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## EDUCATION AND FAMILY: INSIGHTS AND APPLICATION

### *Introduction*

In September 1989, a small group of parents started Hawthorn School for Girls, an independent girls' school, with twenty-two students in five elementary grades in a rented facility in the Beaches area of Toronto. What can be written about the school's history to explain why it exists? How did the school come to be? In order to answer these questions, let us take a step back to examine a bigger picture, the context that better explains the reasons for the school's existence.

For this purpose, I would like to consider the technical and visual elements of a large, beautiful tapestry as a comparison. A tapestry is composed of a warp and a weft.

The warp, which is nothing but a skeleton structure, disappears completely beneath the body of the fabric. All that can be seen in a finished tapestry is the weft, made up of different coloured threads forming the decorative scheme. However, the weft threads are not taken systematically right across the width of the warp...but only across that part of the warp corresponding to the coloured area indicated in the section of the cartoon being woven.<sup>1</sup>

The subject matter or theme of a tapestry is visually presented through the many scenes constructed by the multitude of interwoven threads of the weft. These threads of many colours and hues are woven through the warp until it is entirely encased in the finished tapestry. However the warp, though invisible, provides the foundational structure for the whole work. All the individual threads of the weft are an integral part of the design. No pattern or image would be visible without these threads.

I will speak about the story of Hawthorn School for Girls in terms of a warp, an underlying foundation, and the many threads of the weft, which create the scenes and patterns of the full composition. The warp of the tapestry is provided by the universal call to holiness and to apostolate, which are consequences of baptism. The threads of the weft are provided by our vocations as married people and parents living in ordinary circumstances in the middle of the world, and by the specific needs that led to the creation of Hawthorn

<sup>1</sup>*Great Tapestries*, edited by Joseph Jobe, Edita S.A.Lausanne, 1965, p. 227.

School. The tapestry can be entitled *The Grandeur of Ordinary Life*, with the story of Hawthorn School comprising a small part of this vast picture. Most of you will recognize the title, *The Grandeur of Ordinary Life*, as the theme of a conference, which took place in Rome in January 2002, to commemorate the centennial of the birth of the St. Josemaria. Since today's event also honours him, the title for the tapestry seemed appropriate.

### *Sanctity and Apostolate*

For many of us Hawthorn School is a dream, which has become a reality. This phenomenon has been repeated many times in different places with different individuals over the course of the last 75 years since that day of October 2, 1928, when St. Josemaria "saw" Opus Dei. This dream of Hawthorn really started with the St. Josemaria who envisioned a multitude of Christian men and women present at all levels of society who would "light up the paths of the earth with faith and love"<sup>2</sup> by their prayer and actions, freely assuming their responsibilities as children of God. St. Josemaria described his dream in a homily:

I dream—and the dream has come true—of multitudes of God's children, sanctifying themselves as ordinary citizens, sharing the ambitions and endeavours of their colleagues and friends. . . . He has invited you to stay among the activities and concerns of the world. He wants you to know that your human vocation, your profession, your talents are not omitted from his divine plan. . . . The commandment God gives us is to love as he has loved us, which in most cases means living alongside of others and being their equals, giving ourselves to the service of our Lord in the world so as to make everyone know better the love of God, telling them that the divine paths of the world have been opened up.<sup>3</sup>

Sanctity and apostolate form part of the warp, the underlying structure of our tapestry. Men and women have taken to heart this call to be holy and to be apostles in the middle of the world, desiring to make this a reality in themselves and in those around them through all the possibilities offered by the temporal world. Saint Josemaria emphasized many times that this striving for sanctity and apostolate is the task of the ordinary Christian: "Opus Dei proposes to help the ordinary citizen like yourself to lead a fully Christian life, without modifying their normal way of life, their daily work, their aspirations and ambitions. Opus Dei aims to encourage people in every sector of society to desire holiness in the midst of the world."<sup>4</sup>

You and I are "the ordinary citizen." We live in all layers of society, in ordinary circumstances of daily life, sharing all the social conditions, concerns, and cares of our fellow citizens of the world around us. Through our baptism

<sup>2</sup>From the "prayer card" distributed by the Opus Dei Prelature.

<sup>3</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 20-21.

<sup>4</sup>*Conversations with Msgr. Escriva*, 24.

we are able to identify ourselves with Christ and lead others to Christ. We want to take our sanctification seriously and seek to help others to do the same.

The grace of the sacrament of baptism constitutes another essential component of the warp of our tapestry. At the beatification of the St. Josemaria on May 17, 1992 Pope John Paul II stated in his homily:

Indeed in Baptism by which we become God's children we receive grace, that seed of holiness that grows and matures with the help of the other sacraments and the practice of piety. This is what the same Blessed reminds us.... Christians working in the midst of the world, must reconcile all things with God, speaking with Christ in the midst of all human activity. Particularly in our day Christians are called to co-operate in a new evangelization that imbues the home, professional life, centres of culture and work, mass media, public and private life with those Gospel values that are the source of peace, beauty, ... This call was repeatedly promoted by St. Josemaria.<sup>5</sup>

Each of us, as lay persons living in the middle of the world, find ourselves in a specific place that contains many opportunities for growth in holiness and for apostolate. The way in which many people seize these opportunities provides threads for the weft of the tapestry. In another interview recorded in *Conversations*, St. Josemaria said,

Lay people have their own way of contributing to the holiness and apostolate of the Church. They do so by their free and responsible action within the temporal sphere, to which they bring the leaven of Christianity. Giving Christian witness in their everyday lives, spreading the word which enlightens in the name of God, acting responsibly in the service of others and thus contributing to the solution of common problems; these are some of the ways in which ordinary Christians fulfil their divine mission.<sup>6</sup>

St. Josemaria taught that we should assume the responsibilities of our particular circumstances always acting in full freedom in regard to temporal realities, "to fulfil the mission which God has given you, in the place and in the environment indicated by his Providence."<sup>7</sup>

### *Family and Education*

In the context of this presentation, the specific locus of our activity is family and education, which provide more threads for our tapestry. For most of us our vocation and mission will be found in married and family life. This is the particular place where we will seek God's will for us. Over the years St. Josemaria spoke many times about the importance and dignity of marriage and family life, emphasizing that "marriage is a divine path on earth to lead those with

<sup>5</sup>Pope John Paul II, Homily, May 17, 1992.

<sup>6</sup>*Conversations*, #59.

<sup>7</sup>*Conversations*, # 60.

whom we live to God.”<sup>8</sup> In a homily, *Marriage, a Christian Vocation*, he said,

Husband and wife are called to sanctify their married life and to sanctify themselves in it. It would be a serious mistake if they were to exclude family life from their spiritual development. The marriage union, the care and education of children, the effort to provide for the needs of the family as well as for its security and development, the relationship with other persons who make up the community, all these are among the ordinary human situations that Christian couples are called upon to sanctify.<sup>9</sup>

He called families “the cells of Christianity” affirming that “the first apostolate is in the home . . . parents should understand that founding a family, educating their children, and exercising a Christian influence in society, are supernatural tasks.”<sup>10</sup> The mission of parents is to provide the environment their children require in order to develop into mature responsible adults. Again in the homily, *Marriage, a Christian Vocation*, St. Josemaria tells us, “Parents are called to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the development of their children into men and women who will be authentic Christians.”<sup>11</sup>

In this sense we describe the role of the parents as primary educators of their children. The parents’ task to educate their children stems from natural law and they are enabled to fulfil their responsibilities by the graces received through baptism and marriage. This has been the perennial teaching of the Church. One of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, states, “Since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it.”<sup>12</sup> In his apostolic letter, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II, writes,

The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.<sup>13</sup>

The family is the basic cell of society, a microcosm of society. The family as a social unit is also the first educating community of a society where the members of a family are constantly interacting and learning from each other. It

<sup>8</sup>*Conversations*, 91.

<sup>9</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 23.

<sup>10</sup>*Conversations*, 91.

<sup>11</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 27.

<sup>12</sup>Vatican Council II, *Grav. Ed.*, #3.

<sup>13</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Fam. Cons.* #36.

is uniquely suited to the transmission of ethical, cultural and social values essential to the development and well being of the individual and by extension of society. As such the family should be encouraged and supported to fulfil its functions in order to benefit all of society. Because the state of health of the family is critical for the development and improvement of a nation, the education provided within the family is of the utmost importance.

One of St. Josemaria’s major concerns was the preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of the family. He emphasized that the family that reflects the light of Christ will have “a home full of light and cheerfulness” and as such will be the guide of the world”<sup>14</sup> He exhorts families to be “sowers of peace and joy . . . . This is what we have to be.”<sup>15</sup> In homilies, writings, and meeting people, he presented many points for parents’ reflection in the education of their children in the home. The importance of the parents’ example was a primary consideration.

Parents teach their children mainly through their own conduct. What a son or daughter looks for in a father or mother is not only a certain amount of knowledge . . . [but] a proof of the value and meaning of life, shown through the life of a specific person and confirmed in the different situations and circumstances that occur over a period of time . . . Don’t let yourself be deceived: they see everything from their earliest years, and they judge everything. Let them see that God is not only on your lips but also in your deeds.<sup>16</sup>

Two other important responsibilities for parents to carry out in the home are education in the faith and the introduction to a life of piety. Parents have the mission to educate their children in the faith, guiding them to prayer and the sacraments. St. Josemaria said, “Experience shows in all Christian environments what good effects come from the natural and supernatural introduction to the life of piety given in the warmth of the home . . . They learn to pray following their parents’ example.”<sup>17</sup> The life of piety in a child is fostered and developed through the parents’ example.

Another feature of St. Josemaria’s approach to Christian education is the importance placed upon the human virtues, and their acquisition especially in the home. In a homily in *Friends of God*, he writes, “The human virtues . . . are the foundation for the supernatural ones. These in turn provide us with constant encouragement to behave as good human beings. In either case it is not sufficient merely to want to have these virtues. We have to learn how to practice them.”<sup>18</sup> In another homily he points out that the home is the place where children will first learn the practice of the virtues both supernatural faith, hope

<sup>14</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 30.

<sup>15</sup>*loc. cit.*

<sup>16</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 28.

<sup>17</sup>*Conversations*, 103.

<sup>18</sup>*Friends of God*, 91.

and charity, and natural virtues, “prudence, loyalty, sincerity, humility, industriousness, cheerfulness. . .” Thus parents will sanctify their family life thereby creating a true family atmosphere.<sup>19</sup>

As my final point in considering education within the family, St. Josemaria always advised parents to respect their children’s legitimate freedom: “Parents have to respect their children’s freedom because there is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.”<sup>20</sup> He emphasized the vital importance for parents to develop a relationship of trust and confidence with their children. The relationship between the parent and the child is critical in helping to develop the child’s personality and transmitting essential values. Many times he gave parents the advice not to behave in a dictatorial manner with their children, stating that “Imposing things by force, in an authoritarian manner, is not the right way to teach. The ideal attitude of parents lies more in becoming their children’s friends—friends who will be willing to share their anxieties, who will listen to their problems, who will help them in an effective and agreeable way.”<sup>21</sup>

#### *Parents and the School*

The next thread we will examine is that of parents and their connection with the school. In *Christ is Passing By*, St. Josemaria said, “The parents are the first persons responsible for the education of their children in human as well as spiritual matters. They should be conscious of the extent of their responsibility.”<sup>22</sup> After the family, the next social community whose responsibility includes the development of the child is the school. In most circumstances the family does not undertake to deliver all the components which comprise a complete education. The work done in the home will be supplemented by the work of the school. The parents, as the ones who are first and foremost responsible for their children, seek the help of the school in a complementary role. As the primary educators of their children, it is always incumbent upon them to familiarize themselves with the education that their children receive in the school and to ascertain that this education is consistent with that of the home. This is a right, which may not be taken away from them, and a duty, which they may not give up. Furthermore, the rights and responsibilities of parents both as parents and citizens allow them to start their own schools if it is possible and appropriate.

In 1963, some parents in a get together in Spain with the St. Josemaria were commenting about some worrisome conditions prevalent in the schools at that time. He reassured them that as parents who have received the graces of the sacraments of baptism and matrimony, and as free citizens with a social

<sup>18</sup>*Friends of God*, 91.

<sup>19</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 23.

<sup>20</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 28.

<sup>21</sup>*Christ is Passing By*, 27.

<sup>22</sup>*loc. cit.*

responsibility, they were able to apply whatever solutions were appropriate to ensure a Christian education for their children. Upon hearing these words of St. Josemaria, these parents took the initiative to found the first of what was to be many schools inspired by his insight. This first school, Gaztelueta, was located in Bilbao, Spain. Soon parents working together with educators started other such schools throughout Spain. Subsequently the model of these schools spread to other countries as parents, becoming more cognizant of their role in the education of their children, rightfully chose this approach to fulfil their responsibilities in this area. These parents had clearly understood their obligation in regard to their children and they recognized their freedom to organize educational centres that supported the work of the parents in the home. These schools work closely with the parents to educate their children and parents continue to exercise the role of primary educator. Today, these schools exist internationally— in the Philippines, in Australia, in the United States, in Europe, in Africa, in the countries of Central and South America, and in Canada, more specifically in Toronto.

#### *Hawthorn School for Girls*

The final threads of the tapestry that I will examine describe the scene of Hawthorn School. In its first year Hawthorn had twenty-two students. Today the enrolment is two hundred and twenty in grades ranging from junior kindergarten to grade twelve. The school owns a building of 20,000 square feet and an expansion of 12,000 square feet. is scheduled for completion at the end of the summer. Hawthorn School is a respected member of several professional associations. The annual Gala Dinner raised about \$60,000.00 this year. These facts tell you a little bit about the growth of Hawthorn since 1989. The families of the school reflect the diversity of society itself, coming from many different religious, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Hawthorn provides an education based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. Whatever their background, all who share Hawthorn’s philosophy and commitment to moral excellence and personal development are welcome at the school.

To get back to the question I raised at the beginning of this presentation, how did Hawthorn School for Girls come to be? I have already described the background and conditions that led to the founding of Hawthorn. Its remote origins can be traced back to a small catechetical initiative that started in 1987. My husband and I invited some families to our home for study sessions for both parents and children to enrich and deepen the knowledge of our faith. The parents gathered together in one room; the children divided into age appropriate groups and went to other areas of the house for their classes. In total there were about 20 children plus their parents. The parents studied the Church documents concerning matters related to the family. The study sessions lasted about 45 minutes and took place during the school year twice a month on a weeknight. By the end of the school year other families had heard about this initiative and also wanted to take part. In September 1988 we were able to continue this



Family Catechism, as it came to be called, in a greatly expanded format. The total number of people, including both parents and children, increased significantly to about 130 people. We were given the use of a very spacious day care centre, which allowed us to accommodate all the groups. The Family Catechism now met on a Saturday morning for two hours. The program expanded from just a study of the catechism to other subjects which included stories about people living both ordinary and heroic virtues, Church history, logic games to help children improve their thinking skills and sports activities. The parents expanded their own program of study in addition to helping in the organization and teaching of the children's classes. The most important criterion for enrolment in the program was the presence and participation of the parent in some way.

Over the course of that year the idea of starting a school was seriously considered. In January 1989, a feasibility study was conducted and a general meeting was held for interested parents. A steering committee was organized to continue the investigation. Based on the findings of the committee, a decision was made in the early spring of 1989 to start a girls' school first, which would be followed by a boys' school at a later date. In June of 1989 we had no teachers, no money, and no location, but we did have twenty-two students. Over the course of that summer the newly constituted Board of Directors was able to find a suitable location, the teachers, and even a school chaplain. The Board of Directors had requested the Prelature of Opus Dei to provide a priest for the spiritual needs of the school. This is how Father Joseph Soria came to be appointed as our first chaplain.

In the first year of the school's existence, long and profound deliberations took place at the level of the Board of Directors as they grappled with the essential elements of the school and how to enunciate and transmit these substantive features to all who would come in contact with the school, especially parents and staff. These elements were eventually published as the *Goals, Principles and Operating Characteristics* of the school. They still serve us well today because they provide a framework, a point of reference for explaining to people, especially to prospective parents and to staff, the fundamental principles of the school. The *Goal* is stated as follows: "To provide children as members of a family unit with an integral education. This education is based upon the natural virtues illuminated by the full recognition of man's supernatural end." The goal recognizes four important things: (1) The child is an inseparable part of a family unit composed of parents and children. (2) The education provided addresses all aspects of formation and development, spiritual, intellectual, human, social, affective, and physical. (3) "The full recognition of man's supernatural end" refers to the fact that each human person is a child of God called to eternal life. Respect for the dignity of the human person, which underlies everything done at the school, is based upon the fact that each person is a child of God. (4) The education in the natural virtues, which constitutes the foundation of the program of character education at Hawthorn School, consists not only of intellectual knowledge of the virtues but also of their integration

into daily life.

For the purposes of my presentation here today I will confine myself to highlighting two of the principles:

*First, parents are the primary educators of their children; the school founded by parents operates as an aid to parents.*

*Second, substantial parental involvement is essential and expected. To safeguard and promote the unity of the family and the coherence of the educating endeavour, the school contributes to the formation of the parents and the teachers.*

The students are best educated both personally and academically when the school's priorities are ordered first to the parents, then to the faculty, and finally to the students. This is one of the most important features of Hawthorn, indeed, of all the schools inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaria. This hierarchy of parents, teachers, and students is a radical departure from conventional practice. However, this is a fundamental insight of St. Josemaria in regard to schools. Because of the attention that is given to parents to assist them in the education of their children, the school is providing support to the home.

The conscious effort to foster home-school collaboration is done in a variety of ways at Hawthorn. Activities are organized by the school to help parents understand more profoundly their role as primary educators. Guest speakers from various disciplines and areas of expertise are invited to give seminars to the parents. In-house presentations and workshops, such as education in human sexuality, preparing for high school, good study habits, etc., are part of annual parents' programs offered at the different grade levels. Parents have the opportunity to discuss their child's progress with both teachers and advisors. Meetings take place at regular intervals in order to set goals for the child in regard to academic issues as well as in those areas which relate to the acquisition of virtues.

The cornerstone of the personal character education at Hawthorn is the advising program, which assists students in the understanding of themselves and their relationship with others. Each student has a faculty advisor with whom she meets regularly throughout the school year. The advisor, by listening, understanding, encouraging, and giving advice, leads the student to discover her strengths and weaknesses and to improve in her academic, personal, and social life. The advisor serves as an essential link between the parents and the school. Through the close contact with parents, advisors support the parental efforts to help their daughters mature.

The faculty, in keeping with these principles, also participates in a program of professional development that helps teachers understand the specific nature of the school. Topics covered in the teachers' program include the school's philosophy of education, understanding the human person and the needs of the human person, current ethical and social issues, integration of the virtues in teaching and curriculum, etc. All of these elements promote a unity between the academic and personal education received in the school and at home as a result of a deliberate and systematic effort to work together. In this way the

hierarchy of parents, teachers, and students is developed and maintained. Through these means the school provides valuable support for the family. Family life in the home is strengthened, resulting in strong families. Strong families lead to a healthy society.

### Conclusion

We return to our tapestry. We have examined the warp—the structure provided by personal sanctity and apostolate, and the many threads of the weft—vocation and mission in the ordinary circumstances in the midst of the world, social responsibility and freedom to act in regard to temporal realities, the path to sanctity in marriage, the rights and duties of parents, education within the family and parents assuming social responsibilities in regard to education outside the home, and finally Hawthorn School as a specific manifestation of all of the above. All these threads are interwoven to result in the depiction of the “*Grandeur of Ordinary Life*” as taught by Saint Josemaria.

Some day historians will look back and examine the 20th century and recognize two of the most important figures who have had a decisive influence: Pope John Paul II, who exhorts us to re-Christianize society, to re-evangelize the world, to build the civilization of love, and Saint Josemaria, who teaches us how to do it.

DOMINIC MANGANIELLO

### THE UNIVERSITY IS FOR DONKEYS

St. Josemaria once described himself as a “university man” with a “passionate interest” in all aspects of higher education.<sup>1</sup> I want to begin by recounting an anecdote that might not at first seem related to my subject but is, in fact, a preamble to it. One day a canon at the Cathedral of Valencia asked his good friend Josemaria for a photograph of himself. “Sure,” Escriva replied. “With pleasure. I’ll give it to you right away.” He stepped into the next room and returned with a small cast-iron donkey. “Here, take it,” he said, “Now you have a portrait of me.” The canon stared at him in amazement until Escriva explained, “Yes, yes, my friend, that’s what I am—a little donkey of the Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

I was amused to discover that university teachers, like myself, also bear a family resemblance to the beast of burden, for, on another occasion, Blessed Josemaria wrote:

For me all donkeys have the bearing of a professor.  
With those splendid ears, that seem like television antennae,  
And that bright and alert look.  
But besides, it’s clear that they are wise because they are docile,  
They let themselves be led.<sup>3</sup>

This passage convinced me that the university is for donkeys, not those “old, stubborn, vicious one[s] that would give you a kick when you least expected,” but those young ones that are “hard-working and [have] a quick, cheerful trot.”<sup>4</sup> Blessed Josemaria’s comments were inspired by the verses of Psalm 73: “I was like a donkey in your presence. But I am always with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory.” It was a donkey, moreover, that Christ chose as a throne when he presented himself to the people as king.

I will translate Blessed Josemaria’s ideas freely by using his own words, including those spoken when he was Chancellor of the University of Navarre, and try to show how they apply to the daily life of a professor. Like his friend the donkey, the professor should always be on the lookout for that *divine something* hidden in his everyday tasks.<sup>5</sup> In practical terms this means “there is no

<sup>1</sup> *Conversations with Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer*, par.77.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Berglar, *Opus Dei: Life and Works of its Founder, Josemaria Escriva*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>3</sup> *Ut Lumentum*. General Archives of the Prelature (AGP), P01, 1975, p. 1590.

<sup>4</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 181.

<sup>5</sup> cf. *Conversations*, 121.