knew him to devotion of the Wood of the Cross⁷. He transcended the popular piety of his day, without giving it up, by bringing to the fore its foundation and the reason behind it: the crucified and risen Christ.

Sometimes this devotional Christocentrism was misunderstood, leading Blessed Josemaría to be criticised for things such as the wooden cross that he ordered to be put in the Centres of Opus Dei, and the rigour with which he lived the Liturgy⁸.

b) Asceticism

There is nothing farther from the religious sense of the Founder of Opus Dei than a devotion that lacks doctrinal foundation, a "silly devotion" as St. Theresa of Avila would say. Convinced that the worst enemy of God is ignorance, Blessed Josemaría worked to help people know God more and better. For him, the work of Opus Dei was a great catechesis. Catechesis is what he did all his life, with a skill that brought to doctrine the newness of the Gospel, which is always old and always new (Mt. 13, 52). As Alvaro del Portillo wrote of *The Way*, «Christ fills each and every page, ... for Christ is the Way for man; and the depth of man,

on Christology, Chicago 1973; G. MOIOLI, *Cristocentrismo*, in S. DE FIORES - T. GOFFI, *Nuovo Dizionario di spiritualità*, Roma 1982, pp. 354-366; A. BLASUCCI, *Cristocentrismo*, in E. ANCILLI (ed.), *Dizionario di spiritualità*, Roma 1990, pp. 667-676.

⁷ See B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *The Way*, nos. 178, 277, 302, 470, 775 and 811; *Furrow*, nos. 28 and 238; *The Forge*, nos. 29, 317, 400, 404, 761 and 774. Also Á. DEL PORTILLO, "Introduction to B. Josemaría Escrivá", *The Way of the Cross*, London - New York 1984, esp. pp. 10-12.

⁸ See A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. I: The Early Years*, Princeton 2001, p. 424.

his heart, is enlightened by the light of the Truth of Christ and is inflamed with the Life, the Love, of Christ»⁹. To speak about God, to speak about Christ: this is what sums up and completes the teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei¹⁰.

Doctrine and asceticism are necessarily connected in the Christocentrism of Blessed Josemaría, because truth for the Founder is not a theory to be contemplated in a passive way, but the beginning of life and action. With doctrine comes life; with faith, works. Josemaría could not understand anyone who became acquainted with his teachings without applying them to their action. This unity between theory and practice was so engraved in his soul, that *The Way* starts by referring to it, not only in its famous first point, but in its Prologue: «I shall only stir your memory so that some thought may arise and strike you: and so your life will improve...».

The step from doctrine to asceticism in this Christocentrism is a movement from getting know to Christ to living like Christ. Living like Christ is imitating Christ, following Christ, making ourselves like Christ, being with Christ, loving Christ, remaining with Christ. These are short mottos that appear many times in Blessed Josemaría's writings and sum up his teaching; insights he constantly referred to in his apostolic work and in guiding souls¹¹. *Furrow* could be seen as a paradigm of this, a book where Josemaría examines all the virtues and qualities that should enrich the life of a Christian. They are the virtues and qualities of Christ, *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo*¹².

The unity of doctrine and asceticism is in perfect continuity with the traditions of Christian spirituality. What is new about the Christocentrism of Blessed Josemaría is not this, but the way he cut through the accumulated overgrowth of the centuries which had, in some cases, deformed this unity. Blessed Josemaría worked mightily to free Christian asceticism of the complications and scruples that could disfigure it, to bring it back to its original simplicity and focus on the Lord Jesus Christ¹³.

Another original step — not because of its content, but because of the clarity with which he presents it — is the apostolic nature of Blessed Josemaría's

⁹ IDEM, *Significado teológico-espiritual...*, pp. 50-51.

¹⁰ See Á. DEL PORTILLO, "Introduction to B. Josemaría Escrivá", *Christ is Passing By*, London 1981, esp. pp. 7-11.

¹¹ See IDEM, "Introduction to B. Josemaría Escrivá", *The Forge*, Crows Nest NSW 1988, esp. pp. 13-15.

¹² See IDEM, "Introduction to B. Josemaría Escrivá", *Furrow*, Crows Nest NSW 1987, esp. pp. iv-vi.

¹³ See B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *Holy Rosary*, Chicago 1972, Comment on the Third Joyful Mystery.

Christocentrism. Knowing and following Christ overflow into apostolic action and a spiritual concern for others¹⁴. This does not mean just having an interest in others or in philanthropic activity or social justice. It is all this and more, because it means talking about Christ, announcing Christ, communicating Christ, bringing Christ to those around us: friends, family, colleagues, and even those we meet by chance. Overflow: this is the word Josemaría liked to use to explain the intimate relation between supernatural life and apostolic action, similar to the relation — as we saw before — between supernatural knowledge (doctrine) and spiritual asceticism. Just as the step from knowledge to struggle was based on the common relation of both to Christ — from knowing Christ to imitating Christ — so this step from supernatural life to apostolic action takes place because both refer to Christ.

c) The Personal and Existential

What we have just seen introduces us into the explanation of this «non-original originality». In knowing Christ and imitating Christ and announcing Christ, we find ourselves living in Christ, of Christ, for Christ, with Christ, through Christ. «In this path of love that is our life, we do everything through Love, with a Love that does not weaken our personal defects. I live through Him, with Him, for Him, and for souls. Of His Love and for His Love I live, despite my personal miseries. And despite these miseries, and maybe even through them, my Love is renewed everyday»¹⁵.

In Blessed Josemaría's work and thought, knowing and acting are directed towards living. Knowledge and action are expressions of life. It is in life that everything finds its ultimate meaning and true origin. Knowledge that is not rooted in life is artificial and false, and the same can be said about action. If action does not come from life, it is false and hypocritical — schizophrenic, as he would graphically describe it¹⁶.

The Christocentrism of Blessed Josemaría translates into unity of life: unity between ascetic life, apostolate and work. Work, of course, occupies a special place in his thought, whether it be in the fields, factories, schools, or universities, at home, or in the priestly ministry; in any honest job¹⁷.

¹⁴ See IDEM, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 122.

¹⁵ B. Josemaría Escrivá, quoted by Á. DEL PORTILLO, *Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer, instrumento de Dios*, a homily given on June 12, 1976 at the University of Navarre, p. 9.

¹⁶ B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *Homily given at the University of Navarre*, Oct. 8, 1967, included in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Sydney 1993, nos. 113-117, esp. no. 114.

¹⁷ IDEM, *Conversations ...*, nos. 10, 24, 26, 55-57, 70, 113-117.

Reflecting on this, we understand why it could not be any other way. Prayer means talking with God, with Christ, who has placed Himself within our reach¹⁸ — it is talking about Him and about us¹⁹. Apostolate means talking about Christ, announcing Him, communicating Him to others; it is «working for Christ»²⁰. And work, when united to prayer and apostolate, means «placing Christ at the centre of all human activities»²¹. Our «ordinary contact with God takes place where [our] fellow men, [our] yearnings, [our] work and [our] affections are.» Here is where we have our daily encounter with Christ²².

The doctrine of unity of life caused many difficulties for Blessed Josemaría. Some people denied the possibility of being holy in the middle of the world (and not just in a cloister or at the altar), and rejected the possibility of acquiring perfect divine contemplation without abandoning one's own family, work and situation in life. Towards the end of Josemaría's life, the Second Vatican Council proclaimed the truth of the universal call to holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, nos. 39-42) and unity of life (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 14). But before this recognition by the Universal Church, Blessed Josemaría had to humbly and heroically face those who did not understand that being focused on Christ means practising unity of life, unity between prayer, zeal for souls, and work.

This has been perhaps Blessed Josemaría's greatest contribution in the area of spiritual Christocentrism, although it is still treated with misunderstanding and opposition even today by some experts and specialists of the science of spiritual life²³.

Unity of life. Unity in Christ. This means that the life of the person is life lived in Christ, that the being of the person is being realised in Christ, that the person identifies himself with Christ, that he is a child of God; as St. John says in his first letter (I Jn 3, 2): «we are called children of God...and such we are».

At this point, I think we can highlight three major elements of Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism.

¹⁸ See IDEM, *The Way*, nos. 93-94, 105, 111, etc.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, nos. 100, 109, 113, etc.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 966; *Christ is Passing By*, no. 122.

²¹ IDEM, *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 14, 38, 105, 156, 183.

²² IDEM, *Homily given at the University of Navarre*, Oct. 8, 1967, included in *Conversations...*, nos. 113-117, esp. no. 113.

²³ About these misunderstandings, see A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *El Fundador del Opus Dei. Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-1975)*, Madrid 1984 (2 ed.), pp. 119-120, 144, 146, 162-163, 235, 237, 240 y 259-261; *The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. I: The Early Years ...*, pp. 411-423; P. BERGLAR, *Opus Dei. Life and Work of the Founder Josemaría Escrivá*, Princeton NJ 1994, pp. 176-188.

Firstly, this is a Christocentrism which is in keeping with the writings of St. Paul and St. John. Reading the texts of the Founder, it is impossible not to revert to the Gospel affirmation of St. John: «He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and as I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me» (Jn 6, 57). «Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears, much fruit: for without me you can do nothing» (Jn. 15, 4-5). Other times, Blessed Josemaría's texts explicitly quote Pauline confessions that he found particularly eloquent and encouraging: «for me, to live in Christ, and to die is gain» (Phil. 1, 21). «With Christ I am nailed to the Cross. It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.» (Gal. 2, 19-20).

Secondly, the doctrinal, ascetic and apostolic aspects are based on an underlying mystical Christocentrism, which is at once existential and radical; accessible to all even if it is arduous and difficult. That is how the Founder described it: «Paradox: sanctity is more attainable than learning, but it is easier to be learned than to be a saint»²⁴. Instead of a spirituality that is complicated and intricate, with detailed practices that are difficult to remember, Josemaría offers a spirituality centred on living a personal relationship with Christ. «May you seek Christ: may you find Christ: may you love Christ. Three perfectly clear stages...»²⁵. The call to authentic contemplation is for all, and Blessed Josemaría affirms that when your work is turned into prayer and service to others it is impossible not to be focused on Christ.

Thirdly, the originality of the Founder's Christocentrism can be summarised as «placing Christ at the centre of all human activities». It means placing Him there with sanctifying and sanctified work²⁶. The recapitulation of all things in Christ (Ef. 1,10) now looks outwards — from personal life, from personal identification with Christ, towards the sanctification of others, towards the Christianisation of the society, towards conquering the world for Christ.

²⁴ B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *The Way*, no. 282.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 382.

²⁶ See Á. DEL PORTILLO, *Putting Christ at the Summit, in Holiness and the World. Studies in the Teaching of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*, Princeton - Dublin - Chicago 1997, pp. 291-296; J. ECHEVARRÍA, *Itinerarios...*, pp. 23-36, 181-193 and 214-221; P. RODRÍGUEZ, *Ommnes traham...*; A. ARANDA, *El bullir de la sangre...*, pp. 255-287; J.-L. CHABOT, *Responsibility to the World, and Freedom, in Holiness and the World...*, pp. 251-278.

2. THE THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BLESSED JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ'S CHRISTOCENTRISM

The spiritual aspects of Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism are clear enough. Its theological characteristics are less immediately clear. Theologians frequently speak of Christocentrism, first of all as a soteriological mystery with cosmological, and anthropological dimensions. From a theological point of view, an understanding of reality is Christocentric when, in relating the world and man to God, it always does so with reference to Christ²⁷.

a) Theology and Christocentrism

There are many ways of presenting a theological vision of reality focused on Christ. St. Irenaeus of Lyons for example uses the concept of "recapitulation", taken from St. Paul, to describe Christ as the centre, foundation and summit of all revealed doctrine. St. Augustine, on the other hand, is especially attracted by the mystery of grace, to the point that the supernatural communion of intelligent and free beings makes up the Body of Christ. St. Anselm, already in the second millennium, emphasised the concept of Redemption, and from there he understood that Christ was, is and will be the theological centre of all reality because He is God-Man, the only one capable of offering up to the Father the complete satisfaction for Adam's sin. Thomas Aquinas accepts the brilliant intuition of Plato and Aristotle and describes the exit and re-entry of God, which is achieved through Christ, the final and supreme *logos* of the world and history. In more recent times, Guardini has argued that the Humility of God is the key to inter-

²⁷ See for example H. SCHLIER, *Kephalé. Anakefalaios*, in TWNT, III, 672-682; G. MARTELET, "Sur le motif de l'incarnation", in *Problèmes actuelles de théologie*, Bruges 1964; J.F. BONNEFOY, *Christ and the Cosmos*, Paterson N. J. 1965; A. FEUILLET, *L'hymne christologique de l'épître aux Philippiens*, in "Revue Biblique" 72 (1965) 352-380 y 481-507; Plerôme, in DBS, VIII, 18-40; G. A. MALONEY, *The Cosmic Christ: From Paul to Teilhard*, New York 1968; J.K. RICHES, *What is a Christocentric Theology?*, in S. W. SYKES - J. P. CLAYTON, *Christ, Faith and History*, New York 1972, pp. 223-238; TH. POTVIN, *The Theology of the Primacy of Christ according to St. Thomas and its Scriptural Foundations*, Fribourg 1973; F.X. PANCHERI, *The Universal primacy of Christ*, Front Royal, Virg 1984; R. GARCÍA DE HARO, *Cristo, fundamento de la moral*, Barcelona 1990; G. MOIOLI, *Cristocentrismo*, in G. BARBAGLIO - S. DIANICH, *Nuovo dizionario di teologia*, Cinisello Balsamo 1994, pp. 224-234; J.M. MALDAMÉ, *Cristo e il cosmo*, Cinisello Balsamo 1995; J.P. TOSAUS, *Cristo y el Universo*, Salamanca 1995.

pretation, and von Balthasar has made love the keystone of his broad theological teaching²⁸.

Blessed Josemaría was not an academic theologian, but a basic feature of his work and message was unity — the unity between doctrine and life, between prayer, apostolate and work, between devotion and supernatural faith. His Christocentrism is not limited to the sphere of affection and love, but supposes and expresses a profound understanding of reality as the participation of everything and everyone in the life of Christ. His theology is a unifying interpretation of the relation between the cosmos and man with God. This theological approach follows on from the works of great figures such as Irenaeus, Augustine, and Thomas, and goes beyond them. However, it follows a different path, from Anselm, Guardini and von Balthasar, without clashing with them.

For example, the consideration of sin never disappears from the Founder's vision (he once said that the manifestation of our own misery is like a *ritornello* in human existence). But at the same time it does not become the centre of his thought, which being centred on Christ is very positive. His appreciation of humility, («Without it», he said, using the words of Cervantes, «no virtue would be a virtue») leads him to see humility as the greatest virtue (especially of the Mother of God²⁹), without making it the hermeneutical basis of his theology. The criterion is always Christ, in whom is found humility as well as simplicity, work, magnanimity, and all the perfections we know of him.

One of the most important of these perfections, of course, is love. But this is not the decisive key to Blessed Josemaría's theological vision of man and the world either. Beyond love, there is life — a life that is characterised and justified by love, but which does not find its final identity in love. The Founder constantly proclaimed human and divine love in his preaching, and above all with his example. He was a “man who knew how to love”, and when people called him Father, they used this term in its deep and authentic sense³⁰. The concepts of love, light

²⁸ Cfr H.U. VON BALTHASAR, R. GUARDINI, *Riforma dalle origini*, Milano 1970; *Seul l'amour est credible*, Paris 1966; J.A. KAY, *Theological Aesthetics*, Berna-Frankfurt 1975; G. MARCHESI, *La cristologia di H. U. von Balthasar*, Roma 1977; A. PEELMAN, *H. U. von Balthasar et la théologie de l'histoire*, Berna-Frankfurt 1978; G. DE SCHRIVER, *Le merveilleux accord de l'homme et Dieu. Etude de l'analogie de l'être chez Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Leuven 1983; J. RICHES (ed.), *The Analogy of Beauty. The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Edinburgh 1986; L. ROBERTS, *The Theological Aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, Washington 1987; E.T. OAKES, *Pattern of Redemption. The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, New York 1994.

²⁹ B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *The Way*, no. 598.

³⁰ See J. ECHEVARRÍA, *Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer, Un corazón que sabía amar*, in AA.VV., *La personalidad del Beato Josemaría*, Pamplona 1994, pp. 243-261; *Memoria ...*, pp. 85-158; C. CARDONA, *Camino, una lección de amor*, in *Estudios sobre Camino ...*, pp. 173-179; J.M. YAN-

and life, as taught by St. John and St. Paul, are united in Josemaría's explanation (not academically formulated, but sufficiently developed to be understood and adopted) that light and love belong to life, the life of the Son of God. We participate in this life through grace as adopted children of God, and so in our life and our actions, we reflect the light and love of God³¹.

*b) Divine Filiation in
Blessed Josemaría Escrivá's Christocentrism*

This theological Christocentrism is implied rather than expressed explicitly in Blessed Josemaría's writings. It derives from his deep understanding of divine filiation. The Founder expressly marks out divine filiation as the foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei. We could say that, based on the unified vision of life discussed before, he sees divine filiation as the key to a theological understanding of reality³², which means — following St. Paul and especially St. John very closely, as he does — *to make the life that is transmitted to us through Christ the focus of theology*. This is the definitive theological contribution made by Blessed Josemaría to Christocentrism.

Consider this in the light of Scripture. St. John, in the Prologue to his Gospel writes: «In Him was life, and the life was the light of men» (Jn. 1, 4). Some chapters later, he reports the Lord saying: «I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly» (Jn. 10, 10); and again later on, at the raising of Lazarus: «I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he die, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die» (Jn. 11, 25-26). In his first letter, John addresses this theme from a new perspective:

«I write of what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have handled:

GUAS, *Amar «con todo el corazón»* (Dt 6,5). *Consideraciones sobre el amor del cristiano en las enseñanzas del B. Josemaría Escrivá*, in "Romana" 14 (1998) 144-157.

³¹ Up to now, there have not been any studies on the concept of life according to the Founder of Opus Dei that have been made available to us. A preliminary attempt can be found in L. POLO, *El concepto de vida en mons. Escrivá de Balaguer*, en *La personalidad del Beato Josemaría*, cit., pp. 165-195. There are considerations found in this article which advocate a Christocentric proposition that we think can be found in the writings of Blessed Josemaría. Our proposal has also found support in J.L. ILLANES, *Filiación divina y vivencia existencial*, in J.L. ILLANES (ed.), *El Dios y Padre de nuestro Señor Jesucristo*, Pamplona 2000, pp. 537-546; and J. SESÉ, *La conciencia de la filiación divina, fuente de vida espiritual*, in *ibid.*, pp. 495-518.

³² With respect to the centrality of divine filiation in the theological thought of the Founder of Opus Dei, see F. OCÁRIZ, *Naturaleza, gracia y gloria*, Pamplona 2001², pp. 175-221.

the Word of Life. And Life was made known and we have seen, and now testify and announce to you, the Life Eternal which was with the Father, and has appeared to us. What we have seen and have heard we announce to you, in order that you also may have fellowship with us, and that our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (I Jn. 1, 1-4)».

The importance that the concept of life has in St. John's vision of reality, and its dependence on Christ, is clear. The concept of life is the central reference point for everything. It is the same for the concepts of light and love.

This is also true of St. Paul. One well known text, and one often used by Blessed Josemaría, is the Christological hymn in the Letter to the Ephesians. Paul blesses «the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing on high in Christ. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love. He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons» (Eph. 1, 2-5). For St. Paul, from the very beginning, even before the world existed, everything has been given to us in Christ, because we were destined (therefore, pre-destined) to be children of God in Christ, through Christ Himself.

Filiation is united to generation, which is the act that lets us speak of a father-son relationship. Someone is a son because he has been begotten by someone else. Man has been called, predestined to be born of the Father in His Son through the same Son Incarnate. Our divine filiation obviously refers to the Father, but also to the Son, because it is a participation in his own, unique Filiation. We obtain this participation through the action of the Son in the flesh or in history. It also refers to the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul declares many times (Gal. 4, 6; Rom. 8, 15).

Filiation and generation also refer to the life that is transmitted and possessed. We understand the life that is transmitted and possessed, the being that has been received through generation. In the supernatural order, we speak about the life that God gratuitously gives us over and above the life we already have through the generation of the flesh: the life that Christ communicates. This life is accessed not through the body but through faith. St. John says, «To as many as received him he gave the power of becoming sons of God; to those who believe in his name: Who are born not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God» (Jn. 1, 12). And St Paul reminds us that «you are all the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. For all you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ» (Gal. 3, 26-27).

This is a strong and sound foundation for a spiritual and theological doctrine. It is a complete Christocentrism which leaves the human person with nothing that does not refer to the Incarnate Person, to the extent that he becomes (using an expression that Blessed Josemaría loved, taken from an ancient — and sometimes forgotten — tradition of the Church) *alter Christus, ipse Christus*. «We

must, each of us, be *alter Christus, ipse Christus*: another Christ, Christ himself. Only in this way can we set about this great undertaking, this immense, unending task of sanctifying all temporal structures from within, bringing to them the leaven of Redemption»³³. Christocentrism means the recapitulation of everything that is personal in Christ, because from the Father and through Him, the human person has received its entire being, everything one has, everything one does³⁴.

Developing Christian doctrine in the light of this hermeneutical *leitmotiv* (life as divine filiation in Christ) requires care and study. It is a task that will require many different contributions and the efforts of many theologians. In other words, it will be hard work; but despite the difficulties it may entail, I think it is something feasible and very useful for souls, as can be seen from the impact that the spirit of Blessed Josemaría has had on the people of our times.

A doctrine focused on Christ as the source of life for all — *Omnes traham ad me ipsum!* (Jn. 12, 32) — cannot but renew theological reflection and research. The explanation of the relationship between the cosmos and man with God as a unity is a secure point of reference for this work. In particular, it provides a Christocentrism that does not limit the finality of the Incarnation to the liberation from sin, but which can be applied and developed in many ways. Blessed Josemaría's Christocentrism does not limit the explanatory power of Christianity to questions which end up being restrictive, posing more problems than they intend to solve, as the history of theology in the second millennium has sometimes shown³⁵. Josemaría's Christocentrism with its unifying explanation of all aspects of life, promises to overcome the inconsistencies that have arisen in the previous centuries between intellectual life and the life of faith, between spiritual life and scientific work, between Christian life and professional life, etc.

This is particularly providential today, especially in the Western world where our sociological defences of parish and school, and even the family itself, have been weakened by technological developments easily exploited by the neopagans, radio, television, the Internet.

I remember reading forty years ago the writings of Frank Sheed, Australian born, who lived most of his adult life in England, one of the few prominent lay theologians in the English-speaking world in the twentieth century, who

³³ B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *Christ is Passing By*, n. 183. On this point, see A. ARANDA, *El bullir...*, pp. 203-254.

³⁴ See F. OCÁRIZ - A. BLANCO, *Rivelazione, fede e credibilità*, Roma 2001, pp. 54-61.

³⁵ In this respect, it is enough to look at the neverending and sterile debate between the Thomists and the followers of Duns Scott in relation to the motive for and the finality of the Incarnation. See for example, G. BIFFI, *Fine dell'Incarnazione e primato di Cristo*, in "La Scuola Cattolica" 88 (1960); J.B. CAROL, *Why Jesus Christ?*, Manassas, Virg. 1986.

claimed then that the light of Christ was dimming. Less than ten years ago, I remember Cardinal John O'Connor of New York predicting to me that the coming great struggle within the Catholic community would not be over sexual morality, or abortion or euthanasia, but over the natures and person of Jesus Christ our Lord, over his unique role in salvation.

Even in leadership circles among Catholics, not to mention among liberal Protestants, there are covert attempts to supplant Christ by Spirit theology, or by a complicated pantheism which retains much traditional theological language in denying the divinity of Christ.

At the sub-theological level too, Blessed Josemaría's enthusiasm that we announce Christ, communicate him to others, is a welcome antidote to those, who, while remaining faithful Christians, have given pride of place to other concerns such as social justice, or ecology, or even feminism. Catholics have to be God-centred people, who come to God through Christ.

To finish, I would like to read a text of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá that illustrates what I have been trying to explain. It is a point from *The Forge*, no. 418. Recalling the insight of the Second Vatican Council that «in his Incarnation, He, the Son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man» (*Gaudium et spes*, 22), the Founder says: «If we are faithful to him, Jesus' own life will somehow be repeated in the life of each one of us, both in its internal development (the process of sanctification) and in our outward behaviour. Give thanks to him for being so good». This life is offered to all, since all participate in it already in some way, and all are called to participate in it completely. All men and all women are called to live from Him, in Him, for Him, with Him, through Him. All are called to be holy, because holiness «... is life — a supernatural life»³⁶.

³⁶ B. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ, *The Forge*, no. 156.