

Faith and Personal Freedom in Social and Political Conduct

Thoughts on some teachings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva

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Any attempt to come to grips with an extensive body of teachings requires adopting a perspective that brings its main features into focus. In the case of Blessed Josemaria Escriva, both in regard to the topic we are examining (his teachings on the freedom and action of Christians in political life), and in regard to the totality of his message, this perspective points to a specific date, October 2, 1928, and to the institution, Opus Dei, founded on that date.

During his long and fruitful priestly and apostolic life, Blessed Josemaria never proceeded in a pedagogical or academic way, but rather concretely and experientially. He formulated his teaching directly from his experience of life, which entailed many and varied consequences. One that will affect the methodology of this study is the fact that his teachings on the freedom and political life of the Christian, although, as we will see, very rich, were made concrete and explicit in connection with what was really the sole task of his life: the foundation and governing of Opus Dei. We will begin, therefore, by looking briefly at the political and historical context of those initial and determining moments of Opus Dei. We will then go on to consider the more directly theological-dogmatic aspects of his teaching, and conclude with those that are more immediately moral and pastoral.

In the context of ordinary life

On October 2, 1928, the young priest, Josemaria Escriva, who was then 26, clearly saw that God, in Christ, was calling everyone to sanctity. In the case of ordinary Christians, whose life is defined by each one's temporal work and activities, this is a call to become holy in and through these realities. At the same time, and inseparably, he saw that it was God's will that he dedicate all of his efforts to founding an institution that he later named Opus Dei, the Work of God, which would

have as its purpose the fostering of a sincere search for holiness in the midst of the world. This would come about precisely through the witness of Christians who, by making their ordinary life the place and occasion of their encounter with Christ, would make manifest the sanctifiable and sanctifying capacity of daily life.¹

When Josemaria Escriva received the call to make Opus Dei a reality—and for decades prior to that, since the end of the nineteenth century—various associations and movements had arisen that strove to counter the process of “deChristianization” the western world was going through, by encouraging the presence and action of Christians in public life. The inspiration underlying Blessed Josemaria’s foundational mission was quite different. What he aspired to, what he knew himself called to, was not to promote a Christian presence in public life (although he knew very well the importance of an apostolate of that kind). Rather he was being asked to provoke a radical awareness in Christians of all walks of life of the implications of their baptismal vocation. Each and every Christian, whatever their place and role in society, is called to contribute in a very specific way to making known the power and truth of the Gospel.²

Let us pause to consider in some detail implications of what we have just said:

a) First of all, one fact should be put on record. An eagerness to see the Christian message radiating out to the whole of civil and political society, and peace and justice increasing as a result of Christians acting in accord with their beliefs, was part of the apostolic outlook of Opus Dei’s founder from the very beginning. His writings include many references to specific aspects of the historical and cultural situation in which the Work was born, and more specifically to the rupture between faith and life, between Christianity and earthly realities, then reigning in many places. “God wanted to raise up his Work,” he said in one of his *Letters*, “when in most countries both the ‘elite’ and entire populations seemed to be distancing themselves from the Source of all grace; when even in long-standing Christian countries people were using the sacraments less frequently; when whole sectors of the laity seemed to be asleep, as if their operative faith had vanished.”³

b) Similar ideas are found in much earlier writings, for example, in a paragraph of his personal notes (*Apuntes íntimos*), written between April and June of 1930. There he says that we have to struggle “against laicism, with an apparent laicism; against indifferentism, with an apparent indifferentism.”⁴ A year later, in July 1931, he echoed the same idea in somewhat different terms: “a healthy lay

1. In regard to October 2, 1928, see J.L. Illanes, “Dos de octubre de 1928: alcance y significado de una fecha,” in *Scripta Theologica* 13 (1981) 411-451 (included also in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, Pamplona, 1982, 59-99); Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I: *The Early Years*, Princeton, 2001, pp. 217-231, and A. Aranda, “*El bullir de la sangre de Cristo*”: *Estudio sobre el cristocentrismo del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Madrid, 2000, pp. 81ff..

2. Here and in some of the following paragraphs, we repeat ideas and expressions published earlier in A. de Fuenmayor, V. Gomez-Iglesias, J. L. Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Princeton, 1994, pp. 46-50.

3. *Letter of January 25, 1961*, no. 13.

4. *Personal notes*, no. 32.

outlook, a healthy anticlericalism.”⁵ Both phrases indicate not only the evil or crisis to be overcome, but also the way to overcome it. What is needed is not merely a reaction against a spiritual crisis and anti-Christian attitudes, but a deepening of one’s understanding and living of Christianity. Since this would be a deep and authentic response, it would be able to grasp and assimilate the positive elements contained in modernity. In summary, and with terminology he later employed, neither laicism nor clericalism but a lay mentality; neither secularization nor sacralization but secularity, a deep Christian assumption of secular reality, sanctifying it from within, with full respect for its own intrinsic nature.⁶

c) But while the hope of social progress resulting from truly living the Gospel played a role, even an important role, in the preaching and pastoral activity of Blessed Josemaría, this was seen as coming about as the result of each Christian’s awareness of his personal call to sanctity and apostolate. This awareness should have as its fruit the effort to inform all of reality with the spirit of Christ. In other words, Opus Dei—and this was clearly pointed out by its Founder—does not have as its goal the organization and promotion of social, educational, or cultural initiatives of any kind. Rather it seeks to foster the holiness of its members and of all who take part in its activities. In the founder’s eyes the Christian betterment of society is not an end, but rather a fruit. An effect may be foreseen and even hoped for, but that does not mean that it is sought directly.

d) From these premises a consequence arises that is crucial from many points of view, and specifically in regard to the place political activity occupies in the preaching of Opus Dei’s founder. What Josemaría Escrivá always aspired to was to put each person face to face with the Gospel, that is to say, face to face with Christ, as the radical font of meaning for the whole of one’s existence. Therefore, in his preaching the appeal made in the name of Christ leads directly, not to specific activities of one kind or another, but to a much broader reality: to ordinary life.

Here we find ourselves at the very kernel of the message of Opus Dei, which the founder often summarized with the succinct expression: “the divine paths of the earth have been opened up.” All paths, all upright human occupations should be occasions for finding and drawing close to Christ.⁷ Ordinary life, the daily life of men and women, with all that it comprises, should be valued and, what is more important, assumed as a reality that is at the same time and inseparably, both human and Christian.⁸

5. *Personal notes*, no. 206.

6. For an understanding of secularity in accord with these perspectives and following the express teachings both of the founder of Opus Dei and of one of his closest collaborators, Alvaro del Portillo, see what we have written in “The Church in the World: The Secularity of Members of Opus Dei” in *Opus Dei in the Church* (Scepter Publishers, Princeton, 1994).

7. Cf. among many other texts, *Conversations*, no. 34.

8. In regard to the expression “ordinary life” and its use by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, see the article cited in note 6, and also Fernando Ocariz, “Vocation to Opus Dei as a Vocation in the Church” in *Opus Dei in the Church*, and Pedro Rodríguez, *Vocacion, trabajo, contemplacion*, Pamplona, 1987, pp. 37ff.

Certainly, within the totality of the realities that make up ordinary life, it is necessary to establish differences and hierarchies, for not everything is of equal value or importance. But Opus Dei's founder put the accent not on politics, but on professional work, on the job or task that takes up the greater part of one's day and that determines the place of each man or woman in society, shapes one's personality and channels one's contribution to social life and the common good.⁹

Every human being, man or woman, contributes to the common good through their family life, through their effort to foster an atmosphere of solidarity and community, just as they do through their job.¹⁰ And from the context of their ordinary life, men and woman can and do direct their gaze at public and political life, understood in a strict sense. This is a dimension which does not exhaust the personality of a human being and which, in consequence, should not be absolutized, but which no one can ignore. The human being is by nature social. Even more, it is a dimension which every citizen should feel called to participate in, in one way or another.¹¹

In October 1928, Spain, where Opus Dei and its apostolate began, was going through a period of political calm and economic expansion. In 1923 General Primo de Rivera had established an authoritarian government which found support not only in the army and in conservative sectors of society, but, from 1926 on, also in a major part of the socialist union movement. The Iberoamerican Exposition and the Universal Exposition, both of which took place in 1929, the first in Seville and the second in Barcelona, reflect the economic development and good international relations of this period.

A year later the situation radically changed. Various internal problems, connected with, or at least made more acute by, the general crisis after the collapse of Wall Street at the end of 1929, led to the resignation of General Primo de Rivera

9. The emphasis on professional work is present from the beginnings of Opus Dei, as can be seen in this note from June 1930: "Simple Christians. A mass that is fermenting. Ours is the ordinary, with perfection. The means: professional work. Everyone a saint!" (*Personal notes*, no. 35). For a commentary on this text and an analysis of the connection between ordinary life and work in Josemaria Escriva's teaching, see what we have written in "Trabajo, caridad, justicia," in *Santidad y mundo. Estudios en torno a las enseñanzas del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Pamplona, 1996, pp. 211ff (also printed in *Ante Dios y en el mundo. Apuntes para una teología del trabajo*, Pamplona, 1997, pp. 108ff); for more bibliographical information see note 33.

10. We will look at work and social life in greater detail below. We will limit ourselves here to saying that Blessed Josemaria Escriva also devoted great attention to marriage and the family. For an overview of his teachings in this area, one might consult Cormac Burke, "Il Beato Josemaría Escrivá e il matrimonio: cammino umano vocazione soprannaturale," in *Romana* 19 (1994) 374-384, and F. Gil Hellín, "La vita di famiglia, cammino di santità," in *Romana* 20 (1995) 224-236.

11. Stating more precisely the relationship between ordinary life, professional work and political activity, we can distinguish three dimensions or levels: a) All human activity, and more specifically all work, has an intrinsic political dimension, in the broad sense of the term, for it contributes in one way or another to social life. b) Every citizen is also called, in one way or another, to participate with his opinion and decisions in the election of whoever is to represent him, and also to the resolution of numerous collective questions and the development of civic and political life, giving the word a somewhat more restricted meaning than in the previous case, but still a fairly broad one. c) Finally, some citizens may feel called to take up political functions in a full way, now giving the term its most restricted meaning, dedicating to them either a major part or even the whole of their professional work. In the following discussion, all three levels are alluded to.

in January 1930. Thus began a period of change, upheaval and uncertainty: the abdication by the king and the establishment of the republic in 1931, the attempt at a *coup d'état* by traditionalists in 1932, the anarchist-syndicalist insurrection in 1934, the military uprising and civil war in 1936. These events and, in a special way, the activity of secularist groups, were often accompanied by mob actions that were not only anticlerical but directly anti-Catholic (persecution of priests, suppression of religious orders and congregations, burning of churches and convents, etc.). All of this not only wounded the deep Christian and priestly spirit of Josemaria Escriva, but also led him to consider the mission he had received on October 2, 1928, dreaming of the fruit that awaited an intense and wide-ranging Christian apostolate in the midst of the world.¹²

In fact, on more than one occasion, references in his personal notes to the events just mentioned and the pain they caused in his soul, were accompanied by these exclamations: "Lord, your Work!" "Jesus, your Work!" If the crossroads and social structures of the world had many Christians who were truly conscious of their faith, who were determined to live at all times according to the spirit of Christ—and this is what Opus Dei was called to help bring about—it would be easier to overcome barriers, selfishness and misunderstandings, and there would be, as a consequence, more peace, more harmony, more unity in the world. A point in *The Way* sums up this hope in vigorous language: "A secret. An open secret: these world crises are crises of saints. —God wants a handful of men 'of his own' in every human activity. Then... *pax Christi in regno Christi*—'the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.'" ¹³

The evocation of the implications, including the social implications, of this call to a deep living of the Gospel in the midst of secular realities, is always situated in the spiritual and apostolic context mentioned above. More specifically, there was never a unilateral reference to political action or a change of emphasis in his apostolic work. He continued to put the emphasis on the radical conversion of each person and, based on this conversion, the Christian vivification of all reality, especially professional work. Both in moments of political calm as well as in situations of tension, he always reaffirmed this foundational criterion, that is, the orientation of Opus Dei to the fostering of sanctification in and through ordinary life, of which certainly participation in political tasks forms a part, but only a part and in a different way for each person.

Josemaria Escriva always admitted the legitimacy of associations and movements which had as their purpose the promotion of the presence of Christians in public life. He also admitted the possibility of institutions which had both a polit-

12. In regard to this period in Blessed Josemaria's life see Andres Vazquez de Prada, *op.cit.* pp. 269-276.

13. *The Way*, no. 301. This point in *The Way* echoes one of the most profound spiritual experiences of Blessed Josemaria—the special understanding of the Gospel text *si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum* (Jn 12:32), which he received on August 7, 1931. For a detailed study of this see Pedro Rodriguez, "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 (an expanded Italian version is in *Annales Theologici* 6 [1992] 5-34).

ical and religious purpose (although he warned of the risk of confusion that such a project might entail). But he clearly distinguished between these activities and his own apostolic work. Opus Dei does not have as its specific purpose an objective of that type. Rather its goal is a much broader one, seeking sanctity in the midst of the world, with the consequences arising therefrom. These include the apostolic and spiritual importance of work and ordinary social relationships; an openness to every kind of person, regardless of their position in society; insistence on freedom of thought and decision in professional questions.

Statements and writings expressing this goal are very numerous. To complete this first stage of our discussion, we will now mention only one, at the risk of bringing up questions that we will later look at in more detail. In one of his first letters the founder writes: "The Work has no political aims at all. This is not its purpose. Our only purpose is spiritual and apostolic, and it carries a divine seal: the love of freedom. Act freely," he continued, "because this is proper to our special divine calling to sanctify ourselves while working in the ordinary tasks of mankind according to the dictates of each one's conscience."¹⁴ The members of Opus Dei contribute to the common good with their professional work and their social and family life, participating in civil life just as other citizens do, also, when they consider it opportune, forming part of groups, associations or parties, always with full freedom. But Opus Dei as such neither intervenes nor is present in this field.

The Christian in history

Most of the writings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva that we have just cited come from the earliest years of his priestly activity. But we can find in them, expressly in some cases and implicitly in others, a good part of the considerations that in later years he would develop more fully. This is the case, for example, with his teachings on the Christian as situated in history. Though this question might seem tangential to the topic we are directly considering, political action, it provides us with an intellectual and spiritual framework for the rest of his views.

We should keep in mind that his teaching here was based on an experience that has already been mentioned: the light he received on August 7, 1931, which made him understand in a new way some words of Jesus in St. John's gospel: *et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum*. "For many years now," Blessed Josemaria recalled in an interview granted in 1968, "ever since the foundation of Opus Dei, I have meditated and asked others to meditate on those words of Christ that we find in St. John: 'And when I am lifted up from the earth I shall draw all things unto Myself' (*Jn 12:32*). By his death on the Cross, Christ has drawn all creation to Himself. Now it is the task of Christians, in His name, to reconcile all things to God, placing Christ, by means of their work in the middle of the world,

14. *Letter of January 9, 1932*, nos. 42 and 43. In regard to the composition of this and other *Letters*, cf. Andres Vazquez de Prada, *op.cit.* pp. 436-438.

at the summit of all human activities.”¹⁵ Christ invites Christians to unite themselves to him with faith and love, and thus to bring him by their lives into all human activities, in such a way that their actions make them Christ-like, spreading the peace which, in Christ and through Christ, is offered to us by God the Father.¹⁶

We should add here another experience, which Josemaria Escriva made reference to on various occasions, although without mentioning the date. “One day I was with a friend of mine, a man with a good heart, but who did not have faith. Pointing toward a globe he said, ‘Look, from North to South, from East to West.’ ‘What do you want me to look at?’ I asked. His answer was: ‘The failure of Christ. For twenty centuries, people have been trying to bring his doctrine to men’s lives, and look at the result.’ I was filled with sadness. It is painful to think that many people still don’t know our Lord, and that among those who do know him, many live as though they did not. But that feeling lasted only a moment. It was shortly overcome by love and thankfulness, because Jesus has wanted every man to cooperate freely in the work of redemption. He has not failed. His doctrine and life are effective in the world at all times.... The work of salvation is still going on, and each one of us has a part in it.”¹⁷

These experiences and others like them were pondered by Blessed Josemaria over the course of his life, fusing with his assiduous meditation of Sacred Scripture. His preaching showed a profound awareness of the truth of the redemption, more specifically, of the redemption as a reality fully realized in Christ and unfolding throughout the length of history, in the constant intertwining of God’s call and man’s response.

This deep sense of the redemption as a process, or if we prefer to speak of it in traditional terms, of the application of the redemption, gave place, especially in his writings during the sixties, to a broad vision of history in which the action and the work of human beings is seen in reference to those three great strands of God’s salvific plan: creation, redemption, and the final consummation.

“Christ, our Lord,” he says in effect, “still wants to save men and the whole of creation— this world of ours which is good because so it came from God’s hands. It was Adam’s offense, the sin of human pride, which broke the divine harmony of creation. But God the Father, in the fullness of time, sent his only-begotten Son, to take flesh in Mary ever Virgin, through the Holy Spirit, and reestablish peace. In this way, by redeeming man from sin, ‘we receive adoption as sons’ (*Gal* 4:5). We become capable of sharing the intimacy of God. In this way the new man, the new line of the children of God (cf. *Rom* 6:4-5), is enabled to free the whole universe from disorder, restoring all things in Christ (cf. *Eph* 1:9-10), as they have been reconciled with God (cf. *Col* 1:20).

15. *Conversations*, no. 59.

16. For an analysis and commentary on this experience, one can consult the study mentioned in note 13, which contains Blessed Josemaria’s own words describing it.

17. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 129; see also no. 113, and also, although without express reference to the scene of the map of the world, no. 121.

“That is the calling of Christians, that is our apostolic task, the desire which should consume our soul: to make this kingdom of Christ a reality, to eliminate hatred and cruelty, to spread throughout the earth the strong and soothing balm of love. Let us ask our king today to make us collaborate, humbly and fervently, in the divine task of mending what is broken, of saving what is lost, of fixing what man has put out of order, of bringing to his destination whoever has gone off the right road, of reconstructing the harmony of all created things.”¹⁸

The words that we have just cited summarize some of Blessed Josemaría's deepest convictions. It is clear, on the one hand, that the ultimate reference point of all his preaching, and of his entire life, was always the kingdom of heaven understood in its eschatological fullness: the definitive meeting with God at the end of time, when every human being will find himself or herself united to God and, in God, to all of redeemed mankind. But it is also clear that this reference to eschatology does not remain closed in on itself, leading to a disregard for the present-day situation. Rather it illumines and gives full meaning to the present moment as anticipating the final consummation, and points to the hope of attaining, even though only in a limited way and as a token or pledge, the full fraternity that will be a reality in heaven.

Blessed Josemaría develops this consideration more fully in a homily given on Holy Friday in 1960. In it he comments, as was appropriate for that day, on the redemptive efficacy of Christ's death. “The tragedy of the passion brings to fulfillment our own life and the whole of human history.”¹⁹ The awareness of the supreme value of Christ's death should imbue the life of a Christian, leading him to the sincerity of life and capacity for dedication that our Lord's redemptive death has made possible. “Being a Christian is not something incidental; it is a divine reality that takes root deep in our life. It gives us a clear vision and strengthens our will to act as God wants.” “It means setting our mind and heart on reaching the fullness of love which Jesus Christ showed by dying for us.”²⁰

Blessed Josemaría then contrasts the authentically Christian attitude with “the kind of attitude which develops if one is unable to penetrate this mystery of Jesus.”²¹ He mentions two such attitudes, each opposed to the other, but both far from the truth:

—On the one hand there is “the mentality of those who see Christianity as a combination of practices or acts of piety, without seeing their relationship to the situations of ordinary life, to the urgency of taking care of the needs of others and of trying to find a remedy for injustices.” “Anyone who has that attitude,” he stresses, “has not yet understood the meaning of incarnation. The Son of God has taken on the body and soul and voice of a man; he has shared our faith to the

18. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 183.

19. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 96.

20. *Ibid.* no. 98.

21. *Ibid.*

extent of experiencing the excruciating anguish of death.” Such a person seems to view Christ “as a stranger in the world of man.”²²

—On the other hand, there is the attitude of those who “tend to imagine that in order to remain human we need to play down some central aspects of Christian dogma. They act as if the life of prayer, continual relationship with God, implied fleeing from responsibilities and forsaking the world. But they forget that it was none other than Jesus who showed us the extreme to which we should go in love and service. Only if we try to understand the mystery of God’s love—a love which went as far as death—will we be able to give ourselves totally to others and not let ourselves be overcome by difficulties or indifference.”²³

In the face of these two deformed and deforming attitudes, a clear position is presented: to open, in faith, the doors of one’s mind and heart to the truth of Christ, “who has died and risen, and is present in every moment of life,” in such a way that Christ’s truth enlightens one’s conscience, and “moves us to play our full part in the changing situations and in the problems of human history. In this history, which began with the creation of the world and will reach its fulfillment at the end of time, the Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God’s love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.”²⁴

Without childish utopianisms, conscious of both the reality of evil and the truth of our eternal destiny, and without absolutizing either human effort or political action, the Christian can and ought to confront, confidently and daringly, mankind’s noble ambitions and the problems and questions that history presents. Nothing can separate him from his solidarity with history, in which his life is entwined, and his solidarity with the rest of mankind.

Not the awareness of a future eternal life, for while it is certain that “men have not been created just to build the best possible world,” nor “to build a lasting city here on earth,” but rather “to enter into communion with God himself,” it is also certain that the “children of God ought not to remain aloof from earthly endeavors.”²⁵ “To be a Christian means to work at fulfilling all the noble yearnings of men.”²⁶

Nor the awareness of the power of evil, for while experience makes manifest its reality, and faith reveals its relationship with the unfathomable mystery of sin, with equal certainty that same faith assures us of the victory of Christ. A Christian is not “a defeatist in human history,” someone who denies the possibility of good or who cowers before an evil that he dare not confront. Rather every Chris-

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 99.

25. We here combine texts taken from *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 100, and *Friends of God*, no. 210.

26. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 52.

tian is a son of God who knows that Jesus, his brother and Lord, came to earth “to share man’s concerns, except for the sad experience of willful evil”;²⁷ even more that he conquered sin. Therefore a Christian has the right “to proclaim the royalty of Christ” and to trust in it, for “although injustice abounds... the work of salvation is taking place in the same human history that harbors evil.”²⁸

Hence we have exhortations such as those that we find in *Furrow* and *The Forge* with which we can close this section: “Your task as a Christian citizen is to help see Christ’s love and freedom preside over all aspects of modern life: culture and the economy, work and rest, family life and social relations.”²⁹ “We children of God, who are citizens with the same standing as any others, have to take part *fearlessly* in all honest human activities and organizations, so that Christ may be present in them. Our Lord will ask a strict account of each one of us if through neglect or love of comfort we do not freely strive to play a part in the human developments and decisions on which the present and future of society depend.”³⁰

Sanctification of work and the attainment of social justice

“Politics, in the noble sense of the word, is nothing else than a service aimed at attaining the common good of the earthly City,” wrote Blessed Josemaria in one of his early *Letters*.³¹ In an interview granted in 1967 to a university magazine, when answering a question whether political activities should be allowed in a university, he once again sketched out a definition of politics. “I think,” he began, “we would in the first place have to come to an agreement about what we mean by ‘politics.’” He goes on to suggest two possible meanings of the word:

— “Being interested in and working for peace, social justice and the freedom of all men.”

— Proposing “a particular solution to a specific problem, in competition with those who stand for other possible and legitimate solutions.”³²

In making this distinction, Blessed Josemaria had no pretensions to originality; he was simply making a distinction that is present in ordinary language. But it takes on nuances characteristic of his way of thinking, specifically his emphasis on political action understood not in a strict or restricted way, but on human work considered in all its amplitude. One can find references in his writings to the spirit

27. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 125.

28. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 186; cf. also no. 74.

29. *Furrow*, no. 302.

30. *The Forge*, no. 715.

31. *Letter of January 9, 1932*, no. 42. “Of course,” he adds further on (no. 46), “it would not be reasonable to try to have every citizen become a professional politician... But one can and should demand a minimum knowledge of the specific aspects that the common good requires in the society in which each person lives, in one’s specific historical circumstances.”

32. *Conversations*, no. 76.

and attitude with which the Christian should take up tasks of public service, with full freedom and responsibility. But his references to work in general are more frequent. He is very aware that all work, all human tasks, and not just political activities, have an impact on human society and its development. Therefore all work should be carried out with a concern to contribute to the common good. It is not surprising then that his discussion of political activity is often found in the context of his teaching on work: specifically, on the sanctification of work, whatever its characteristics and its way of affecting the dynamics of social life.³³

Quite frequently Blessed Josemaria summed up the ideal of sanctity and apostolate in and through ordinary life by means of a three-part refrain: "Sanctify oneself in one's work; sanctify others through one's work, sanctify one's work."³⁴ The ordinary Christian, called to carry out his divine vocation in the midst of the world, should not only strive for sanctity in his work, living with an awareness of God's presence, and sanctify others with his work, attracting them towards Christ by means of his work and the occasions that his work gives rise to. He should also sanctify the work itself, carrying it out as God wants and filling it with the spirit of the Gospel. These three elements are intimately interwoven. Each requires the others, in such a way that personal sanctity and apostolate would have a false ring to it were it not accompanied by a true sanctification of work.

What does that sanctification of work entail? A quick glance at the writings of Josemaria Escriva immediately provides a first approximation: to work well, to carry out one's work in a finished way, perfectly, to the extent that this is possible for a human being. "An essential part of this endeavor—the sanctification of ordinary work—that God has entrusted to us," he states in one of his *Letters*, "is carrying out the work itself well, its human perfection, the proper fulfillment of all of one's professional and social duties. The Work demands that everyone work conscientiously, with a sense of responsibility, with love and perseverance, without neglect or frivolity."³⁵ "If you want to be useful, serve," he said in one of his homilies. "It's not enough to want to do good; we must know how to do it. And, if our desire is real, it will show itself in the effort we make to use the right methods, finishing things well, achieving human perfection."³⁶ And finally, in *The Forge*, he says, "If we really want to sanctify our work, we have inescapably to fulfill the first condition: that of working, and working well, with human and supernatural seriousness."³⁷

33. This is not the place to explain this teaching in detail, although it constitutes the grounding of what we are about to say. We refer to some studies that form an introduction to it, in which one can find abundant references to his own writings: Jose Luis Illanes, *La Santificación del trabajo*, Sixth edition, Madrid, 1980; Pedro Rodríguez, *Vocación, trabajo, contemplación*, Pamplona, 1986; Fernando Ocariz, "El concepto de santificación del trabajo," in *La misión del laico en la Iglesia y en el mundo*, Pamplona, 1987, pp. 881-891; J.M. Aubert, "La santificación del trabajo," in *Mons. Escriva de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, pp. 215-224; R. Alvira, "El trabajo en Camino," in *Estudios sobre Camino*. Madrid, 1988, pp. 257-263; G. Faro, *Il Lavoro nell'insegnamento del Beato Josemaria Escriva*, Rome, 2000; see also the article already cited in note 9.

34. See, for example, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 46, and *Friends of God*, no. 120.

35. *Letter of May 31, 1954*, no. 18.

36. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 50; see also *Friends of God*, nos. 61 and 63.

37. *The Forge*, no. 698.

To work well implies, then, to work in a finished way, with attention and intensity, with professional and technical competence. But if the technically faultless, perfect, completion of one's task, to the extent possible, constitutes an indispensable presupposition for its sanctification, this in no way exhausts all that the expression "sanctification of work" signifies on the lips of Blessed Josemaria. We must not forget that the word "work" is always united in his thought with the adjective "professional." The work to which he refers is never simply the mere activity by which an individual, considered abstractly and in isolation, modifies some material object or orders certain ideas, but professional work, work as a profession, as a task which defines the subject in the heart of a society, which presupposes and gives rise to relationships, rights and duties, which influences collective life, contributing to the structure and development of the human community.³⁸

The invitation to "work well," therefore, prompts one not only to carry out the task in a technically correct way, but to fulfill the duties and obligations that derive from this task. And since there is no sanctity without the interiorization of what is carried out, one is also led to fulfill it with the spiritual attitude that, from a Christian perspective, those duties imply. This includes valuing and treating as beings like ourselves, even more, as sons and daughters of God, each and every one of the persons with whom our work puts us into contact. As he puts it in one of his homilies: "The dignity of work is based on Love. Man's great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral. He can love other creatures, pronounce an 'I' and a 'you' which are full of meaning. And he can love God, who opens heaven's gates to us, makes us members of his family and allows us also to talk to him in friendship, face to face. This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love."³⁹

The love referred to here is, of course, love for God, but also, and inseparably, love for other men and women. The "capacity that we could call technical," "our knowledge of our job," he says in another homily, "should have a feature which was basic to St. Joseph's work," (the homily is about him), "and should be so for every Christian: the spirit of service, the desire to contribute to the well-being of other people."⁴⁰

The concern to contribute to the service of others and to social progress, whether through the carrying out of one's own profession or job, or through participation in community tasks or in political projects properly speaking, forms then an integral part of the ethical world of the Christian, in which charity, the soul and culmination of the evangelical law, presupposes and assumes the fulfillment of one's own duties, and therefore technical-professional competence and a zeal for justice. In another of his homilies he concludes with a forceful expression: "A man or a society that does not

38. Among the many texts in which he expresses his concept of work, we refer, as especially representative, to *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 47 and *Friends of God*, no. 57.

39. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 48; see also *Friends of God*, no. 68.

40. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 51.

react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ's heart. While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind. Otherwise their Christianity will not be the word and life of Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man."⁴¹

"No human life is ever isolated. It is bound up with other lives. No man or woman is a single verse; we all make up one divine poem which God writes with the cooperation of our freedom."⁴² Thus every Christian, regardless of his or her position in society, should be challenged with the same invitation: "Love justice. Practice charity. Always defend personal freedom, and the right of all men to live and to work, to be cared for in sickness and old-age, to form a home and bring children into the world, to educate their children in a way appropriate to the talents of each, and to be treated as men and citizens."⁴³

To summarize, every Christian, and every human being, should strive to make a reality in the world, to the extent possible, the aspiration to peace, fraternity and justice that is rooted in human nature and that finds its confirmation in the Gospel. Hence, to return to the tri-partite refrain mentioned earlier, Blessed Josemaria spoke not only of sanctifying oneself in one's work and of sanctifying others through one's work, but of sanctifying work. It is not only a matter of becoming holy in work, of growing in spiritual depth in and through work, and of contributing with one's word and example to other people's deepening their relationship with God. Also and inseparably, we are being asked to sanctify the work as such, carrying it out in such a way that it contributes to the real good of those who have some relationship to this work and of society as a whole. And as we pointed out earlier, these three dimensions should never be understood as merely juxtaposed realities, but as profoundly interpenetrating dimensions, so that one cannot be adequately understood without the other: ethics and technique, spiritual depth, and real and effective service should all be present at the same time.⁴⁴

Freedom, Diversity, Pluralism

The proclamation that each Christian is called not merely to feel himself in solidarity with the ideal of social justice, but to take an active role in making it a reality,

41. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 167 and, in the same sense, no. 111.

42. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 111.

43. *Letter of October 15, 1948*, no. 29; on the implication of the relation between social responsibility, justice and charity, see the study already cited in note no. 9, "Trabajo, caridad, justicia," and the texts of Blessed Josemaria that it includes, especially the extended discussion in *Friends of God*, nos. 169-173.

44. From this point of view, the teachings of Blessed Josemaria coincide in many aspects, although employing a different terminology, with John Paul II's discussion of work in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, especially the sections on the relationship between work taken in the objective sense and work in the subjective sense, and also the chapter on the spirituality of work. On the message contained in that encyclical, see our study "Trabajo, historia y persona. Elementos para una teología del trabajo en *Laborem exercens*," in *Scripta Theologica* 15 (1983) 205-231 (later included in the book *Iglesia en la historia. Estudios sobre el pensamiento de Juan Pablo II*, Valencia 1997).

was always united in Blessed Josemaría's preaching to the proclamation of the importance of freedom, especially in temporal questions. We have already seen this stress in some of the texts already cited. Therefore any presentation of his teaching about the social and political activity of Christians that failed to mention freedom would be radically incomplete. And as we noted at the beginning of this study, Josemaría Escrivá developed his teaching not in the abstract, but in connection with the priestly work that he was carrying out, above all the foundation of Opus Dei.

In 1933, with a view to giving impetus to the apostolic work of Opus Dei, Fr. Josemaría decided to set up an academy that later developed into a student residence. One of the young fellows who came there recalls an interview he had with Fr. Josemaría. While explaining the apostolic work being done there, he stressed that the residence, which was trying to form good Christians, was open to people of any political and social outlook, and that they would never be asked questions about their political views. "On the other hand" he continued, smiling and as if to reinforce his words, "you will be asked many other 'awkward' questions. You will be asked if you pray, if you make good use of your time, if you keep your parents happy, if you study, because for a student studying is a serious obligation."⁴⁵

This criterion of openness, with the insistence that Opus Dei's apostolic activity transcends any temporal beliefs or opinions, has been repeated by the founder and the Prelature on multiple occasions. This has involved both general statements⁴⁶ and references to specific circumstances.⁴⁷ "From the moment

45. Testimony of José Luis Múzquiz, published in Salvador Bernal, *Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, London — New York, 1977, p. 288. This conversation took place in the aforementioned residence, on Ferraz street, at the end of 1934 or the beginning of 1935. In a lengthy testimonial, José Luis Múzquiz spoke of another recollection in the same vein of an event that took place in 1939, in the months immediately after the end of the Spanish Civil War. "When I arrived at Jenner [the street on which a new student residence had been opened by Father Josemaría] the Father [Father Josemaría] immediately began a meditation that had a great impact on me. The war that had just ended had taken on for us young people something of the nature of a crusade, and these were moments of a patriotic-religious triumphalism. But in his meditation the Father spoke to us in a very different way: 'all of this is very noble and patriotic, but there is a much greater kingdom: the kingdom of Christ that has no end.' And he continued, 'for Christ to reign in the world, he first has to reign in your heart. Is he really reigning? Is your heart for Jesus Christ?' It was language totally different from what we were used to hearing" (AGP, RHF, D-4417, pp. 43-44).

46. This is clearly stated in the Statutes of Opus Dei, in the context of the freedom of the Christian faithful. We will limit ourselves to one citation, from the *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*: "As far as professional activity is concerned, and social and political doctrines, each of the faithful of the Prelature, within the limits of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals, has the same complete freedom as any other Catholic citizen. The authorities of the Prelature should abstain even from giving advice in these matters. Therefore this freedom can only be restricted by the norms for all Catholics that might be given, in a diocese or circumscription, by the respective bishop or episcopal conference. In consequence, the Prelature does not answer for the professional, social, political or economic activities of any of its faithful (no. 88, and 3; translation from the Latin original). The *Codex iuris particularis*, the technical name for the Statutes of the Prelature, was written by the founder in 1973, recompiling expressions and criteria that were already present in earlier versions of the Statutes, with a view to the process then underway of establishing Opus Dei as a personal Prelature. On this juridical history, see the extensive treatment in *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, previously cited in note no. 2.

47. We might mention, among others, the year 1957, when the presence of members of Opus Dei in the Spanish government provoked various commentaries in the press that gave rise to an official statement in July of that year, from which we take some excerpts: "In this field [political life], the same as in all professional, economic or social matters, the members of Opus Dei, like any other Catholic, enjoy full freedom within the limits of Christian morality. . . . Therefore they act as private citizens, without the Institute

in which they first approach the Work,” Msgr. Josemaria declared in an interview granted in 1967, “all its members are fully aware of their individual freedom. If one of them ever tried to exert pressure on the others to make them accept his political opinions, or to use them for human interests, they would rebel and expel him without a second thought.” “Respect for its members freedom,” he continued, “is an essential condition of Opus Dei’s very existence. Without it, no one would come to the Work. Even more. The Work has never intervened in politics, and with God’s help it never will; but if it were to, I would be its number one enemy.”⁴⁸

These declarations, reflecting a reality deeply rooted in the spirit and life of Opus Dei, can be summed up in a few fundamental principles:

a) Independence of the Prelature with respect to any socio-political establishment: Opus Dei “is absolutely foreign to any political, economic, ideological or cultural tendency or group.”⁴⁹ It “does not seek any worldly or political aims...it only and exclusively seeks to foster—among all races, all social conditions, all countries—the knowledge and practice of the saving teachings of Christ.”⁵⁰

b) The primary focus of Opus Dei’s activity is the formation of its members and of those who take part in its apostolates. “The main activity of Opus Dei is offering its members and other people the spiritual means they need to live as good Christians in the midst of the world.”⁵¹ The “work of the directors is to see to it that all the members receive the genuine spirit of the Gospels (a spirit of charity, of harmony, of understanding, all of which are absolutely foreign to extremism) by means of a solid and appropriate theological and apostolic formation.”⁵²

c) This work of formation, which is aimed at helping each of the members of the Prelature to sanctify their own work, filling it with a Christian spirit, is carried out by transmitting Catholic faith and morals, without whose knowledge there could not be true Christian action, while expressly excluding any tie to particular theological schools. “Opus Dei will never promote or defend any school of philosophical or theological thought of its own.”⁵³ As its statutes expressly state, “it does not have any opinion or corporate school in theological or philosophical questions that the Church leaves to the free opinion of the faithful.”⁵⁴

participating in any way in the merits or deficiencies of their personal activities.” On that same occasion, a priest of Opus Dei, Julian Herranz (today an archbishop and president of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts), published the article “Opus Dei and Politics,” which can still be read with profit (*Nuestro Tiempo*, 6/34 (1957) 385-402).

48. *Conversations*, no. 28; see also nos. 39 and 48.

49. *Conversations*, no. 28.

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

51. *Conversations*, no. 27.

52. *Conversations*, no. 35.

53. *Letter of January 1, 1951*, no. 23.

54. *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, no. 109.

d) In temporal questions “Opus Dei as such neither should nor can express—nor even have—an opinion of its own.”⁵⁵ The Prelature’s faithful freely form their own opinions on professional, cultural, social and political matters, and make their decisions in all of these fields in accord with the faith and with complete autonomy. They act with “complete personal freedom,”⁵⁶ because they “enjoy the same freedom as any other Catholic to form [their] own opinions and to act accordingly.” Therefore, in all questions not defined by the magisterium of the Church “each member of Opus Dei holds and defends the opinions he sees fit, and acts in consequence.”⁵⁷

e) In full accord with all that we have just said, the existence of pluralism among the members of Opus Dei, a diversity of opinions and actions in temporal questions, is viewed as a positive reality. “In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered.” “Variety in thought and action in what is temporal and in what is a matter of theological opinion poses no problem for the Work. On the contrary, the diversity which exists and will always exist among the members of Opus Dei is a sign of good spirit, of an honest life, of respect for the legitimate opinion of each individual.”⁵⁸

In summary, those who become part of the Prelature do so with the desire to spread the Christian ideal throughout society precisely through their own situation and profession, and they seek to receive only and exclusively apostolic and spiritual assistance. This is what the bond with the Prelature covers and nothing beyond that.⁵⁹

In one of the interviews he granted in the 1960s, Blessed Josemaría felt the need to point out that, by radically excluding any intervention by the authorities of Opus Dei in its members’ temporal decisions and actions, he was not fostering any “abstentionism” or neglect of their proper duties on the part of its faithful.⁶⁰ Neither was he suggesting a privatization of the faith or the irrelevance of Christian ideals for solving temporal problems. His affirmations stem from a radically different concern: the recognition of the essential mediating function of conscience, or in broader terms, of practical and prudential judgments. But this point, already alluded to, deserves more detailed consideration.

55. *Conversations*, no. 29.

56. *Conversations*, no. 35.

57. *Conversations*, no. 29.

58. *Conversations*, nos. 67 and 38; cf. also no. 48.

59. “The bond which unites us,” the founder wrote in the Letter just cited, “is purely spiritual. You are united with one another and each of you with the Work as a whole solely in the area of the search for your own sanctification, and in the field—likewise exclusively spiritual—of bringing the light of Christ to your friends, to your families, to those around you.” “You are not united,” he continued, “by anything other than your commitment of faith, morality, and social doctrine, which is the spirit of the Catholic Church and, therefore, of all the faithful” (*Letter of January 9, 1932*, no. 44). On the bond between the Prelature and its faithful, see *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, especially nos. 1-3 and 27; cf. also *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei and Opus Dei in the Church*, both cited above.

60. Cf. *Conversations*, no. 29.

Faith and history in the configuration of a Christian conscience

We can start this section with a clear affirmation of the social relevance of the faith. The faith is not only a stimulus, but also a light, not only a force moving one to action, but also a truth that informs the intellect. What Christian revelation tells us about the human being, about his dignity, his properties and distinctive notes, about his destiny, cannot help but influence, and decisively so, one's judgments, decisions and behavior. Blessed Josemaria addresses this aspect with his usual clarity:

“Nonsectarianism. Neutrality Those old myths that always try to seem new.—Have you ever bothered to think how absurd it is to leave one's Catholicism aside on entering a university, or a professional association, or a scholarly meeting, or Congress, as if you were checking your hat at the door?”⁶¹ And in *Furrow*, in equally graphic terms: “It is not true that there is opposition between being a good Catholic and serving civil society faithfully.... Those who affirm the contrary are liars, yes, liars! They are the same people who honor a false liberty, and ask us Catholics ‘to do them the favor’ of going back to the catacombs.”⁶²

In a different tone, but with equal firmness, he expressed this in other writings, some of which have already been cited. We can add another here, taken from one of his letters. In it he begins by citing the words of Jesus in chapter 22 of St. Matthew: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.” With these words, Jesus “warned us against the harmful effects of Caesarism and of *clericalism*. He foresaw the doctrine of a healthy *anticlericalism*, which is a deep and true love for the priesthood...and he established the autonomy of God's Church and the legitimate autonomy that civil society enjoys for its own ordering and structuring.”⁶³

“But” he noted immediately, “the distinction established by Christ does not signify in any way that religion has to be relegated to the church, to the sacristy, nor that the ordering of human affairs is to be done at the margin of any Christian or divine law. For that would be a negation of faith in Christ, which demands the adhesion of the whole man, soul and body, as an individual and as a member of society.” “Christ's message,” he continued, “sheds light on the whole of human life, its beginning and its end, not only in the narrow field of a few subjective practices of piety.” Laicism is, therefore, he concluded, “the negation of a faith expressed in deeds, of a faith that knows that the autonomy of the world is relative, and that everything in this world has as its ultimate meaning the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”⁶⁴

61. *The Way*, no. 353.

62. *Furrow*, no. 301; see also no. 357.

63. *Letter of January 9, 1959*, no. 31. See also *Furrow*, no. 313, where he speaks of the “Caesarist mentality” of those who fail to understand “the freedom of other citizens in the things that God has left to the judgment of men.”

64. *Letter of January 9, 1959*, no. 31.

But if Blessed Josemaria Escriva's teaching requires us to take the social relevance of the faith as our point of departure, we also must immediately add, and with equal clarity, the essential mediating role of conscience, as well as the reality that in technical terms is referred to as the indetermination or singularity of the practical judgment. We do so with words taken from a homily given in 1967. The Christian who knows "that the world, and not just the church, is the place where he finds Christ," "endeavors to become properly formed, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind with complete freedom about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and then he makes his own decisions. Being the decisions of a Christian, they result from personal reflection, in which he endeavors, in all humility, to grasp the Will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life."⁶⁵

Human decisions blossom within the intimacy of a person's being and presuppose a process that does not develop in the abstract or in the third person. They are not the simple deduction of consequences or implications based on general principles, but rather the fruit of a vital operation that involves the whole person, with his desires and longings, with his way of understanding life and the world, with his ideals and values, with his knowledge and experience, with the imperatives that arise from his conscience and the feelings that stem from his heart, with his own personal appreciation of the circumstances and his concrete evaluation of consequences and implications.

All of this has particular application in the case of political decisions, in which a broad and complicated array of factors comes into play. General principles certainly must have an influence here, including, for a believer, his faith. But we should never forget that the implantation of ethical ideals must always be pursued in a way that respects each person's subjectivity and the singularity and autonomy of the political order, and that takes into consideration the values of peace and harmony, without which there is no political life but only despotism and tyranny.

In a homily given in 1960, after insisting that a priest should exercise his pastoral work of formation of consciences with full respect for the temporal freedom of the faithful, Blessed Josemaria added: "This way of acting and this spirit are based on respect for the transcendence of revealed truth and on love for the freedom of the human person. I might add that they are also based on a realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects."⁶⁶

"God in creating us," he commented in this connection, in an article published in 1969, "has run the risk and the adventure of our freedom. He wanted a history that would be a true history, the product of genuine decisions, that is not fiction nor some sort of a game. Each man has to experience his own personal

65. *Conversations*, no. 116.

66. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 99.

autonomy with all that it implies: trial and error, guesswork and sometimes uncertainty." "We cannot forget," he added, "that God who has given us the security of faith has not revealed to us the meaning of all human events. Along with the truths that for a Christian are absolutely clear and secure, there are other matters, very many in fact, in which only opinion is possible. In these questions, a Christian can reach some knowledge of what could be true and opportune, but he cannot affirm it to be so in a completely certain way."⁶⁷

Josemaria Escriva stresses two points here. In the first place, and before anything else, the transcendence of the Christian message, of revealed truth, which is not circumscribed or conditioned by ideologies or cultures, but rather should inform all human activities and every culture. In the second place, the historicity and dynamism of events, which are not predetermined but open to freedom and to the future, and consequently are irreducible to theoretical, scientific or deductive knowledge. The Christian, situated in history, finds his inspiration and motivation in his faith, but should evaluate with his own reason all of the factors in play in each case and then assume the risk and responsibility of his own decisions.

All of this leads, in the preaching of Opus Dei's founder, to a clear statement: "There are no dogmas in temporal affairs." One should not "try and fix absolute truths in questions where necessarily each one will look at things from his own point of view, according to his particular interests, his cultural preferences, his own personal experience."⁶⁸ To try to do so, to try to "impose dogmas in temporal affairs" would do violence to reality and inevitably lead to denying the dignity and freedom of man: "to the forcing of other people's consciences, to lack of respect for one's neighbor."⁶⁹

Responsibility and Lay Mentality

The previous statement has, among others, two consequences, or better, one consequence with two different manifestations according to whether one considers it from the perspective of the Church as an institution or from the perspective of the Christian faithful. Let us look at it from both viewpoints.

a) The mission of the Church, and more specifically of the priest, can be described with words taken from one of his homilies. "If my own personal experience is of any help," he said, "I can say that I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the de-

67. "The Riches of the Faith," an article published in the newspaper *ABC*, November 2, 1969. Reprinted in Scepter Booklet no. 5, New York, 1974.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*, "Avoid," he says in a Letter already cited, "the abuse which seems to have grown worse in our time, and which can be clearly seen in many countries throughout the world. I refer to the desire, contrary to man's licit independence, to force everyone to form a single group in things that are matters of opinion, converting temporal doctrines into dogmas and defending this false position with propaganda of a scandalous nature against those who have the nobility to refuse to give in" (*Letter of January 9, 1932*, no. 1).

mands of his life and to discover what God wants from him in particular—without in any way limiting that holy independence and blessed personal responsibility which are the features of a Christian conscience.”⁷⁰

Pastoral and priestly activity understood in this way demands the integral transmittal of the faith, including its ethical implications, also in regard to social and political questions. Therefore one must also transmit the Church’s social doctrine, which, as John XXIII says in *Mater et Magistra*,⁷¹ forms part of the Christian understanding of life. This is a question, then, of an inescapable pastoral duty.⁷² But this transmission has to be carried out without forgetting that Catholic doctrine—except in situations in which the good of the Church has justified special pronouncements by the ecclesiastical hierarchy⁷³—illuminates each one’s conscience as a light initiating a process in which other lights and values are introduced, until a decision is reached for which each specific person is responsible. This presupposes therefore a clear awareness of the Christian mission of the layman, of the function of the ordinary Christian in regard to the sanctification of secular realities, in his own name and under his own responsibility.

The “new awareness” of the mission of the laity, emphasized by the Second Vatican Council, also has very important implications, as he noted in an interview granted to *L’Osservatore Romano*, regarding the awareness that pastors should have of their own role. Priests should be more aware each day “that lay people have a role of their own which should be fostered and stimulated by pastoral action aimed at discovering the presence in the midst of the People of God of the charisma of holiness and apostolate, in the infinitely varied forms in which God bestows it.” Hence, “we priests are being asked to have *the humility of learning not to be fashionable*, of being, in fact, servants of the servants of God and making our own the cry of the Baptist: ‘He must increase, I must decrease’ (*Jn* 3:30), so as to enable ordinary Christians, the laity, to make Christ present in all sectors of society.” “One of the fundamental tasks of the priest is and always will be to give doctrine, to help individuals and society to become aware of the

70. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 99. Similar expressions, referring not to his personal work as a priest but to Opus Dei as such, can be found in *Conversations*: “The principle which governs the activity of Opus Dei’s directors in this area is respect for freedom of opinion in temporal matters,” which leads to “making each individual aware of his own responsibilities and inviting him to accept them according to the dictates of his conscience, acting with full freedom” (no. 29).

71. Cf. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, AAS 53 (1961) 453.

72. “A priest,” said Blessed Josemaría in an interview granted in 1967, “by virtue of his teaching mission should preach the Christian virtues, and their practical demands and manifestations in the concrete circumstances of the lives of the men to whom he ministers. He should also teach men to respect and esteem the dignity and freedom with which God has endowed the human person, and the special supernatural dignity which a Christian receives at Baptism.” “No priest who fulfills this duty of his ministry,” he continued, “can ever be accused, except through ignorance or bad faith, of *meddling in politics*. Nor could it be said that this teaching interferes in the apostolic task which belongs specifically to the laity, of ordering temporal structures and occupations in a Christian fashion” (*Conversations*, no. 5), for proper preaching about Christian virtues and their specific demands does not exclude but rather presupposes—and on this we insist—the recognition of Christian freedom.

73. Opus Dei’s founder always put on record the possibility that the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Pope and the bishops, could in special circumstances require or at least recommend to Catholics a common political position (cf. for example, the text of the Statutes cited above in note 46). But neither did he neglect to clarify that the exceptional character of those situations implied their provisional and transitory status. Otherwise there would be a risk of falling into clericalism (cf. *Conversations*, nos. 12 and 59).

duties which the Gospel imposes on them, and to move men to discern the signs of the time. But all priestly work should be carried out with the maximum respect for the rightful freedom of consciences: every man ought to respond to God freely.”⁷⁴

b) From the second perspective mentioned above, that is, from the viewpoint of the laity or ordinary Christians, the conclusion to be reached can be expressed in three words: sense of responsibility. This in turn implies two things:

—above all, an awareness of the need to go deeper, not only in living but also in knowing the Christian message, and thus being able to make decisions and to judge with a knowledge of causes, that is, to acquire a “formation”—a term which Blessed Josemaria liked to use—which makes it possible to act at all times with full spontaneity and in a way that is “consistent” with one’s faith.⁷⁵

—and, at the same time, an awareness of the need to assume full responsibility for one’s own actions, since they are an expression of one’s personal convictions and the fruit of a process in which Christian faith, human science and inner feelings interweave to arrive at a decision that is the product of one’s own personal reasoning and freedom.

Msgr. Escriva returned again and again to this point, since his acute consciousness of human freedom, combined with his deep respect for the lay condition, made him react strongly against any manifestation of clericalism, a defect into which, as he pointed out on more than one occasion, not only clerics but also lay people can fall. A Christian should make his decisions with the help of the light of faith, exercising his own freedom and with an awareness of the role that all of his own ideas and hopes play in his thinking. Therefore, for a person who acts in this way, “it would never occur to [him] to think or to say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are ‘the Catholic solutions’ to problems. That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism, ‘official Catholicism,’ or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things.”⁷⁶

74. *Conversations*, no. 59; cf. also no. 12.

75. Cf. *The Forge*, no. 712, and also, in reference to the members of the Prelature but involving principles of general validity, *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, no. 96. Blessed Josemaria always stressed how important it was for Catholics to go beyond a merely individualistic piety. “I can tell you in this regard,” he wrote in one of his *Letters*, “what my great desire is. I would like to see catechisms for children spelling out clearly... the obligation people have of getting involved in public affairs and of not just abstaining, being ready to serve the common good faithfully and on their personal initiative.... In the field of education and human formation it is also very desirable for educators, without imposing their personal theories in matters of opinion, to teach students the obligation they have to act freely and responsibly in fulfilling their duties as citizens. This is a great desire of mine, because I see that thus Catholics would learn these truths from childhood, and would know how to put them into practice later when they became adults.” “It is quite common to find, even among apparently responsible and upright Catholics, the error of thinking that they are only required to fulfill their family and religious duties, and scarcely any mention is made of civic duties. It is not a question of selfishness. It is simply a lack of formation. Nobody has ever told them clearly that the virtue of piety, which is part of the cardinal virtue of justice, and the Christian sense of solidarity, are also expressed by being present in society, in being aware of and contributing to solving the problems affecting the whole community” (*Letter of January 9, 1932*, nos. 45-46).

76. *Conversations*, no. 117.

Recognition of the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities and, therefore, of personal freedom and responsibility, should move Christians to speak in their own name, acting consistently with the ideals of the Gospel, but without trying to find support for their activity in the Church's patronage, or even less, to make use of the Church. In other words, to use a favorite expression of Blessed Josemaria, one should act with a "lay mentality," with the mentality proper to lay men and women, who love the world, because they know that that is the place of their encounter with God, who recognize and respect the value of created things, who are aware of their freedom and therefore fully assume responsibility for their actions. "You must foster everywhere," continues the paragraph just cited, "a genuine 'lay outlook,' which will lead to three conclusions:

- "be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one's own personal responsibility;
- "be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains;
- "and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions."⁷⁷

The Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ

"A secret. An open secret: these world crises are crises of saints. —God wants a handful of men 'of his own' in every human activity. Then... *pax Christi in regno Christi*' — 'the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ.'" This quote from *The Way*, cited earlier,⁷⁸ can serve as an introduction to the final section of this study, for it places before us the "peace of Christ" that was always Blessed Josemaria's ardent goal. At the same time, it allows us, in light of everything we have said, to show what the expression "the peace of Christ in the kingdom of Christ" implied in his heart and on his lips: the idea of a harmonious fellowship in freedom of men and women who, conscious of their intrinsic dignity and their eternal destiny, know how to respect and love one another, and consequently share in, above their diversity and differences, the great adventure of history.

Josemaria Escrivá always dreamed of a multitude of Christians present in the most diverse strata of society who, consistent with their faith and conscious of their freedom, would spread in all these surroundings an atmosphere of harmony, mutual respect, dialogue, fraternity. He saw this as one of the fruits that ought to be hoped for from the mission that God had entrusted to him on October 2, 1928.

77. *Ibid.*; on this question, in addition to the studies already mentioned in connection with sanctification of work, one can consult E. Reinhardt, "La legittima autonomia delle realtà temporali," in *Romana* 15 (1992), 323-335.

78. Cf. note 13.

Being of a realistic temperament, he never let himself be carried away by easy dreams. He did not fail to see that the experience of history was one of confrontation and struggle. He had no doubts about differences in viewpoints being a constant reality in human history. Furthermore, he saw in these differences, as we have already pointed out, not a misfortune to be deplored but a reality that should be valued. But he always taught that this diversity, while broad and deep, should never give rise to hatreds and confrontations, but rather to cooperation and dialogue.

And this was not only because “an object which for some people is concave seems convex to those who have a different perspective.”⁷⁹ But, much more profoundly, because the Gospel teaches us a friendship that transcends all divisions: “*Jesus Christus, Deus homo*. Jesus Christ, God-man. This is one of ‘the mighty works of God’ (Acts 2:11), which we should reflect upon and thank him for. He has come to bring ‘peace on earth to men of good will’ (Lk 2:14), to all men who want to unite their wills to the holy will of God—not just the rich, not just the poor, but everyone; all the brethren. We are all brothers in Jesus, children of God, brothers of Christ.... There is only one race in the world: the race of the children of God.”⁸⁰

“The awareness of the limitations of human judgment,” he says in the article ‘The Riches of the Faith,’ “leads us to recognize freedom as a condition for living together. But it is not everything; it is not even the most important consideration. The root of respect for freedom lies in love. If other people think differently from me, is that a reason to regard them as enemies? The only real reason for doing so would be selfishness or the intellectual blindness of those who think that politics and material progress are the only real values. A Christian knows that this is not so, because each person has an infinite value, an eternal destiny in God. Jesus Christ has died for each one. We are Christians when we are capable not only of loving humanity in the abstract, but also each person who comes our way.”⁸¹

Christian freedom, which “comes from within, from the heart, from faith,” is not, as he adds in the same place, an individualistic freedom centered on the affirmation of one’s own autonomy or activity. It is necessarily united to another great Christian reality, fraternity. “Faith—that great gift of God—has reduced the divergencies, the barriers so that they have disappeared, ‘and there are no more distinctions between Jew nor Greek, slave and free, male and female’ (Gal 3:28). To know that we are brothers and sisters, to love one another as such, over and above differences of race, social condition, culture, ideology, belongs to the essence of Christianity.”⁸²

The Christian *ethos*, the spiritual ideal that Christianity sets forth, is not a utopian and unrealizable ideal, of no relevance to human history, valid only for the reduced sphere of private life or for the next world. It is an ideal that is valid for today and now, with repercussions for every sphere of human life. To proclaim that

79. “The Riches of the Faith.”

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

81. “The Riches of the Faith.”

82. *Ibid.*

“there are no dogmas in temporal matters,” that it is part of the Christian understanding of life to recognize that one cannot impose in the name of faith or of reason temporal solutions or policies, that one must at all times respect the legitimate freedom of others, does not imply “that the Christian should be indifferent or apathetic to temporal affairs.” Nothing is further from reality. Nevertheless, “a Christian has to make his civic and social aspirations compatible with an awareness of the limitations of his own opinions, respecting the opinions of others and loving genuine pluralism. A person who does not know how to live in this way has not reached the full depth of the Christian message.”⁸³

“Peace, truth, unity, justice. How difficult it often seems to eliminate the barriers to human harmony! And yet we Christians are called to bring about that miracle of brotherhood. We must work so that everyone with God’s grace can live in a Christian way, ‘bearing one another’s burdens’ (*Gal 6:2*), keeping the commandment of love which is the bond of perfection and the essence of the law.”⁸⁴ And he adds in another homily, “Our Lord wants us [Christians] to be present in all the honest pursuits of the earth, so that there we may sow, not weeds, but the good seed of brotherhood, of forgiveness, of charity and of peace.”⁸⁵

It is certainly not easy to live out this ideal, to make it our own in such a way that it gives shape to our entire life, and through our efforts affects all of society. It requires us to recognize, not merely theoretically but existentially, the reality of man’s destiny, his ordering to a final end that consists in the perfect fraternity of heaven, the family of the children of God. It also requires us to overcome selfishness, the desire for power and self-affirmation, something which is never easy, and even less so when one lives passionately; and this is how life, and specifically political life, demands to be lived.

“To speak of freedom, of love for freedom, is to place before ourselves a difficult ideal. It is to speak of one of the greatest riches of the faith. Because—let us not fool ourselves—life is not like a romantic novel. Christian fraternity is not something which comes from heaven once and for all for everyone, but rather a reality that has to be built up each day, and this in a life which is not easy, with its conflicts of interest, tensions and struggles, with that daily contact with narrow-mindedness in others and in ourselves.” “But if this panorama discourages us, if we allow ourselves to be conquered by our selfishness, or if we fall into the skeptical attitude of the person who shrugs his shoulders, it means that we need to deepen our faith, to contemplate Christ more deeply.” This, then, is the path: to look towards Christ, to become one with him in faith and love, in prayer, until one is fully identified with him. Because “this is the only school in which the Christian learns to know himself, and to know others, to live in such a way that he is Christ present among men.”⁸⁶

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 157.

85. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 124.

86. “The Riches of the Faith.” Blessed Josemaría turned his attention repeatedly to the identification between the Christian and Christ, including its ethical implications. See especially the homilies entitled

Many more texts could be cited here, since this was one of the central themes of his preaching. But those already quoted are enough not only to present his message, but also to evoke the passion with which he transmitted it and lived it. Upon reading, or rereading, some of these passages, one might almost think that Opus Dei's founder had in mind the Greek, classical conception of politics: the understanding of politics as the task of citizens, the common enterprise of persons who know themselves to be free and equal, and who confront with calm and daring the challenges life presents. While emphasizing the personal work each individual carries out in society, making work the hinge of his spiritual message, he always places it in a fully human context, in a society of men and women who know themselves to be in solidarity and who act in consequence.⁸⁷ But what guides his vision is always the Gospel. Josemaria Escriva was always, first and foremost, a man of faith, of a living faith, a faith that overflowed with God's love, so that, in the words of St. Paul, he strove always to work through charity.⁸⁸ And it was this faith that he longed to transmit, aware that in it one would find, not a magic remedy for any problem, but something much more important, the power of a love that is the foundation of all human interaction. Here then, in the end, is the heart of his message about human life, and also about political life.

"Christ's Presence in Christians" and "Finding Peace in the Heart of Christ," both included in *Christ Is Passing By*; and also, for a theological study, A. Aranda, "El cristiano 'alter Christus, ipse Christus' en el pensamiento del Beato Josemaría de Balaguer," in *Santidad y mundo*, pp. 129-187 (reprinted and expanded in A. Aranda, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo*, cit., pp. 203ff) and Jose Luis Illanes, "El cristiano 'alter Christus-ipse Christus.' Sacerdocio comun y sacerdocio ministerial en la enseñanza del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer," in *Biblia, exégesis y cultura*, Pamplona, 1993, pp. 605-622.

87. Along the same lines, although from a different perspective, see P. Donati, "Il significato del lavoro nella ricerca sociologica attuale e nello spirito del Opus Dei", in *Romana* 22 (1996) 122-134.

88. *Gal* 5:6.