

Priestly Soul and Lay Mentality

The ecclesiological relevance
of an expression of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

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1. The call to holiness and a fully lay spirituality

The message spread by Blessed Josemaría since 1928 has done much to foster the full rediscovery of the universal call to holiness, especially among all those immersed in secular realities. In 1930 he explained his understanding of the mission he had received in the following terms: “We have come to say, with the humility of one who knows he is a sinner and of very little worth—*homo peccator sum* (Lk 5:8), we say with Peter—but with the faith of someone who lets himself be led by God’s hand, that sanctity is not reserved for a privileged few. Our Lord calls all of us. He expects love from everyone. From everyone, no matter where they are. From everyone, no matter what their situation, profession or job. Because that normal, ordinary, apparently unimportant life can be a path of sanctity.”¹ As John Paul II observed, Opus Dei’s founder “from the beginning anticipated the theology of the laity that later came to characterize the Church of the Conciliar and post-Conciliar periods.”²

Little by little this message made headway until it was clearly ratified at the Second Vatican Council, specifically in chapter five of *Lumen Gentium*.³

1. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter*, 24 Mar 1930, no. 2, cited by Amadeo de Fuenmayor, Valentín Gómez-Iglesias, Jose Luis Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Scepter, Princeton, 1994. He reiterated this idea forcefully in *The Way*, Scepter, New York, 1985, no. 291: “Your duty is to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you. Who thinks that this task is only for priests and religious? —To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: ‘Be ye perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect.’” One should take into account that *The Way* was first published in 1939.

2. John Paul II, homily at a Mass celebrated on August 19, 1979, *L’Osservatore Romano* (Spanish edition), 26 Aug 79, p. 11 (423). The original text in Italian was published in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II/2, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome 1979, p. 142.

3. There are two Conciliar statements in which this point is clearly reflected: “It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love” (*Lumen Gentium* [LG] 40). “All Christians, in the conditions, duties and circumstances of their life and through all these, will sanctify themselves more and more” (LG 41).

In this regard, Gérard Philips,⁴ one of the best commentators on the Council, wrote: “The novelty of the declaration should be evident to everyone. We can even predict without fear of error that the Council’s insistence in proclaiming the universal vocation to sanctity, as the years go by, will receive even more attention.”⁵

Almost forty years have gone by and one can truly say that this teaching has lost none of its freshness. In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, when speaking about current *pastoral priorities*, the Pope put in first place the universal call to holiness. Referring explicitly to the laity, he said: “The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this ‘high standard’ of ordinary Christian living” (no. 31).

In the years following the Council there has been a lot of talk about the laity. But the conversation has often been centered on the need to open to them new ways of collaborating in Church organisms rather than to help them understand and live more deeply their specific vocation and mission.⁶

Blessed Josemaría’s constant teaching has always been very different: “The prejudice that ordinary members of the faithful must limit themselves to helping the clergy in ecclesiastical apostolates has to be rejected. There is no reason why the secular apostolate should always be a mere participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Secular people too have a duty to do apostolate. Not because they receive a canonical mission, but because they are part of the Church. Their mission . . . is fulfilled in their profession, their job, their family, and among their colleagues and friends.”⁷

The pastoral phenomenon that “by divine inspiration”⁸ arose with Opus Dei was, as the Founder said, “new, yet as old as the Gospel.”⁹ To better appreciate this novelty, one should keep in mind in regard to the universal vocation to holiness and apostolate¹⁰ that he emphasized not only the subjective dimension (all the faithful, of whatever state and condition have this vocation), but also the objective

4. As assistant secretary of the Theological Commission of Vatican II, he was one of the experts who contributed most to the writing of *Lumen Gentium*.

5. Gérard Philips, *La Iglesia y su misterio. Historia, texto y comentario de la constitución “Lumen Gentium,”* Herder, Barcelona, 1968 (French original, 1968), vol. II, p. 131.

6. Pope John Paul II, in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988) observed that in the post-conciliar period, the laity has been exposed to the “temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world” (no. 2). In the same document the Pope laments “the tendency towards a ‘clericalization’ of the lay faithful” (no. 23).

7. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, Sinag-Tala, Manila, 1985, no. 21. [Hereafter cited as *Conversations*.]

8. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, in *AAS* 75 (1983), p. 423.

9. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, “The Christian Vocation,” a homily given on December 2, 1951, in *Christ Is Passing By*, Scepter, New York, 1974, no. 1.

10. “Christ’s plea is addressed to each and every Christian. No one can consider himself excused, for whatever reason: age, health or occupation. There are no excuses whatsoever. Either we carry out a fruitful apostolate, or our faith will prove barren” *Friends of God*, Scepter, New York, 1981, no. 272.

(all professions, all situations of family, social life, etc., can and should become a path of sanctity and apostolate).¹¹

In consequence he asserted unhesitatingly that lay people called to the fullness of sanctity and apostolate not *in spite of* being immersed in temporal realities, but precisely *making use of and by means of* them. This affirmation forms the nucleus of the fully lay spirituality that in the decades before Vatican II was seen by many as having revolutionary features.

As Gérard Philips observed, "many Christians have long harbored the prejudice that sanctity cannot flourish outside the precincts of a monastery."¹² Although one "cannot accuse the religious of such a presumption,"¹³ one must note that their path of sanctification, especially if they are monks, implies a special separation from temporal realities. This separation forms part of their ecclesial mission, reminding people of the fleetingness of earthly realities and pointing to the glory of heaven. Nevertheless, whenever this separation (this *fuga mundi* [*flight from the world*], to use a term from medieval theology) is erroneously seen as necessary for anyone who aspires to sanctity,¹⁴ the logical result is to think that lay people are normally not called to the fullness of Christian life, or at least not to a high standard of sanctity, and that they should try to live the demands of the Gospel *in spite of* being immersed in temporal realities.

One can thus understand why, after many centuries, the idea became widespread that sanctity requires the separation from temporal affairs that is proper to the religious state, defined precisely as the "state of perfection" *par excellence*.¹⁵ And this in turn led to the, at least unconscious, conviction that the laity are called to a "lesser" sanctity.¹⁶

11. One of the central points of Blessed Josemaría's teaching is that sanctity and apostolate constitute two indispensable dimensions of the Christian vocation. "For a Christian, apostolate is something instinctive. It is not something added onto his daily activities and his professional work from the outside. I have repeated it constantly, since the day that our Lord chose for the foundation of Opus Dei! We have to sanctify our ordinary work, we have to sanctify others through the exercise of the particular profession that is proper to each of us, in our own particular state in life" *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 122. On this theme see I. De Celaya, "Unidad de Vida y Plenitud Cristiana," in *Msr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei. En el 50 aniversario de su fundación*, Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 1985, p. 334.

12. Gérard Philips, *La Iglesia y su misterio*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 96.

13. *Ibid.*

14. On this topic cf. F. Vandenbroucke, *La spiritualité del Medioevo*, ed. Borla, Bologna 1991, p. 453 (original French version in J. Leclercq, F. Vandenbroucke, L. Bouyer, *La spiritualité du Moyen Age*, Aubier 1961).

15. We note here that this expression was never used by Vatican II.

16. In past eras, there was a tendency to recommend "a holy life" to monks, religious and to the various categories of pious persons, while the common faithful seemed too tied down by their commitments in the world to aspire to anything other than to observe the demands of a rather lax practice, with a certain indispensable minimum." M. Labourdette "La santidad, vocación de todos los miembros de la Iglesia," in *La Iglesia del Vaticano II: Estudios en torno a la Constitución conciliar sobre la Iglesia*, a cooperative work edited by Guillermo Barauna; Spanish edition edited by Santiago Nogaledo, Barcelona, Flors, 1966, vol. II, p. 1061.

2. Dangers and Temptations along the Path

Blessed Josemaría's extraordinary gifts as a pastor and spiritual director enabled him to clearly point out the path and to indicate the obstacles that had to be overcome in advancing towards the goal of sanctity.

He was very aware of the dangers and temptations that had to be overcome by those who, immersed in secular realities, wanted to make progress on the path to sanctity. In his memorable¹⁷ homily "Passionately Loving the World," given during a Mass celebrated on the campus of the University of Navarre on October 8, 1967,¹⁸ he referred to some of these dangers, especially those of "a disembodied spiritualism," "a materialism blind to the spirit," and "clericalism."

To overcome the first two dangers, one needs what he called a "priestly soul;" while clericalism is combated by a "lay mentality," another of his original expressions. Before examining the meaning of these two expressions in more detail, it is worthwhile looking more fully at the three dangers to be overcome.

First, we need to remember that the Church "travels the same journey as all mankind and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 40). This has particular relevance for the laity, as the Council recalled: "They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the Gospel spirit, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity, they must manifest Christ to others" (LG 31).

The vocation-mission of the laity is therefore determined by their full insertion both into civil society and into the Church. They are "citizens of both cities" (GS 43) and, in consequence, constitute the connecting point between them. They are "ambassadors to the world," but they "are not of the world" (*Jn* 17:18). Jesus addressed the Father saying: "I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one" (*Jn*

17. This homily was memorable not only because of the external circumstances—about thirty thousand people were present, and for many of them it was their first meeting with the founder of Opus Dei—but above all because on this occasion he vigorously highlighted the theology of secularity that was a central theme of the message he had spread untiringly since 1928.

18. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, "Passionately Loving the World," a homily published in *Conversations*, op. cit., nos. 113-123. The citations from the homily follow the paragraph numbers in this book. In regard to the structure and theological content of this homily see Pedro Rodríguez, "Vivir santamente la vida ordinaria. Consideraciones sobre la homilía pronunciada por el Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer en el campus de la Universidad de Navarra (8 Oct 67)," in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, ed. University of Navarre, Pamplona 1993, pp. 225-258. A theological reflection on this homily is also offered in A. Aranda, "El bullir de la sangre de Cristo". *Estudio sobre el cristocentrismo del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Rialp, Madrid 2000, pp. 263-277.

17:15). In this perspective one can also understand why the Council pointed out: "That the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate one another is a fact open only to the eyes of faith; moreover, it will remain the mystery of human history, which will be harassed by sin until the perfect revelation of the splendor of the sons of God" (GS 40).

This mystery of human history, "harassed" in its advance by sin, is shown especially in the temptations to which the mission, and therefore the spirituality, of the laity is subject. Indeed, the intimate connection between earthly and supernatural realities, which they are called upon to bring about in their daily life, is exposed to a double danger: that of separating the two realms and that of confusing them. The separation of the two can be manifested as either a disembodied spiritualism or a materialism closed to the spirit.¹⁹ Confusion of the two, on the other hand, is one of the signs of clericalism.

Blessed Josemaría described the danger of disembodied spiritualism as the tendency to "present the Christian way of life as something exclusively 'spiritual,' proper to pure, extraordinary people, who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world, or at most, tolerate them as something necessarily attached to the spirit, while we live on this earth. When things are seen in this way, churches become the setting *par excellence* of the Christian life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated world, which is considered to be the antechamber of heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate path. The doctrine of Christianity and the life of grace would, in this case, brush past the turbulent march of human history, without ever really meeting it."²⁰ As we will consider more fully below, in the same homily "Passionately Loving the World" he goes on to vigorously affirm the true Christian vision of secularity: "On this October morning, as we prepare to enter upon the memorial of our Lord's Pasch, we flatly reject this deformed vision of Christianity."²¹

Allied to the danger of spiritualism is another error which, if less extreme, is all the more insidious: the danger of leading a "double life." "I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the thirties that they had to know how to 'materialize' their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side,

19. The double danger offered by this separation was clearly pointed out by Vatican II when it noted: "It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to shirk our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that by our faith we are bound all the more to fulfill these responsibilities according to the vocation of each one. But it is no less mistaken to think that we may immerse ourselves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations. One of the gravest errors of our time is the dichotomy between the faith which many profess and the practice of their daily lives" (GS 43).

20. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, "Passionately Loving the World," *op. cit.*, no. 113.

21. *Ibid.*

an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities.”²² And he goes on to insist: “No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot have a split personality if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things. There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find him.”²³

In the same homily “Passionately Loving the World,” Blessed Josemaría refers also to a “materialism blind to the spirit.”²⁴ This is the error of those who “think that we may immerse ourselves in earthly activities as if these latter were utterly foreign to religion, and religion were nothing more than the fulfillment of acts of worship and the observance of a few moral obligations” (GS 43). The Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (1988) sees this as a growing danger, noting that often today “individuals cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God or simply retain him without meaning in their lives, or reject him outright and begin to adore various ‘idols’ of the contemporary world. The present day phenomenon of secularism is truly serious not simply as regards the individual, but in some ways as regards whole communities” (no. 4).

A widespread manifestation of secularism is seen in a bad “laicism,” in which religious values are explicitly rejected or relegated to the closed arena of one’s conscience and to the dim light of churches, without any right to penetrate and influence social and political life.

We can also mention here a practical secularism that dims the ideal of sanctity and leads to religious indifferentism. The fact of finding oneself immersed in secular realities could easily lead to becoming enmeshed in purely human ambitions, overlooking the supernatural meaning of life. These temptations come from the world itself, as our Lord warned us: “the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (*Mt* 13:22). Therefore Saint Paul exhorts us: “Do not be conformed to the world” (*Rom* 12:2). But despite the temptations that come from the world, we should also realize that “the deepest danger lies in ourselves: we ourselves have not converted and therefore we are not free in regard to material things. The goods of this world have for us an ambiguous character due to the avarice and disorder with which we approach them as a consequence of sin. Therefore they have the power to distract us and to seduce us, and we easily lose the right path.”²⁵

22. *Ibid.*, no. 114.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, no. 115.

25. R. Cantalamessa, *La Parola e la vita: riflessione sulla Parola di Dio delle Domeniche delle Feste dell'anno. Anno A*, ed. Città Nuova, Rome 1992 7, p. 114.

Finally, turning to the danger of *clericalism*, we can define it as the interference by clerics in the civil arena.²⁶ It represents a confusion between the two spheres, which gives rise to undue interference of one sphere in the other as a result of an insufficient recognition of the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities. Clericalism is thus every use of sacred power for temporal ends, or the desire to make use of the Church in order to gain advantages in the civil sphere. Blessed Josemaría also uses the term to refer to laymen who try to make use of the Church for temporal ends, not respecting the legitimate autonomy of the secular sphere.

To overcome all these dangers, in the following sections we will consider the importance of cultivating what Blessed Josemaría called “a priestly soul” and “a lay mentality.”

3. Overcoming spiritualism and materialism: a priestly soul and love for secular realities.

Blessed Josemaría always recommended that one should “*materialize* one’s spiritual life.”²⁷ “Authentic Christianity, which professes the resurrection of all flesh, has always quite logically opposed ‘dis-incarnation,’ without fear of being judged materialistic. We can, therefore, rightfully speak of a ‘Christian materialism,’ which is boldly opposed to a materialism blind to the spirit.”²⁸

This implies an appreciation of the Christian value of secular realities. The original goodness and transcendent value of “matter and the most trivial occurrences and situations”²⁹ are discovered thanks to the light emanating from Christ’s work of redemption and recapitulation.

This is one of the characteristics that distinguishes Christianity from so many other religious attitudes that conceal a distrust or even rejection of all that is material. In Stoicism, in Platonism and gnosticism, in Buddhism and Hinduism, temporal realities seem to lie under a shadow. Here is where the absolute newness of Christianity is evident. God has become man and has assumed all that is human and material, transforming it into a way of expressing God’s love, into a path of holiness and of redemption.

With the light of faith, Blessed Josemaría attained a deep theological appreciation for the “secular character” (LG 31) that Vatican II recognized as proper to the laity. He never ceased to insist that “everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians” and that therefore “it is in the midst of the most material things

26. On the phenomenon of clericalism cf. H. Jedin, “Origine medievali del clericalismo,” in *Chiesa della fede. Chiesa della storia*. Saggi Scelti, Brescia 1972, pp. 91-110.

27. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations*, no. 114.

28. *Ibid.*, n. 115.

29. *Ibid.*, n. 114.

of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves.”³⁰ “Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”³¹

Thus “the Christian materialism” proposed by Blessed Josemaría is opposed not only to a disembodied spiritualism, but also to a materialism closed to the spirit. He truly understood that the secular character, or secularity, proper to the laity was not simply an external fact, but that it possesses a theological and vocational dimension. This is reaffirmed by *Christifideles Laici*. In the situation in the world in which the laity find themselves, “God manifests his plan and communicates to them their particular vocation of ‘seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God’ (LG 31)” (no. 15).

The opening to the Spirit, who by his grace transforms and elevates secular realities, implies, therefore, a call directed to the laity to discover that “something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations.”³² Underlying this is the reality of the common priesthood, a priesthood that is actualized by each of the faithful in accord with the nature of his or her own vocation. For the laity, characterized by their own secular character, this means that they are called to exercise this priesthood “in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life... It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are so closely associated that these may be effected and grow according to Christ and may be to the glory of the Creator and redeemer” (LG 31).

The expression “priestly soul,”³³ used to highlight the common priesthood of the faithful, owes its existence to the founder of Opus Dei.³⁴ “Live and work for God, with a spirit of love and service, with a priestly soul, even though you may not be a priest. Then all your actions will take on a genuine supernatural meaning which will keep your whole life united to the source of all graces.”³⁵ He also taught that “we have been given a new principle of energy, strong new roots grafted onto our Lord.”³⁶ “Thus we see why the Mass is the center and root of a Christian’s spiritual life.”³⁷

30. *Ibid.*, n. 113.

31. *Ibid.*, n. 114.

32. *Ibid.*

33. On this subject cf. M. M. Otero, “El ‘alma sacerdotal’ del Cristiano”, in *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-302.

34. See J.L. Illanes, “El cristiano ‘alter Christus-ipse Christus’: Sacerdocio común y sacerdocio ministerial en la enseñanza del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,” in *Biblia, Exégesis y Cultura: Estudios en honor del Prof. José María Casciari*, G. Aranda, C. Basevi and J. Chapa (eds.), Eunsa, Pamplona 1994, pp. 615-616.

35. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge*, Scepter, Princeton 1988, no. 369.

36. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 155

37. Blessed Josemaría often stressed this point; see, for example, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 87.

In this sense, he recalled that all “the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life,” “the immense panorama of work,” “the most ordinary situations,”³⁸ “even what seems most commonplace,”³⁹ all of this is included in “an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord;”⁴⁰ an ascending movement that seek to “unite all things in Christ” (*Eph* 1:10). In virtue of their priestly soul, all Christians therefore are called to sanctify work, to sanctify themselves in their work, and to sanctify others through their work. Thus their entire life is transformed into prayer and apostolate.⁴¹

All of this is possible, as Josemaría Escrivá often noted, only if one has a deep contemplative life, an intimate and continual relationship with God that gives rise to “a supernatural instinct to purify all of one’s actions, to raise them to the order of grace and turn them into a means of apostolate.”⁴²

Blessed Josemaría also emphasized that one’s faith and baptismal vocation must be expressed by one’s entire life: “Through baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, ‘to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ’ (*1 Pet* 2:5). Everything we do can be an expression of our obedience to God’s will and so perpetuate the mission of the God-man.”⁴³

He graphically insisted that “the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.”⁴⁴

In an interview that he granted in 1968, he said: “For many years now, 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

38. “Passionately Loving the World,” in *Conversations* no. 114.

39. *Ibid.*, no. 115.

40. *Ibid.*

41. He also wrote: “An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer,” *The Way*, no. 335. This is a consideration to which he returned on many occasions: “there is no human undertaking which cannot be sanctified, which cannot be an opportunity to sanctify ourselves and to cooperate with God in the sanctification of the people with whom we work. . . . To work in this way is to pray. To study thus is likewise prayer. Research done with this spirit is prayer too. We are always doing the same thing, for everything can be prayer; all activity can and should lead us to God, nourish our intimate dealings with him, from morning to night. Any honorable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life that is both simple and strong.” *Christ Is Passing By*, *op. cit.*, no.10.

42. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter*, February 2, 1945, no. 11, cited by J.L. Illanes, in Rodríguez, Ocariz, and Illanes, *Opus Dei in the Church*, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

43. *Christ Is Passing By*, *op. cit.*, no. 96. Among the numerous discussions of this topic cf. A. Vanhoye, *Liturgia e vita nel sacerdozio dei laici*, in *Sacerdozio e mediazione*, R. Cecolin (ed.), Messaggero Publishers, Padua 1991, pp. 21-40.

44. Escrivá, “Passionately Loving the World,” *op. cit.*, no. 116.

middle of the world, at the summit of all human activities.”⁴⁵ This intuition contains a profound conviction of the priestly dimension that characterizes the life of the faithful, “the salvific meaning of Christian secularity, and in consequence, the way to sanctify it.”⁴⁶

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, his first successor as head of Opus Dei, has summed up this teaching of the founder: “the priestly soul—that is, a soul which desires to make the spiritual priesthood it has received actually bear fruit—means an apostolic spirit, a yearning to serve, an effort to turn the most ordinary actions, one’s family and social relations, one’s ordinary professional work, into the effective occasion of a filial and continuous encounter with God.”⁴⁷

Blessed Josemaría was strongly drawn by Saint Paul’s life and teaching, above all by his struggle to imitate Christ, to have “this mind . . . which was in Christ Jesus” (*Phil 2:5*). He saw in this apostle a shining example of a priestly and apostolic soul. In the letter to the Corinthians we read: “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (*1 Cor 9:22*). “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (*2 Cor 12:15*).

Blessed Josemaría frequently recalled that a priestly soul entails love for the Cross, a yearning to spread everywhere the fire of love that Jesus came to bring into the world (cf. *Lk 12:49*), to be co-redeemers with him. “This explains the apostolic responsibility of the priestly soul, which feels the divine urging, stemming from Baptism, to co-redeem with Christ.”⁴⁸ To the extent that a person is united to Christ he shares in his universal salvific mission. Every action of a Christian then acquires an apostolic dimension, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, which makes “all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them [establishes] the right relationship of the entire world to Christ.”⁴⁹

The following text provides a clear synthesis of Blessed Josemaría’s teaching in this regard: “Uniting professional work with ascetical struggle and with contemplation—something that could seem impossible, but which is necessary, to contribute to reconciling the world with God—and converting that ordinary work into an instrument of personal sanctification and apostolate. Is this not a noble and great ideal, for which it is worthwhile giving one’s life?”⁵⁰ Underlying these words is the

45. *Conversations*, no. 59. Cf. P. Rodríguez, “Omnia traham ad me ipsum. El sentido de Juan 12,32 en la experiencia espiritual de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer” in *Romana* 13 (1991/2), 331-352. An Italian version exists: “Omnia traham ad me ipsum. Il significato di Giovanni 12,32 nell’esperienza spirituale de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer,” in *Annales Theologici* 6 (1992) 5-34.

46. *Ibid.* [*Annales Theologici* 6] p. 27. Also see *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 105 and 183.

47. Alvaro del Portillo, “Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá: His Love for the Church,” in *In Love with the Church*, Scepter, New Rochelle, NY, 1987.

48. *In Love with the Church*, op. cit., p. 13.

49. Vatican II, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2.

50. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Instrucción*, 19 Mar 1934, no. 33, cited by J.L. Illanes, in Rodríguez, Ocariz, Illanes, *Opus Dei in the Church*, p. 146. Also see K. Koch, “Kontemplativ mitten in der Welt: Die Wiederentdeckung des Taufpriestertums beim seligen Josemaría Escrivá,” in *Josemaría Escrivá. Profile einer Gründergestalt*, Cesar Ortiz (ed.), Adamas Verlag, Cologne 2002, p. 317.

importance of attaining what he called "unity of life," a phrase that we find him using at least since 1931 and that sums up the core of Opus Dei's message.⁵¹

4. *The danger of clericalism and its antidote: a lay mentality*

Besides spiritualism and secularism, another danger the laity have to skirt in striving to make their daily life conform to their faith is clericalism. Clericalism is marked by an insufficient appreciation for the legitimate autonomy of temporal realities. In a letter written in 1954, Blessed Josemaría stressed among other things the autonomy of the temporal and clerical spheres, asking that there not be "clerics who want to get mixed up in the concerns of the laity, nor laity who want to get mixed up in concerns of the clergy."⁵²

This autonomy was later clearly affirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which recognized each person's freedom and responsibility to confront the problems of his work environment. This freedom does not mean the absence of reference to the Creator, but rather the desire to accept God's will in every circumstance of one's life.

As *Gaudium et Spes* teaches: "If by the autonomy of earthly affairs is meant the gradual discovery, exploitation, and ordering of the laws and values of matter and society, then the demand for autonomy is perfectly in order: it is at once the claim of modern man and the desire of the Creator. By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These man must respect as he recognizes the methods proper to every science and technique" (GS 36).⁵³

Thus pastors "will not always be so expert as to have a ready answer to every problem (even every grave problem) that arises; this is not the role of the clergy: it is rather up to the laymen to shoulder their responsibilities under the guidance of Christian wisdom and with eager attention to the teaching authority of the Church. Very often their Christian vision will suggest a certain solution in some

51. Cf. De Fuenmayor, Gómez-Iglesias, Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, pp. 36-37. Also see R. Lanzetti, "L'unità di vita e la missione dei fedeli laici nell'Esortazione Apostolica 'Christifideles laici,'" in *Romana* 9 (1989), pp. 303-304. A Spanish version exists: "La unidad de vida y la misión de los fieles laicos en la Exhortación Apostólica 'Christifideles laici,'" in *Romana, Estudios 1985-1996* (1997 supplement), p. 85-102.

52. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter 19 Mar 1954*, no. 21, cited by Fernando Ocariz, "Vocation to Opus Dei as a vocation in the Church," in Rodríguez, Ocariz, J.L. Illanes, *Opus Dei in the Church*, op. cit., p. 117.

53. Other Conciliar texts that deal with this topic are: GS 41; 56 and 76; LG 36 and *Apostolicam Actuositatem* [AA] 4; 7 and 31. The following is particularly interesting: "Laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. . . . they must bring to their cooperation with others their own special competence, and act on their own responsibility. . . . The temporal order is to be renewed in such a way that, while its own principles are fully respected, it is harmonized with the principles of the Christian life and adapted to the various conditions of times, places and peoples." (AA 7). On the conciliar teaching and also commenting on other texts of Blessed Josemaría, cf. E. Reinhardt, "La legítima autonomía de las realidades temporales," in *Romana* 15 (1992) 323-335.

given situation. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that some of the faithful, with no less sincerity, will see the problem quite differently. Now if one or the other of the proposed solutions is too easily associated with the message of the Gospel, they ought to remember that in those cases no one is permitted to identify the authority of the Church exclusively with his own opinion" (GS 43).

Lumen Gentium in turn exhorts pastors to "recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church . . . pastors must respect and recognize the liberty which belongs to all in the terrestrial city" (LG 37).

Josemaría Escrivá typifies clericalism as the error of one who says he is stepping down "from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are 'the Catholic solutions' to problems."⁵⁴ And he adds forcefully: "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."⁵⁵

In contrast to clericalism, he sought to foster a lay mentality,⁵⁶ emphasizing the need to view secular realities in the light of faith, while recognizing and respecting their value. "You must foster everywhere 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."⁵⁷

The spirit of freedom⁵⁸ and responsibility that characterizes a lay mentality can be contemplated here under three points of view:

- personally ("accepting personally the weight of one's own responsibilities");⁵⁹

54. "Passionately Loving the World," no. 117.

55. *Ibid.*

56. We note here that the expression "lay mentality" was coined by Blessed Josemaría.

57. "Passionately Loving the World," no. 117.

58. On this subject cf. C. Fabro, "Un maestro de libertad cristiana. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer," in *L'Osservatore Romano* July 2, 1977; Idem, "La temprá di un padre della Chiesa," in Fabro, Garofalo, Raschini, *Santi nel mondo. Studi sugli scritti del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, ed. Ares, Milan 1992, especially pp. 70-73; A. Llano, "La libertad radical," in *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad*, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-276.

59. For the founder of Opus Dei, the topic of freedom united to a corresponding personal responsibility was a constant in his teaching, as he himself noted: "If my own personal experience is of any help, 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 demands 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. 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." *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 99. Among the numerous texts that could be cited here is the following point from *The Forge*: "You need formation, because you need a profound sense of responsibility, if you are to encourage and direct the activity of Catholics in public life and do so with the respect that everyone's freedom deserves, reminding each and every one that they have to be consistent with their faith" (no. 712).

- “intersubjectively” (respect for the legitimate pluralism “of one’s brothers in the faith”);⁶⁰
- in the ambit of the Church (not involving the Church in human factions).⁶¹

The importance the founder of Opus Dei gives to personal freedom and responsibility is seen in the following quote: “It is obvious that, in this field as in all others, you would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God and which the Church freely recognises. Personal freedom is essential to the Christian life. But do not forget, my children, that I always speak of a responsible freedom.

“Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency. A call to fulfill honorably your commitments as citizens, in all fields—in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in your job—accepting with courage all the consequences of your free decisions and the personal independence which corresponds to each one of you. A Christian ‘lay outlook’ of this sort will enable you to flee from all intolerance, from all fanaticism.⁶² To put it in a positive way, it will help you to live in peace with all your fellow citizens, and to promote this understanding and harmony in all spheres of social life.”⁶³

Since Blessed Josemaría was speaking to laymen in the homily just cited, one can understand why he did not stop to consider that clericalism was a danger for

60. In this respect he also noted: “You would belittle the faith if you reduced it to a human ideology, if you raised a political-religious standard to condemn—on who knows what divine authority—those who think differently from you in matters which by their very nature can be solved in a wide variety of ways.” *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 99. On this question, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo noted: “The mind of the Council clearly supports this view. There was much less support however—in fact, there was opposition in certain sectors of both civil and ecclesiastical life—when, in 1932, Monsignor Escrivá wrote to the first members of Opus Dei: ‘Avoid that abuse which seems to be widely intensified in our time—it is manifest in nations throughout the world—which betrays a desire contrary to the legitimate freedom of men, in attempting to oblige all to form a single group in matters of opinion, to turn temporal doctrines into dogmas’ (Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter January 9, 1932*, no. 1): Alvaro del Portillo, “Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá: His Love for the Church,” in *In Love with the Church*, Scepter, New York, 1987, p. 18.

In regard to the relevance of this aspect of personal freedom it is interesting to note the following observation: “It is precisely the radical presence of freedom in the personal origin of all of these undertakings of solidarity that prevents any confusion, from the very outset, of this ideal with the traditionalist program of a Christianity imposed upon people. Its essential pluralism and its intrinsic respect for *freedom of consciences* separates it from any kind of *fundamentalism*.” A. Llano, “La libertad radical,” p. 274.

61. In another homily, preached in 1963, he said: “It makes me very sad to see a Catholic.... impudently or scandalously seek to climb up in the world on the strength of being a Christian”: *Friends of God*, no. 13.

62. In regard to this aspect cf. J. J. Sanguinetti, *La libertad en el centro del mensaje de Josemaría Escrivá*, Acts of the International Congress “The Greatness of Daily Life,” held in Rome from January 7 to 12, 2002, manuscript pages 15-16.

63. *Conversations*, no. 117. Other aspects of the responsibility that Christians have as citizens are found in many other texts by Blessed Josemaría. One might note here the chapter entitled “Citizenship” in *Furrow*, nos. 290-322.

priests as well. It is worthwhile recalling that on other occasions he energetically noted the existence of this danger.⁶⁴ In an interview granted in October 1965, he remarked that, in spite of the solemn teachings of the Second Vatican Council, often people still viewed the apostolate of the laity as a pastoral activity “organized from above” and he recalled that the laity should never be considered as the “long arm of the Church.”⁶⁵

He emphasized on various occasions that the ministerial priesthood is essentially a service to the common priesthood of the faithful, who are, in the great majority, lay faithful. Thus, on the occasion of the ordination of priests of Opus Dei, he said: “They are being ordained to serve. They are not being ordained to give orders or to attract attention, but rather to give themselves to the service of all souls in a divine and continuous silence. When they become priests, they will not allow themselves to yield to the temptation to imitate the occupations of lay people—even though they are well able to do that work because they have been at it until now, and have acquired a lay outlook which they will never lose.

“Their competence in the various branches of human knowledge such as history, natural sciences, psychology, law and sociology is a necessary feature of this lay outlook. But it will not lead them to put themselves forward as priest-psychologists, priest-biologists or priest-sociologists: they receive the sacrament of Holy Orders to become nothing other than *priest-priests*, priests through and through.”⁶⁶

Blessed Josemaría wanted priests to have a lay mentality above all so that they would know how to respect the proper function of the lay faithful, without intruding on their autonomy and without considering them the long arm of the hierarchy. A lay mentality, in addition, permits priests to appreciate, to grasp one might say almost “connaturally,” the beauty but also the difficulties of the faithful who find themselves fully immersed in secular life.

A lay mentality leads one to discern the Christian value of secular realities and therefore of work, seeing in it an occasion and means of sanctification. In regard to priests, Blessed Josemaría recalled that they too are called to sanctify themselves

64. In an interview practically contemporaneous with that homily he said: “All those who exercise the priestly ministry in the Church should always be careful to respect the autonomy which a Catholic layman needs, so that he will not find himself in a position of inferiority in relation to his fellow laymen, and can carry out efficiently his own apostolic task in the middle of the world. To attempt the opposite, to try to *instrumentalize* lay people for ends which exceed the proper limits of our hierarchical ministry, would be to fall into a lamentably anachronistic *clericalism*. The possibilities of the lay apostolate would be terribly curtailed; the laity would be condemned to permanent immaturity and above all, today especially, the very concept of authority and unity in the Church would be endangered. We cannot forget that the existence among Catholics of a true diversity of criterion and opinion in matters which God has left to the free discussion of men is in no way opposed to the hierarchical structure or the unity of the People of God. On the contrary, it strengthens them and defends them against possible impurities.”: “Espontaneidad y pluralismo en el Pueblo de Dios,” interview published in *Palabra* in October 1967 and included in *Conversations*, no. 12.

65. *Conversations*, no. 21.

66. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, “A Priest Forever,” in *In Love with the Church*, no. 35.

in their own daily work, in their specific pastoral tasks, which also can and should be an occasion and means of sanctification.

In this regard, we can cite the following testimony of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo: "I would like to add here what is just one more among many vivid memories which bear upon this theme: namely, the authentic joy with which the Founder of Opus Dei, an untiring preacher of the need to be 'contemplatives in the middle of the world,' read the following paragraph from the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, which answers the objections that the cares and concerns of the priestly ministry could be obstacles for seeking personal sanctity: 'Rather than be held back by perils and hardships in their apostolic labors they (priests) should rise to greater holiness, nourishing and fostering their action with an overflowing contemplation, for the nourishment of the entire Church of God' (LG 41)." ⁶⁷

Therefore Blessed Josemaría stressed that the sanctification of work "is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs." ⁶⁸

5. Close interconnection between a priestly soul and lay mentality

Blessed Josemaría placed great stress on the interconnection between a "priestly soul" and "lay mentality." He frequently mentioned them together, and noted that the vocation to Opus Dei led one to have "a truly priestly soul and a fully lay mentality." ⁶⁹

A Christian immersed in temporal realities is called to bring about a vital synthesis—to bring all things to God (priestly soul), but at the same time to respect the nature proper to each reality and the freedom of each person (lay mentality).

A lay mentality that is not informed by a priestly soul leads to laicism or to a materialism blind to the spirit; while a priestly soul that is divorced from a lay mentality can degenerate into clericalism. ⁷⁰

A priestly soul leads to establishing a unity between earthly and supernatural realities, ⁷¹ overcoming the rupture caused by a disembodied spiritualism or by a

67. Alvaro del Portillo, "Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá: His Love for the Church," in *In Love with the Church*, pp. 22-23.

68. *Friends of God*, no. 61. Among the ample bibliography on this theme, cf. Jose Luis Illanes, *La santificación del trabajo*, Ed. Palabra, Madrid, 1980 (7th edition).

69. Letter, March 28, 1955, no. 3, cited in *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, p. 271.

70. See J. L. Illanes, "El cristiano, 'alter Christus-ipse Christus,'" pp. 617-618.

71. This idea is well expressed in the following text of Blessed Josemaría: "If the Son of God has become a man and died on the Cross, it was so that all men might be one with Him and the Father (cf. John 17:22). All of us, therefore, are called to form a part of this divine unity. With a priestly soul and with the Holy Mass as the center of our interior life, we strive to be present with Jesus, between God and men," Letter, March 11, 1940, cited by Alvaro del Portillo in "Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá, His love for the Church," in *In Love with the Church*, p. 12.

materialism closed to the spirit, while a lay mentality guarantees that the unity between earthly and supernatural realities does not end up in a confusing of the two spheres, thus avoiding the improper interference we have termed clericalism.

The connection between a priestly soul and lay mentality gives one the capacity to understand secular realities and to fill them with Christian meaning, elevating them to a divine plane. Thus Bishop Alvaro del Portillo observed that the Christian dimension of secularity “can be seen as the harmonious union of a ‘priestly soul’ with a ‘lay mentality.’”⁷²

The harmonious union between a priestly soul and lay mentality ensures that the apostolate of the laity is marked by a fully lay style. As Blessed Josemaría said in a homily: “The Christian apostolate—and I’m talking about an ordinary Christian, living as just one more man or woman among equals—is a great work of teaching. Through real, personal, loyal friendship, you create in others a hunger for God and you help them to discover new horizons—naturally, simply. With the example of your faith lived to the full, with a loving word which is full of the force of divine truth.”⁷³

Blessed Josemaría also stressed the need to join a priestly soul with a lay mentality in order to sanctify work. The sanctification of work has two prerequisites: that it be humanly well done (in accord with a lay mentality),⁷⁴ and that it be done with and for God and men (in accord with a priestly soul). In an interview granted in 1967 he said: “What I have always taught, over the last forty years, is that a Christian should do all honest human work, be it intellectual or manual, with the greatest perfection possible: with human perfection (professional competence) and with Christian perfection (for love of God’s Will and as a service to mankind). Human work done in this manner, no matter how humble or insignificant it may seem, helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world’s divine dimension is made more visible and our human labor is thus incorporated into the marvellous work of Creation and Redemption. It is raised to the order of grace. It is sanctified and becomes God’s work, *operatio Dei, opus Dei.*”⁷⁵

The value that the founder of the Work attributed to the union between a priestly soul and a lay mentality is evident in a letter he wrote on the occasion of the first priestly ordination of members of the Work, on June 25, 1944. At the beginning of the letter addressed to the members of Opus Dei he says: “I want all of my children, priests and laity, to engrave firmly in your head and in your heart a reality that we cannot consider in any way as something merely external, but that is, on the contrary, the hinge and foundation of our divine vocation.”

72. Alvaro del Portillo, *Immersed in God*, interview with Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter, Princeton 1996, p. 15.

73. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 149.

74. We recall here that “by the autonomy of earthly affairs is meant the gradual discovery, exploitation and ordering of the laws and values of matter and society. . . . By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. These man must respect as he recognizes the methods proper to every science and technique” (GS 36).

75. *Conversations*, no. 10

“In everything we do we must all of us (priests and lay people) have a truly priestly soul and a fully lay outlook, if we are to understand and use in our personal lives that freedom which we enjoy in the sphere of the Church and in temporal things, seeing ourselves at one and the same time as citizens of the city of God and citizens of the city of man.”⁷⁶

One finds here a consideration of great ecclesiological relevance. When Blessed Josemaría refers to the need to have a priestly soul and a lay mentality he is not speaking only to lay faithful but also to sacred ministers. Thus he is fostering the service that priests are called to offer to the common priesthood of the lay faithful, by recognizing the latter’s specific vocation-mission,⁷⁷ while also contributing to the organic cooperation that should exist between the sacred ministers and the lay faithful.⁷⁸

A similar reflection can be seen in these words from a late letter of his: “Since the work of Opus Dei is eminently lay, and the priesthood informs the whole of Opus Dei with its spirit; and since the work of lay people and that of priests complement one another and mutually benefit each other, our vocation requires that all members of the Work manifest this intimate union between the two elements in such a way that each is to have a *truly priestly soul* and a *fully lay mentality*.”⁷⁹



The Holy Father has stressed the need to place sanctity as “the foundation of the pastoral planning in which we are involved at the start of the new millennium.”⁸⁰ In this perspective, the founder of Opus Dei’s contribution to developing an authentic secular spirituality that deeply influences every aspect of daily life and furthers the inculturation of the faith is clearly of great importance for the new evangelization, to which we should all feel ourselves called.

76. Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter of February 2, 1945*, no. 1, cited by José Luis Illanes, “The Church in the world: the secularity of the members of Opus Dei,” in *Opus Dei in the Church*, p. 165.

77. Pope John Paul II expressed this idea repeatedly in his apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (March 25, 1992): “Finally, because their role and task within the Church do not replace but promote the baptismal priesthood of the entire People of God, leading it to its full ecclesial realization, priests have a positive and helping relationship to the laity. Priests are there to serve the faith, hope and charity of the laity. They recognize and uphold, as brothers and friends, the dignity of the laity as children of God and help them to exercise fully their specific role in the overall context of the Church’s mission.” (no. 17). “Above all it is necessary that he be able to teach and support the laity in their vocation to be present in and to transform the world with the light of the Gospel, by recognizing this task of theirs and showing respect for it.” (no. 59).

78. The Second Vatican Council has indicated that the Church is a “priestly community” with an “organic structure” (LG 11) and that this structure is characterized by the correlation (reciprocal relation) between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood (cf. LG 10 and 32).

79. *Letter, March 28, 1955*, no. 3, cited in *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, p. 271. The expression “all members of the Work” is explained by the fact that in that period Opus Dei had not yet attained a canonical configuration fully adequate to its pastoral and apostolic reality. The present status of personal prelature now offers an adequate context for the organic cooperation between laity and priests.

80. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), no. 31.