

The Inseparability of Holiness and Apostolate. The Christian, ‘alter Christus, ipse Christus’, in the Writings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

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1. INTRODUCTION: SITUATING BLESSED JOSEMARÍA’S DOCTRINE ON GRACE

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá was fully cognisant of the role of grace in Christian life, both on account of his Christian upbringing, and of the many experiences of God’s outpouring in his own life. It would be quite straightforward to account for the presence of the many different aspects of grace in his writings: divinisation, justification from sin, divine filiation, theological virtues, etc.¹ However, it is also fair to say that his vision and understanding of sin has modulations all of its own, aspects of grace that, while not being unknown in the history of dogma and spirituality, receive reiterated expression in his works. The main idea that can be pointed out is that of grace in terms of *the life of Christ* in believers. This idea is to be found in the history of dogma and spirituality from New Testament writings, especially Paul and John. It is expressed in the writings and preaching of Blessed Josemaría principally in the affirmation that the Christian, the ordinary baptised Christian, is and must be ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’, “another Christ, Christ himself”².

¹ On the history of the doctrine of grace, cfr. for example J. AUER, *Il Vangelo della grazia*, Cittadella, Assisi 1988; C. BAUMGARTNER, *La grâce du Christ*, Tournai 1963; H. RONDET, *Gratia Christi: essai d’histoire du dogme et de théologie dogmatique*, Paris 1948; G. PHILIPS, *L’union personnelle avec le Dieu vivant: essai sur l’origine et le sens de la grace créée*, Leuven 21989.

² On the motif *alter Christus – ipse Christus* in the writings of Blessed Josemaría, cfr. especially A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente en los cristianos*, in “*El bullir de la sangre de Cristo*”. *Estudio*

It should be noted that this exact binomial does not seem to be present in modern Christian anthropology or spirituality³. The term 'alter Christus', however, has been commonly applied by theologians and spiritual writers to the ministerial priesthood⁴. Blessed Josemaría, already in his earliest works, does likewise⁵. The term 'alter Christus' has also been applied in a specific way to the spirituality of St Francis of Assisi⁶, and every so often to the common Christian⁷. 'To act in the person of Christ', an apparent equivalent to 'ipse Christus', is likewise traditionally applied to the ministerial priesthood⁸. Blessed Josemaría also does so⁹.

sobre el cristocentrismo del beato Josemaría Escrivá, Madrid 2000, pp. 203-54, which has been followed closely in these pages. On the question of the relationship between the common and ministerial priesthood, cfr. 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*, a cura di G. ARANDA - C. BASEVI - J. CHAPA, Pamplona 1994, pp. 605-22.

³ Cfr. A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente...*, pp. 203ff.

⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 217-21. The idea is also to be found in official documents of the Church. Cfr. also R. GERARDI, "Alter Christus": *la Chiesa, il cristiano, il sacerdote*, in «Lateranum» 47 (1981) 111-23. Works from the first half of the 20th century include: L. GUARNIERI, *L'alter Christus*, Roma 1929; D. JORIO, *Sacerdos alter Christus. De instructione pro scrutinio ad ordines peragendo commentarius*, Roma 1933; C. MATTEIS, "Alter Christus". *Spunti biblico-letterari (con esempi) per chierici e sacerdoti*, Pinerolo 1952; RHAUDENSES (pseud. Giustino Borgonovo), *Sacerdos alter Christus. Corso di esercizi al clero*, Milano 1954.

⁵ Cfr. W 66-67, though the term is also applied to Christians: W 687. Abbreviations of Blessed Josemaría's works used are as follows: Cnv: *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Dublin 1976; CPB: *Christ is Passing By*, Dublin 1973; FOG: *Friends of God*, London 1981; Frg: *The Forge*, Dublin 1977; LC: *In Love with the Church*, London 1989; VC: *The Way of the Cross*, London 1983; W: *The Way*, Dublin 1970.

⁶ Cfr. for example S. DA CAMPAGNOLA, *L'angelo del sesto sigillo e l'"alter Christus"*. *Genesi e sviluppo di due temi francescani nei secoli XIII-XIV*, Roma 1971.

⁷ By way of example, cfr. the following expression of Blessed COLOMBA MARMION, "Christianus, alter Christus: 'Le chrétien est un autre Christ'. C'est bien la définition du chrétien qu'a donnée, sinon en propres termes, du moins en expression équivalente, toute la tradition. 'Autre Christ', parce que le chrétien est d'abord, par la grâce, enfant du Père céleste et frère du Christ ici-bas, pour être son cohéritier là-haut; 'autre Christ', parce que toute son activité, — pensées, désirs, actions, — plonge sa racine dans cette grâce, pour s'exercer suivant les pensées, les désirs, les sentiments du Jésus, et en conformité avec les actions de Jésus: *Hoc enim sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu* (Phil II, 5)", *Le Christ, vie de l'âme. Conférences spirituelles*, Paris 1920, p. 66.

⁸ Cfr. St THOMAS AQUINAS, *S.Th.III*, q. 82, aa. 1-2; VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 33; Decr. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, nn. 2, 13.

⁹ Hom. *A Priest Forever*, in LC, n. 44.

However, throughout most of his writings, the Founder of Opus Dei unhesitatingly applies the binomial 'alter Christus – ipse Christus' to all Christians, baptismally called by God to the fullness of Christian life and apostolate. On the one hand, of course, the fact that the term is applied indistinctly to Christians as a whole, as well as to ordained ministers, links the term 'alter Christus' to the exercise of the Christian's common priesthood. But on the other hand, given the technical imprecision of expressions generally employed by spiritual writers in a kerygmatic or exhortational context, the question must be asked: what meaning does the term have? what are its implications for Christian life and apostolate?

At an obvious level the designation 'alter Christus – ipse Christus' marks out Christians as carriers of divine grace, inspired by the Spirit to follow closely the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Many Fathers of the Church and spiritual writers termed the baptised not only 'Christians' (followers of the Lord Jesus, sanctified by the Spirit), but 'christs'¹⁰, following through on the soteriological motif of 'divinisation' typical of many Eastern Fathers¹¹, and derived ultimately from the 'Christ-mysticism' of Paul and John.

More specifically, however, it should be noted that Blessed Josemaría does not employ the term 'alter Christus – ipse Christus' in a vague, merely exhortational, manner. Rather it constitutes a forceful expression of Christian identity, of what a Christian *is* and *does*, an expression loaded with dogmatic, ecclesial, ethical and spiritual consequences. The moral and spiritual content of the expression has already been carefully mapped¹². In this paper I intend to enquire into the meaning of the term in the wider context of some New Testament teachings,

¹⁰ The idea is to be found for example in Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, St Basil, St Cyril of Jerusalem, Didymus the Blind, St Cyril of Alexandria, St John Damascene, St Jerome, St Augustine, St Bede the Venerable, St Anselm, Peter Lombard, Richard of St Victor. For references, cfr. A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente...*, pp. 211-4.

¹¹ On the concept of divinisation in the Fathers of the Church, cfr. for example J. GROSS, *La divinisation du chrétien d'après les pères grecs. Contribution historique a la doctrine de la grace*, Paris 1938; J.-C. LARCHET, *La divinisation de l'homme selon saint Maxime le Confesseur*, Paris 1996; M. LOT-BORODINE, *Perché l'uomo diventi Dio*, Magnano (BI) 1999 (orig. 1932); P. NELLAS, *Voi siete dèi: antropologia dei Padri della Chiesa*, Roma 1993; A. THEODOROU, *Die Lehre von der Vorgottung des Menschen bei den griechischen Kirchenvätern*, in «Kerygma und Dogma» 7 (1961), 283-310; P. WILSON-KASTNER, *Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo*, in «Augustinian Studies» 7 (1976), 135-52.

¹² Cfr. A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente...*, passim.

specifically Paul's teaching on the Christian's participation in the life of Christ, and Matthew's doctrine of Christian ethics and mission. The *first* part of the paper will briefly deal with these two questions of biblical exegesis. The *second* will examine, in their proper context, some of the Founder of Opus Dei's writings that deal with the life of Christ in Christians. Special attention shall be paid to one specific point: that the life of Christ in believers has *inherently apostolic and missionary implications*. The *third* and last part of the paper will present a series of arguments that test and give support to Blessed Josemaría's affirmation to the effect that holiness and apostolate are inseparable.

2. SOME ASPECTS OF GRACE AND MISSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

a) *The Pauline Doctrine of Participation in Christ*

Over recent centuries, at least from the time of the Protestant Reformation, Paul's doctrine of redemption and grace has been linked in the main with the doctrine of justification: by God's grace: through faith the sinner is declared and made just in God's sight¹³. It is probably true, however, that in the meantime many Pauline expressions that speak of salvation in terms of participation in the life of Christ have been left somewhat out of the picture. At best they were considered either as spiritual, pious, 'enthusiastic' or metaphorical expressions of Christian life; some might have even said that they leaned towards a kind of pantheistic merging between the Divinity and humans in Jesus Christ, what has sometimes been termed 'panchricism'¹⁴. In other words, if Paul's anthropology is centred on justification, grace is seen to be involved mainly in the inner dynamic of Christian conversion, and not so much as a defining element of Christian life.

The twentieth century, however, has witnessed a growing interest in Paul's doctrine of participation in Christ, among both Protestant¹⁵ and Catholic schol-

¹³ On the question of justification, cfr. my study *Fides Christi. The Justification Debate*, Dublin 1997.

¹⁴ Cfr. PIUS XII, Enc. *Mystici corporis* (1943): DH 3816.

¹⁵ Protestant authors who put the doctrine of participation in Christ on centre stage include G.A. DEISSMANN, *Die neutestamentliche Formel 'in Christo Jesu'*, Marburg 1892; W. BOUSSET, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenäus*, Göttingen 61967 (orig. 1921), and A. SCHWEIZER, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen 1930 (trans. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, London 1956). Later on attention

ars and spiritual writers¹⁶. Surprisingly, perhaps, some of the former came to consider Paul's doctrine of participation in Christ as the true living centre of his understanding of salvation and Christian life, relegating that of justification to the status of a 'subsidiary crater'¹⁷. Whatever may be said of this position, it is hard to deny the central role 'Christ-mysticism' plays throughout the entire 'corpus Paulinum': its theology, soteriology and anthropology. The exegete James Dunn, for example, is of the opinion that 'the study of participation in Christ leads more directly into the rest of Paul's theology than justification'¹⁸.

Three principal expressions of Paul's 'Christ-mysticism' may be noted: the Christian is one who lives 'in Christ', 'with Christ', 'through Christ'. Let us take them one by one.

'In Christ' Perhaps the most common expression of Paul's doctrine of 'participation in Christ'¹⁹ lies in the formulae 'in Christ' (*en Christō*), 'in the Lord' (*en Kyriō*), to be found some eighty-odd times in the 'corpus Paulinum'. Paul employs the formula in three main ways. For the most part it has objective connotations. In other words, it points to the *redemptive act* that has either taken place already 'in Christ', or depends on what Christ has yet to do²⁰. Second, 'in Christ' refers to the subjective state of the believer, who 'is in' or 'lives in' the Lord²¹. And third, the formula 'in Christ' is employed commonly when Paul

to this doctrine waned somewhat in the face of psychological critique, a predominance of ecclesiological and sacramental motifs, and an increased focus on the experience of the action of the Holy Spirit. On the development of the notion, cf. G. SELLIN, *Die religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergründe der paulinischen 'Christusmystik'*, in «Theologische Quartalschrift» 176 (1996), 7-27.

¹⁶ Cfr. E. ANCILLI, *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Spiritualità*, Roma 1990, 3 voll.: 'Cristocentrismo', 'Gesù Cristo', etc.

¹⁷ This is the position for example of Albert SCHWEITZER, who has it that 'the doctrine of justification by faith is... a subsidiary crater, which has formed within the rim of the main crater – the mystical doctrine of redemption through being-in-Christ' *The Mysticism of Paul...*, p. 225.

¹⁸ J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ*, in *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge 1998, pp. 390-412, here p. 395.

¹⁹ We have made ample use of the study of J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ*, cit.

²⁰ Cfr. for example Rm 3,24; 6,23; 8,2; 8,39; 1 Cor 1,4; 15,22; 2 Cor 3,14; 5,19; Gal 2,17; 3,14; 5,6; Phil 2,5; 4,19; 1 Ts 5,18.

²¹ Cfr. for example Rm 6,11; 8,1; 12,5; 16,3; 1 Cor 1,2; 1,30; 15,18; 2 Cor 5,17; Gal 1,22; 2,4; 3,28. With "in the Lord", cf. Rm 16,8-13; 1 Cor 4,17; 9,1; Phm 16.

speaks of himself and his activity, or exhorts believers to adopt a particular attitude or course of action²².

As a result, the formula 'to be in Christ' may not be reduced to a description of the objective state of being a Christian or a member of the community of believers in Christ; neither can it be explained purely in terms of a personal experience of Christ, dead and risen; nor can it be referred exclusively to belief in his message and teaching. Being 'in Christ' clearly involves all three: being *situated in Christ* (the locative sense of being 'in Christ')²³, which comes as a result of the previous *indwelling of Christ* in the believer. And the reason why these two elements go together is simple enough: 'being in Christ' is above all the fruit of *grace*, God's own gift to humans. Besides, it is probably correct to say that Paul's way of speaking attempts to give expression to his own intense experience of union with Christ, of being 'caught up in Christ', the result of justifying grace and of his call to be an Apostle. And although his personal experience of the state of being 'in Christ' was more vivid and profound than that of other believers, the very fact he spoke of being 'in Christ' to *all* Christians, as the *sine qua non* basis of their 'being Christian', is a clear indication that this state is not an exceptional one, but corresponds to the common situation of the simple believer.

Perhaps the unifying key to this expression is given in Gal 2,19-20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me". In Col 1,27, Paul says, 'Christ in you' is 'the hope of glory'. Likewise Col 3,4 speaks of the future revelation of "Christ who is our life", and in Eph 3,17 Paul prays that "Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith". As a result it can be seen that the three usages of the term 'in Christ' (the objective, the subjective and the paranaetical) do not lie in contradiction with one another. Christ our Redeemer (the objective side) fills believers' lives with his own life (subjective experience), emptying out the 'old man' and the life of sin, thus moving Christians to act in conformity with their new being (the paranaetical aspect). 'For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here' (2 Cor 5,17). The life of the believer has been 'taken over' by Christ, as it were, 'replaced' by him, and hence it may be said that the believer lives 'in Christ'.

²² Cfr. for example Rm 9,1; 1 Cor 4,15,17; 16,24; 2 Cor 2,17; 12,19; Phil 1,13; 2 Ts 3,12; Phm 20. With "in the Lord", cfr. Rm 14,14; 1 Cor 7,22; 15,58; Phil 1,14; 2,19,24; 2,29; 3,1; 4,1.2.4.10.

²³ Cfr. J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ*, cit., p. 404.

'*With Christ*'. Besides speaking of the life of Christ in the Christian and that of the Christian 'in Christ', Paul often speaks of the Christian as being 'with Christ'²⁴. On the face of things, the term would seem to denote simply the presence of the Christian 'in the company of' the Lord. The term is particularly common in an eschatological context in Pauline writings, for to the Christian is made the promise of being 'with Christ in heaven'²⁵ and in the parousia²⁶. Besides, the Christian is said to 'die with Christ' in order to be raised with him in future resurrection²⁷. Only once, however, in Pauline writings are Christians said to have been made alive 'with Christ' in the *present* moment (Col 2,13). As we have seen, the expression that normally refers to the present situation of Christians is that of being 'in Christ'. However, there are many other *compound* expressions of the term which indicate not only in a generic way that Christians are 'with' Christ, but that they are with Him throughout each and every stage and aspect of his life, death and resurrection²⁸.

The question may be asked: in what way does the expression to be 'in Christ' differ from that of being 'with Christ'? What does the latter add to the former? In brief terms, it may be said that the former speaks in the main of the fact of believers' *living union with Christ*, whereas the latter speaks of our *likeness to him* and at the same time our *distinctness from him*. In that sense Paul makes it clear that the 'in Christ' expressions may never be interpreted in terms of a quasi-pantheistic merging between God and humans in Christ. In other words, Christians do live off Christ and should live like Him, but they are never merged with Him. However, it would likewise be mistaken to consider the term 'with Christ' as an expression of the pure *autonomy* of humans who by their own energies and initiative would be in a position to imitate the good example of their Lord and Master. After all, such an understanding would be compatible with a

²⁴ Cfr. *ibidem*, pp. 401 ff.; E. LOHMEYER, *Syn Christó*, in *Festgabe für Adolf Deissmann zum 60. Geburtstag, 7 November 1926, 1927*, pp. 218-57; J. DUPONT, *SYN CHRISTO. L'union avec le Christ suivant saint Paul*, Bruges; Louvain 1952.

²⁵ Cfr. for example Phil 1,23; 1 Ts 4,17; 5.10; Col 3,3.

²⁶ Cfr. Col 3,4; 1 Ts 4,14.

²⁷ Cfr. Rm 6,8; Col 2,20; 2 Cor 4,14.

²⁸ Cfr. J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ...*, p. 402, note 62. Paul speaks for example of 'contending together with' Christ, 'fellow prisoner with' Christ, 'rest in company with', 'die with', 'reign with', 'unite' and 'bond with', 'fellow slave with', 'work with', 'fellow worker with', 'live with', 'yokefellow with', 'fellow heir with', 'participate with', 'participate with', 'fellow imitator with', 'build with', 'be encouraged together with', 'suffer with', 'fellow citizen with', 'groan together with', 'fellow soldier with', 'rejoice with', 'united in spirit with', 'be in travail together with' Christ.

doctrine pure works-righteousness, and therefore out of keeping not only with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, but also with living 'in Christ' understood as an outworking of Christian justification in general. Perhaps the following words may sum up the theological content of the two expressions: Christians live and die with Christ, rest and work, suffer and rejoice, are crucified, grow and reign with Him, *on account of the fact that* Christ lives in them. It is quite exact to say, therefore, that the life, passion and resurrection of Christ is re-enacted, as it were, in the lives of believers²⁹.

'Through Christ'. Closely linked with the formulae 'in Christ' and 'with Christ' is to be found the expression *dia Christou*. It is worth noting that the term 'dia' in Paul very seldom takes the accusative (which would mean 'on account of Christ')³⁰, but almost always the genitive (meaning literally 'through' Christ). Hence Paul explains that the believer's life 'in Christ' and 'with Christ' comes also 'through Christ'. The formula either involves the saving or commissioning or final action of God which takes effect through the work of Christ (what might be termed his 'descendent' mediation)³¹, or the life of believers whose prayers come to the throne of God 'through Christ' (his 'ascendant' mediation)³². Paul in his preaching and mission is not interested in a Christ who lived in the past and serves us now as an inspiration to heroic behaviour. Rather Christ is now and remains "an open channel between God and his people"³³, a living intermediary of creation and salvation. He is the one who makes living 'in Christ' possible and real in the present moment.

²⁹ The following texts from Romans are particularly indicative: "So then we were buried with him through baptism into death... For we have become knit together with the very likeness of death, we shall certainly also be knit together with the very likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old nature has been crucified with him... But if we have died with Christ, we believe we shall also live with him" (Rm 6,4-8). "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs – heirs of God and heirs together with Christ, provided that we suffer with him in order that we might also be glorified with him... For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together up till now... In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness... Those he knew beforehand he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rm 8,16-29).

³⁰ Cfr. for example 1 Cor 4,10; Phil 3,8.

³¹ Cfr. for example Rm 2,16; 3,24; 5,17.21; 7,4; 1 Cor 15,57; 2 Cor 1,5; 5,18; Gal 1,1; Phil 1,11; 1 Ts 5,9; Eph 1,5; Tit 3,6.

³² Cfr. for example Rm 1,8; 5,1; 5,11; 7,25; 16,27; 2 Cor 3,4; Col 3,17.

³³ J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ...*, p. 406.

But what does 'dia Christou' add to the other formulae that go to describe the state of the Christian, 'in Christ' and 'with Christ'? To clarify this point, it should be noted that God justifies, and believers' prayers come to the throne of the Almighty through Christ not only in an occasional or complementary way, but *through Him alone*. Christ, in other words, is not only a Mediator; rather, he *the* mediator, the only mediator, between God and man³⁴. According to Paul, just as our *whole* life is 'in Christ' (Christ has replaced the 'old man'), and *everything* we do is 'with Christ', as we have seen above, so also we are saved and justified *only* 'through Christ'. Christ is involved in the totality of salvation, ethics and human life and activity. Christ is present in each and every aspect of the life of the Christian. To put the same thing the other way around, it is probably correct to say that for Paul everything in the Christian that is not *in* Christ, everything believers do that is not *with* Christ, everything that comes to us not *through* Christ, belongs in one way or another to the sphere of sin. In any case, it is quite clear that the life of Christians 'in Christ' and 'with Christ' takes place through Christ himself, and that none of these expressions may be taken in a purely metaphorical or imitative way. From the point of view of the *genesis and experience* of Christian life, perhaps the order should be inverted by saying that Christians live 'through Christ', 'with Christ' and 'in Christ'.

Consequences. What consequences may be drawn from Paul's teaching that believers participate in the life of Christ, live with him, are justified and sanctified through him? Four may be suggested. *First*, that Christian's relationship with Christ is dynamic in character, in the sense that it has a temporally situated beginning (normally Baptism, but one also thinks of Paul's own conversion), and establishes an ongoing relationship with Christ that involves every moment and every aspect of one's life. Besides, the new life begins at Baptism specifically with an incorporation into the dynamic of Jesus' death and resurrection. As a result, living 'in Christ' always involves partaking in his death and resurrection. *Second*, just as salvation comes through another, Jesus Christ, our being with Christ is always associated with the life of others who are in Christ. Being incorporated into Christ, therefore, Christians are incorporated together into his Body, the Church³⁵. Participation in Christ, in other words, is a corporate, social, ecclesial phenomenon. *Third*, the fact of living in Christ, with Christ, through Christ, places clear ethical demands on Christian believers while giving them the

³⁴ Cfr. 1 Tim 2,5; my study *La mediazione cristiana*, in *Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 98-99* (Pontificia Università della Santa Croce), Roma 1998, pp. 83-105.

³⁵ Cfr. J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ*, cit., pp. 408-10.

strength to be faithful to them, for “you must recognise yourselves dead indeed to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ” (Rm 6,11; cfr. 6,12-14). Mystical union with Christ on no account takes Christians out of the real world of everyday life in society. Being a Christian is not only a *state* one is in; it also constitutes a *duty*, a mission: it is at one and the same time an ‘is’ and a ‘must’. *Fourth*, belonging to Christ, living his life, being incorporated into his body, and living a new life, Paul experiences an inner compulsion to communicate the word of God to all peoples, to live and work as an Apostle. “Christ’s love constrains/controls us” he says, in justifying his mission to the Corinthians (2 Cor 5,14), for “when we reflect that if one man has died for all, then all men should be dead; and the reason he died for all was so that living men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them” (v. 15). Through Paul’s preaching, converts experienced no less than ‘the grace of Christ’ (Gal 1,6). In spite of the unworthiness that comes from having persecuted the followers of Christ (1 Cor 15,9; Gal 1,13-14; Act 8,3), he feels interiorly *obliged* to preach the word of God: “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor 9,16).

It is quite clear that Paul’s encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, his living union with Christ, and the apostolic mission following it are two sides of the one coin³⁶. The depth of his union with Christ is expressed in all exactitude in the totality and single-mindedness of his mission to the Gentiles. Justifying grace, mystical and ethical life, belonging to Christ’s Body, as well as apostolic witness and preaching, are unbreakably linked with one another in the life of the Apostle to the Gentiles. But an important question remains. All Christians participate in Christ by grace. This is the basis of his preaching. But does this mean they are called to the apostolate as Paul was, with the same force, and drive, and imperious quality? Certainly not all Christians received the same calling Paul received. Yet, the Apostle is convinced that the Spirit provides a wide variety of ministries within the Church, for the edification of Christians and also for the evangelisation of the world³⁷. But does this mean that *each and every Christian*, by the simple fact of their Baptism, is meant to be an apostle, sent by

³⁶ Cfr. my study *Fides Christi*, cit., pp. 169-85, especially pp. 174-7.

³⁷ “There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord... The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. One may have the gift of preaching with wisdom given by the Spirit; another may have the gift of preaching instruction given him by the same Spirit; and another the gift of faith given by the same Spirit; another again the gift of healing, through this one Spirit; one the power of miracles; another, prophecy; another the gift of recognising spirits; another the gift of tongues and another the ability to interpret them”, (1 Cor 12,4-10).

Christ to preach the Good News? Paul, it would seem, does not give a conclusive reply to the question³⁸.

b) Aspects of the Christian mission in the Gospels

Throughout the Gospel all the actions and words of Jesus are referred to his heavenly Father, and as a result the people glorified God for his great works (Mt 15,31; Lk 7,16; 13,13). The apparent frustration and indignation that Jesus experienced in the presence of some of the Jewish leaders shows this. "If I am not doing the works of my Father", Jesus says in the gospel of John, "then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (Jn 10,37 f.). In other words, it is not only Jesus' lifestyle that would remind people of God and his great works, by referring them perhaps to the memory of the words and great deeds of patriarchs and prophets. Rather, his very works are divine works, which refer directly to his Father and reveal divine life. "Whoever sees me sees the Father" (14,9). Although all authority ultimately comes from God (Rm 13,1), the people perceived in the words and works of Jesus a special power and incontrovertible truth. "And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Mt 7,28-9).

Something of a kind may to be seen to happen in the lives of Jesus' followers. In particular, Matthew's mission discourse (Mt 10,1-11,1) makes it clear that rejection of those sent by him amounts to rejection of Jesus himself and of his message, for they are carriers of his authority and his divine power. "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven... He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Mt 10,32-3.40; cfr. 10,15.19-20.22). Again, it is not that the 'lifestyle' or virtues of the apostles themselves (whose defects and limitations were often quite apparent) would be in a position to lead people to God on their own strength. Rather, on the basis of a complete and tangible *detachment* from material support (Mt 10,8-10), and a full faith-attachment to Jesus, their preaching and actions would be identified with those of their Master.

³⁸ Cfr. J.D.G. DUNN, *Participation in Christ...*, pp. 626 ff.

In the gospel of Matthew, after preaching the beatitudes, Jesus sums up his teaching in the following saying: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5,16). This text, often commented on by Blessed Josemaría, clearly expresses the inseparability between the Christian’s holiness before God, and their apostolic action, as dimensions of the good works they perform. Matthew makes it clear that the light present in the life of true followers of Jesus is not meant to attract attention towards *themselves*, but rather to induce people to glorify *God*.

Again, however, the question remains: is this commissioning and sending forth applicable to the Twelve alone (Mt 11,1), or in an ample sense may it be applied to all believers in Christ?

3. BLESSED JOSEMARÍA’S REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTIAN AS ‘ALTER CHRISTUS – IPSE CHRISTUS’

Blessed Josemaría speaks of the Christian as ‘alter Christus’ and/or ‘ipse Christus’ on many occasions throughout his published writings³⁹. Four particular features may be noted.

First, even though in his earliest published work (‘The Way’, previously published in part as ‘Consideraciones espirituales’) Blessed Josemaría designates the priest as ‘alter Christus’⁴⁰, and the subject of ‘ipse Christus’ as the ‘varón-apóstol’⁴¹, or apostolic man, the subject of the phrase is almost invariably *the ordinary Christian*, taken either individually or collectively (‘the Christian’⁴², ‘each Christian’⁴³, ‘Christians’⁴⁴, ‘all Christians’⁴⁵). He adds, however, that being ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’, though characteristic of all Christians, is to be found in a direct way in the priest, “by virtue of the sacrament” of Holy Orders⁴⁶.

³⁹ Here we follow A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente...*, especially the table of sixteen texts from published works presented on pp. 251-3.

⁴⁰ Cfr. W 66-67.

⁴¹ Cfr. W 687.

⁴² Cfr. CPB 21; 96; 115.

⁴³ Cfr. Cnv 58; CPB 104; 107; 120; 150; 183; 185; FOG 6.

⁴⁴ Cfr. CPB 106; 121; Frg 74.

⁴⁵ Cfr. VC 6.

⁴⁶ “What is the identity of the priest? That of Christ. All of us Christians can and should be not just other Christs, *alter Christus*, but Christ himself: *ipse Christus!* But in the priest this happens in a direct way, by virtue of the sacrament”, *A Priest forever*, in LC, n. 68.

Second, at times the Founder of Opus Dei says that the Christian ‘is’ another Christ, Christ himself⁴⁷, in this way referring to the *state* of being Christian. However, he also has it that being ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’ is a *task*, a duty, an aspiration for the Christian. At times he says that the Christian believer ‘is called to be’ ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’⁴⁸, that ‘God calls him to be’ one⁴⁹, that he ‘feels the urgency of being’ one⁵⁰, that he ‘must be’, ‘is obliged to be’ ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’⁵¹, ‘is and wants to be’⁵² or ‘makes up his mind to be’⁵³ or ‘will be’⁵⁴ another Christ, Christ himself. Being ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’, therefore, is both a state in which the Christian lives, and a pressing invitation to live up to what one already is. This paradox of simultaneously being a Christian and not being (fully) a Christian, would seem to indicate that being ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’ is primarily the work of divine grace: God is the one who both constitutes people as ‘other Christs’, and brings them firmly and gently to their destiny of full filial identification.

Third, Blessed Josemaría handles the two elements of the binomial ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’ in different ways. The term ‘ipse Christus’, ‘Christ himself’ is often used on its own⁵⁵, and more frequently so than is ‘alter Christus’⁵⁶. The terms are often placed together more or less as equivalents⁵⁷. On other occasions, however, the term ‘ipse Christus’ is presented as an intensification and culmination, as it were, of the term ‘alter Christus’. “But we have to join him [Christ] through faith”, he writes, “letting his life show forth in ours to such an extent that each Christian is not simply ‘alter Christus’: another Christ, but ‘ipse Christus’: Christ himself!”⁵⁸.

Blessed Josemaría seems to be saying that the Christian is not only ‘alter Christus’, but also, and even more so, ‘ipse Christus’. This would seem to indicate that the two terms are not entirely equivalent. Given the fact that the term ‘ipse Christus’ seems to bring out the full import of being ‘alter Christus’, and

⁴⁷ Cfr. CPB 107; 104; 106; 115; W 687.

⁴⁸ Cfr. CPB 21.

⁴⁹ Cfr. CPB 150.

⁵⁰ Cfr. FOG 6.

⁵¹ Cfr. Cnv 58; CPB 96; 120; 183; Frg 74.

⁵² Cfr. CPB 121.

⁵³ Cfr. CPB 185.

⁵⁴ Cfr. VC 6.

⁵⁵ Cfr. CPB 107; 115; 120; 121; Frg 74.

⁵⁶ Cfr. CPB 21; 150, 185; W 687.

⁵⁷ Cfr. Cnv 58; CPB 56; 106; 183; FOG 6; VC 6.

⁵⁸ Cfr. CPB 104.

not the other way around (besides being the more frequently used of the two), it is fair to say that 'ipse Christus' is what best describes the inner identity of the Christian believer according to the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei.

Fourth, Blessed Josemaría associates a wide variety of aspects of Christian spirituality and mission of the Christian with the term 'alter Christus – ipse Christus'. Two main groups of texts may be found, those referring to Christian believers personally, to their work and relationship with God, and those relating more directly to apostolate and Christian witness towards other people; in other words, the binomial has a personal and apostolic meaning and application. Of course the two are completely tied in with one another, and any distinction between them remains to some degree artificial.

On the one hand, according to the Founder of Opus Dei, the Christian, 'alter Christus – ipse Christus', contemplates the life of Christ, imitates his actions as a child of God, follows Jesus by doing his or her duty, sanctifying professional work and obligations of state, offers all things to the Father, in union with the mediating action of Christ, is a priest of his or her own existence.

On the other hand, as a result of being and living as 'alter Christus – ipse Christus', Christians strive to ensure that the life of the Master is shown forth in all they do, as they consider themselves co-redeemers with Christ, bringing others to take part in Redemption, knowing themselves to be called to serve all humankind, like Christ, and continue the mission of Christ by sanctifying temporal structures from within, perpetuating in this way the mission of Christ towards the whole of humanity⁵⁹.

In other words, the expression 'alter Christus – ipse Christus' offers a succinct summary of the entirety of Christian existence, interior and exterior, in all its richness, dynamism and simplicity.

The union of holiness and apostolate. Perhaps the most novel feature of Blessed Josemaría's writings lies in the direct connection he makes between *being a Christian* and *being an apostle*. On the basis of a study of Antonio Aranda⁶⁰ and

⁵⁹ Cfr. the analysis of A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente...*, pp. 251-4.

⁶⁰ "El *alter Christus* es el bautizado, configurado por el Espíritu Santo con Cristo, al que sigue asumiendo libremente los deberes de su consagración-misión; es decir, es el cristiano en su estado de crecimiento en la semejanza con el Hijo Redentor, progresando en su identificación con Él, en la íntima unidad entre su condición personal y su participación activa en la misión de la Iglesia. El *ipse Christus* no es otro cristiano sino ése mismo, como uno y el mismo es Cristo, pero el beato Josemaría lo contempla ahora no sólo en cuanto sujeto del proceso de identificación con Cristo, sino en cuanto participante ya de la meta en cada etapa del proceso aunque éste continúe. Si se es otro 'otro Cristo' en la indestructible unidad de

others, this tension may be explained more or less in the following terms. The Christian is 'alter Christus', in that his or her life is and should be ever more similar to that of Christ's, as a result of the Christifying (or divinising) action of God's grace, and human correspondence to it; this correspondence consists precisely of imitating the life of Christ as we know it through the gospels and Christian tradition. In this way the very way Christ lived is (and should be) reproduced in Christians, in their actions and attitudes. Christians are meant to be living icons of the life of Christ. In this way their lives serve as a luminous beacon to those around them, thus leading them to God.

But in a fuller and more definitive sense of the word, the Christian is also — according to the spiritual experience of Blessed Josemaría — 'ipse Christus', Christ himself, in that the grace by which the Christian becomes an 'alter Christus' is *Christ's own grace*, Christ's own life, and is meant to be made 'visible' in and through the life of Christians. In other words, Christ lives and acts in the world through those who live in him and are enlivened by his grace, and not merely through the Christ-like virtues they manage to live. In and through Christians who live in Christ, the living Christ continues acting *directly* in the world, "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2,35). Not only *in* Christians does Christ work, making them ever more like Himself, but, at one and the same time, he works *through* them. The same divine grace that gives rise to the virtues (which may as yet be far from perfection) acts and works, besides, through the Christian on other people, preparing them for faith and conversion. In other words, grace not only sanctifies those who receive it, making them become like Christ, 'christiform', living icons of Christ throughout history; it is also meant to sanctify those who come into contact with Christians. Thus Christian apostolate cannot be reduced to the mere example of more or less presentable Christian living.

la consagración-misión participada, se está siendo ya 'el mismo Cristo' en cuanto a la eficacia salvífica también participada. El *alter Christus*, capacitado y llamado a una identificación progresiva con el Hijo Redentor, es ya, mientras aún camina por esa vía, participante de su eficacia redentora y, por eso, está haciendo ya presente a Cristo entre los hombres: está siendo una imagen viva suya; está siendo 'el mismo Cristo' en cada uno de los instantes en que es instrumento eficaz de corredención... El *alter Christus* es así, aquí y ahora, *ipse Christus*: Cristo mismo que sigue estando presente entre los hombres, en cuanto que está presente la eficacia de su función redentora participada. En el ejercicio por parte del *alter Christus* de su función apostólica, se actualiza la eficacia redentora de Cristo: la acción eficaz del Redentor se hace presente en la del corredentor. Jesús sigue así 'pasando' entre los hombres" (A. ARANDA, *Cristo presente...*, p. 238).

4. TESTING THE ESSENTIALLY APOSTOLIC AND MISSIONARY CHARACTER OF CHRISTIAN HOLINESS

The reader may observe that the interpretation offered of the texts in which Blessed Escrivá uses the binomial 'alter Christus – ipse Christus' is a valid and inspiring one. Being a Christian and being an apostle clearly go hand in hand. At the same time it is an interpretation; the texts are suggestive, but hardly go to prove a *strict* association, in the theological sense, between the two elements. For something as serious and innovative, theologically speaking, as the attribution of a *directly* apostolic, missionary or ecclesial aspect to Christian grace present in the ordinary baptised Christian, it would hardly seem sufficient to cite a relatively small number of texts that make this connection in a passing way. It is clearly necessary to test and further demonstrate the truth value of this connection. Four different arguments may be used: authority, theology, practical confirmation, seeking confirmation in other writings in Blessed Josemaría. Lack of space prevents greater attention being paid to the first three; the fourth will be considered more thoroughly.

a) Arguments by authority

Vatican II's teaching on the universal call to holiness and apostolate, particularly in *Lumen Gentium* and *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, confirms in general terms Blessed Josemaría's conviction of the convergence between holiness and apostolate. Many pointers may also be found in John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris missio*. Besides, it is not difficult to perceive that all the principal features of Paul's doctrine of grace (living 'in' Christ, 'with' Christ, 'through' Christ) that we saw above, may to be found in Blessed Josemaría's designation of the Christian as 'alter Christus', 'ipse Christus'. Although at a descriptive and linguistic level the differences and nuances between the two are many, Blessed Josemaría's explanations of the reality of Christian life are clearly inspired in Paul: the life of Christ is present in all Christians by the very fact of their being so; it is at once a state and a pressing invitation to be faithful to one's Christian identity; it should be understood not in a metaphorical, but in a real way, in terms of a gift coming to us from God through Jesus Christ; it refers to one's personal relationship

with God, to living virtuously in society, and to one's relationship with other people. Besides, the universal apostolic zeal of the Apostle to the Gentiles finds a continuous resonance in the life and writings of the Founder of Opus Dei⁶¹. The same may be said of the Gospel's teaching on the living presence of Christ in believers.

b) Theological arguments

From the theological standpoint it is apparent that the continuity Blessed Escrivá posits between the search for Christian holiness and apostolate is fully in keeping with Christian anthropology and ecclesiology: his teachings on the unity of life of Christians and 'naturalness' would hardly make sense should being a Christian be divorced from being a Christian witness and apostle, since the social and individual aspects of being Christian (and being human) are simply inseparable; from the ecclesial standpoint, his understanding confirms the fact that God has wanted to stand in need of human mediations in the communication of grace, mediations not only associated with the sacraments, but also those in which Christ's life is made present when ordinary Christians exercise their common priesthood in the midst of society.

c) The living confirmation of Blessed Josemaría's message

Considerable importance must be given to the fact that the message of the Founder of Opus Dei has actually come to be accepted and lived and passed on in turn by very many Christians from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures⁶². Blessed Josemaría himself was very aware of this reality. One example among many may be taken. In the homily "The Christian's Hope" preached in 1968 and published in 'Friends of God', he said: "A good number of years ago, with a sense of conviction that was growing stronger in me each day, I wrote: 'Put all your hope in Jesus. You yourself have nothing, are worth nothing, can do

⁶¹ Cfr. my study *The Charism of the Founder of Opus Dei*, in «Annales Theologici» 14 (2000), pp. 401-446.

⁶² On this question, cfr. my study *La virtù della speranza e l'ascetica cristiana in alcuni scritti del Beato Josemaría Escrivá, Fondatore dell'Opus Dei*, in «Romana» 12 (1996) 262-279, which also refers to Mgr. Alvaro Del Portillo's preface *Significado teológico-espiritual de "Camino" to Estudios sobre "Camino"*, J. MORALES (ed.), Madrid 1989, pp. 45-56.

nothing. He will act, if only you abandon yourself in him' [from his *Consideraciones espirituales*, written in the early 1930's]. Time has gone by, and that conviction of mine has grown even stronger and deeper. I have seen many souls with such hope in God that it has set them marvellously ablaze with love, with a fire that makes the heart beat strong and keeps it safe from discouragement and dejection, even though along the way they may suffer and at times suffer greatly"⁶³. The Founder of Opus Dei, in other words, did not simply preach a message and then 'hope for the best'; he intended the message to truly bear fruit by the grace of God, and the fact that many people answered God's call through his life and preaching confirmed him in its value and validity.

d) Other texts of Blessed Josemaría confirming the inseparability of holiness and apostolate

In the coming paragraphs we will suggest a number of apparently disparate motifs arising frequently throughout the ascetical writings of Blessed Josemaría that confirm that Christian holiness is indeed inseparable from apostolate. Though others could be mentioned (the Christian as light, salt and leaven in society; the common priesthood of the faithful; the believer as a burning brand within society, etc.), we shall briefly examine the following motifs: (1) "Christ is alive in Christians"; (2) Christian apostolate as a 'compelle intrare'; (3) the Christian as one who gives off the 'bonus odor Christi', or "good fragrance of Christ"; (4) "to hide and disappear is for me, so that Jesus alone may shine out".

"*Christ is alive in Christians*". The title of Blessed Josemaría's first collection of homilies, *Christ is passing by*, published in 1973, two years before his death, expresses this idea in a graphic way. The Founder of Opus Dei not only affirms that Christ is present in society and in the hearts of believers, through the Gospels, in the sacraments, and by the sending of the Holy Spirit. Christ is present, Christ is *passing by*, he says, knocking delicately yet unmistakably at innumerable human hearts (Rv 3,20), in and through the lives of his followers. For Blessed Josemaría, this is something more than a metaphor, as the homily *Christ Present among Christians*, preached on Easter Sunday, 1967, and published in the same volume, demonstrates. The homily starts with the idea that Christ, the risen Christ, is now truly and, as it were, 'personally' alive. He lives now in the

⁶³ FOG 205.

Church, especially in the Eucharist, but also, he says, “Christ is alive in Christians”⁶⁴. Besides, he makes it clear that this living presence of Christ in the world through Christians is an expression of the binomial ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’ considered above. “But we have to join him through faith, letting his life show forth in ours to such an extent that each Christian is not simply ‘alter Christus’: another Christ, but ‘ipse Christus’: Christ himself!”⁶⁵. Christ’s own life shines forth in that of the Christian. Blessed Josemaría’s understanding of this idea in *Christ Present among Christians* may be worked out in the five stages.

First, the basis is the very life and work of Christ. What takes place in the life of the Christian has taken place already in Christ himself, given his very constitution as God-man. “You cannot separate the fact that Christ is God from his role as redeemer. The Word became flesh and came into the world ‘to save all men’”. That is to say, Christ’s holiness, as the Word incarnate before his Father, is simply inseparable from his mission. As a result, continues the author, “with all our personal defects and limitations, we are other Christs, Christ himself, and we too are called to serve all men”⁶⁶. Speaking of Christ’s way of acting, he goes on to say: “All this human behaviour is *the behaviour of God*. ‘For in him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily’. Christ is God become man: a complete, perfect man. And through his human nature, he shows us what his divine nature is. Recalling this human refinement of Christ, who spent his life in the service of others, we are doing much more than describing a pattern of human behaviour; *we are discovering God*. Everything Christ did has a transcendental value. It shows us the nature of God and beckons us to believe in the love of God who created us and wants us to share his intimate life”⁶⁷. In the action of Christ, not only can we observe a pattern of behaviour, Blessed Josemaría is saying, an exemplary way of acting, but God’s own actions among humans, what elsewhere is would refer to with the term ‘Opus Dei, operatio Dei’.

Second, this vital union with Christ comes about in the Christian by the sacraments of Christian initiation, not by any supplementary rite or designation.

⁶⁴ CPB 104.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ CPB 106, citing 1 Tim 2,4 and 1 Jn 2,7-10.

⁶⁷ CPB 109, citing Col 2,9. Emphasis added. The text continues: “Jesus’ dealings with men go much further than words or superficial attitudes. Jesus takes them seriously and wants to make known to them the divine meaning of their life. Jesus knows how to be demanding, how to direct men to face up to their duties. If we listen to him, he weans us from comfort and conformity, and brings us to know the thrice-holy God. For Jesus is moved by hunger and sorrow, but what moves him most is ignorance. ‘As he landed he saw a great throng, and

“A Christian knows that he is grafted onto Christ through baptism. He is empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, called to act in the world sharing the royal, prophetic and priestly role of Christ. He has become one and the same thing with Christ through the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and love. And so, like Christ, he has to live for other men, loving each and every one around him and indeed all humanity”⁶⁸.

Blessed Josemaría notes, however, that “our sins can make it difficult to recognise Christ. That is why we must face up to our personal miseries and seek to purify ourselves. But in doing this, we must realise that God has not promised us a complete victory over evil in this life. Instead he asks us to fight”⁶⁹. It is interesting to note, therefore, and this is the *third* point, how in Blessed Josemaría’s writings Christ’s living presence in Christians is not seriously prejudiced by their imperfections. “Not so much despite our wretchedness but in some way through it, through our life as men of flesh and blood and dust, Christ is shown forth: in our effort to be better, to have a love which wants to be pure, to overcome our selfishness, to give ourselves fully to others — to turn our existence into a continuous service”⁷⁰. “With all our personal defects and limitations, we are other Christs, Christ himself”⁷¹. This brings us to the *fourth* point.

In order not only to ‘be’ ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’, but to live in keeping with this dignity, the Founder of Opus Dei goes on to explain that baptismal consecration places weighty demands on believers. In order that the Christians may become Christ who ‘is passing by’, he gives exceptional importance to their contemplation of the life of Jesus. “But to be Christ himself, we must see ourselves in him. It’s not enough to have a general idea of the spirit of Jesus’ life; we have to learn the details of his life and, through them, his attitudes. And, especially, we must contemplate his life, to derive from it strength, light, serenity, peace... It is not a matter of just thinking about Jesus, of recalling some scenes of his life. We must be completely involved and play a part in his life. We should follow him as closely as Mary his Mother did, as closely as the first twelve, the holy women, the crowds that pressed about him. If we do this without holding back, Christ’s words will enter deep into our soul and will really change us”⁷². If Chris-

he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things’ (Mk 6,34)”.

⁶⁸ CPB 106.

⁶⁹ CPB 114.

⁷⁰ CPB 114.

⁷¹ CPB 106, citing 1 Tim 2,4 and 1 Jn 2,7-10.

⁷² CPB 107.

tians want to be apostles, he continues, “if we want to bring other men and women to our Lord, we must first go to the Gospel and contemplate Christ’s love. We could take the central events of his passion, for, as he himself said: ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’. But we can also look at the rest of his life, his everyday dealings with the people he met. In order to bring men his message of salvation and show them God’s love, Christ, who was perfect God and perfect man, acted in a human and a divine way. God comes down to man’s level. He takes on our nature completely, except for sin”⁷³. These texts, though belonging to the last decade of the Founder’s life, reflect his preaching and writings from the very beginning⁷⁴.

Fifth, and last, being an ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’ requires the virtue of charity. “We have gone to the Gospel to contemplate Jesus’ dealings with men and to learn to bring him to our fellow men, being ourselves other Christs. Let’s apply this lesson to everyday life, to our own life... When a Christian makes Christ present among men by being Christ himself, it is not only a matter of being a considerate, loving person, but of making the Love of God known through his human love. Jesus saw all his life as a revelation of this love. As he said to one of his disciples, ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father’”⁷⁵. Again, it is made clear that it is not enough for a Christian to be a loving person, kind and affectionate, in that way possibly drawing more attention to oneself than to Christ; rather the believer is capacitated and bound *to love on God’s behalf and in a divine way*, so that those loved by a Christian may be in a position to experience in the first place the love of God, just as those who had seen Jesus had ‘seen’ the Father.

Blessed Josemaría’s reflection on Christ being present among Christians is based on the encounter of Jesus’ disciples on their way back to Emmaus. “When they draw near the village”, we read in the homily “he makes as if he is going on,

⁷³ CPB 107, citing Jn 15,13.

⁷⁴ In the homily *Christ present among Christians*, he says: “In the early years of my life as a priest, I used to give people presents of copies of the Gospel and books about the life of Jesus. For we do need to know it well, to have it in our heart and mind, so that at any time, without any book, we can close our eyes and contemplate his life, watching it like a movie. In this way the words and actions of our Lord will come to mind in all the different circumstances of our life”, CPB 107. This autobiographical reference is to be found in point 382 of *The Way*: “When I made you a present of that Life of Jesus, I wrote as an inscription. May you seek Christ: may you find Christ: may you love Christ”. The following point of *The Way* is also indicative: “How I wish your bearing and conversation were such that, on seeing or hearing you, people would say: This man reads the life of Jesus Christ”, (n. 2).

⁷⁵ CPB 114-5, citing Jn 14,9.

but the two disciples stop him and practically force him to stay with them. They recognise him later when he breaks the bread. The Lord, they exclaimed, has been with us! ‘And they said to each other: Was not our heart burning within us while he was speaking on the road and explaining to us the Scripture?’ Every Christian should make Christ present among men. He ought to act in such a way that those who know him sense ‘the fragrance of Christ’. Men should be able to recognise the Master in his disciples”⁷⁶. Being and living as ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’, being Christ present among Christians, is thus clearly linked with Paul’s description of Christian life as the ‘good fragrance of Christ’ (‘bonus odor Christi’), which Blessed Josemaría comments upon often in his published works.

Giving off “the good fragrance of Christ”. Blessed Josemaría develops this theme in the use he makes of the term ‘the good fragrance of Christ’ (2 Cor 2,15), the ‘bonus odor Christi’ as the Vulgate translation has it.

On several occasions, the Founder of Opus Dei speaks of prayer as the basis of all Christian life and apostolic endeavour, in the midst of everyday activities, “...right there, not taken away from those things, but with our hearts fixed on God. Then our words, our actions — our defects! — will give forth the ‘bonus odor Christi’, the sweet fragrance of Christ, which other men will inevitably notice and say: ‘Here is a Christian’”⁷⁷. The ‘bonus odor Christi’ as lived the Christian will be so ordinary and natural that generally it is hardly noticed, showing itself in a wide range of human virtues⁷⁸. Blessed Josemaría for example speaks of the ‘bonus odor Christi’ when speaking of the virtue of chastity⁷⁹, of the need to live a noble life⁸⁰, and especially in affectionate charity. “To

⁷⁶ CPB 105, citing Lk 24,32 and 2 Cor 2,15 (‘bonus odor Christi’).

⁷⁷ FOG 271.

⁷⁸ Cfr. CPB 36. “The ideal is not out of reach. A Christian is no Tartarin of Tarascón, a literary character bent on hunting lions in the corridors of his home, where they were not to be found. I always speak about real daily life, about the sanctification of work, of family bonds, of friendships. If we aren’t Christian in these things, where will we be Christian? The pleasant smell of incense comes from some small, hidden grains of incense placed upon the burning charcoal. Likewise is the ‘aroma of Christ’ noticed among men — not in a sudden burst of flame, but in the constant red-hot embers of virtues such as justice, loyalty, faithfulness, understanding, generosity and cheerfulness”.

⁷⁹ Cfr. Frg 92: “The ‘bonus odor Christi’, the fragrance of Christ, is also that of our clean life, of our chastity — the chastity of each one in his own state, I repeat — of our holy purity, which is a joyful affirmation. It is something solid and at the same time gentle; it is refined, avoiding even the use of unfitting words, since they cannot be pleasing to God”.

⁸⁰ Cfr. CPB 36: “We offer frankincense that rises up to the Lord: our desire to live a noble life which gives off the ‘aroma of Christ’”.

impregnate our words and actions with his aroma is to sow understanding and friendship. We should accompany others so that no one is left, or can feel, abandoned. Our charity has to be affectionate, full of human warmth... That is what Jesus Christ teaches us”⁸¹. Christians by living in this way will “console and help and especially bring God’s light to others”⁸². Blessed Josemaría comments on other occasions on the need for Christians being light for others⁸³.

It is interesting to note that, as with other expressions examined earlier, the ‘bonus odor Christi’ present in the Christian, though expressive of the incisiveness and humanity of Christian life and apostolate, is not taken to be incompatible with the presence in the Christian of limitations and defects. And the reason is clear: *Christ* is present and active among Christians (in spite of their defects), which is not the same as *Christians* (without defects) being present and active in society *on behalf of Christ*.

Christian apostolate as a “compelle intrare”. Given that the presence of Christ in the Christian is considered in terms of the ‘bonus odor Christi’, the good fragrance of Christ, which gently spurs others to come close to God, it may come as a surprise that Blessed Josemaría presents Christian apostolate in terms of the ‘compelle intrare!’ He is referring here to the parable of the marriage feast, told by the evangelist Luke (14,8-24). When the first guests do not respond to the invitation, the master orders the servants to “go out into the highways and hedgerows and compel — ‘compelle intrare’ — people to come in” (Lk 14,23).

⁸¹ Cfr. CPB 36. The text continues: “If a Christian does not love with deeds, he has failed as a Christian, besides failing as a person. You cannot think of others as if they were digits, or rungs on a ladder on which you can rise, or a multitude to be harangued or humiliated, praised or despised, according to circumstances. Be mindful of what others are — and first of all those who are at your side: children of God, with all the dignity that marvellous title entails... We have to behave as God’s children toward all God’s sons and daughters. Our love has to be a dedicated love, practised every day and made up of a thousand little details of understanding, hidden sacrifice and unnoticed self-giving. This is the ‘aroma of Christ’ that made those who lived among our first brothers in the faith exclaim: See how they love one another!...”

⁸² CPB 156. “The external signs of love should come from the heart and find expression in the testimony of a Christian life. If we have been renewed by receiving our Lord’s body, we should show it. Let us pray that our thoughts be sincere, full of peace, self-giving and service. Let us pray that we be true and clear in what we say — the right thing at the right time — so as to console and help and especially bring God’s light to others. Let us pray that our actions be consistent and effective and right, so that they give off ‘the good fragrance of Christ,’ evoking his way of doing things” *ibidem*.

⁸³ Cfr. CPB 10; 72.

How can the gentle urging of authentic Christian life, word and example, be compatible with people being compelled in one way or another to accept God's gifts?

Blessed Josemaría himself is quite aware of the apparent contradiction. "Surely this is coercion", he said, "an act of violence against the legitimate freedom of each individual conscience?"⁸⁴ However, he goes on to explain: "if we meditate on the Gospel and reflect on the teachings of Jesus, we will not mistake these commands for coercion. See how gently Christ invites: 'If you have a mind to be perfect... If any man would come after me...'. His 'compelle intrare' implies no violence, either physical or moral. Rather, it reflects the power of attraction of Christian example, which shows in its way of acting the power of God... When we breathe this air of freedom we see clearly that evil is an enslavement, not a liberation... Such a person may show that he has acted according to his preferences, but he does not speak with the voice of true freedom, because he has become the slave of his decision and he has decided for the worst, for the absence of God, where there is no freedom to be found"⁸⁵. Blessed Josemaría sums up the content of the 'compelle intrare' as follows. "It is not a kind of material push, but the abundance of light, of doctrine, the spiritual stimulus of your prayer and your work, which is an authentic witness of doctrine; the sum total of the sacrifices which you know how to offer; the smile coming to your lips because you are sons of God; filiation which fills you with a serene happiness—even though adversities will also be there—which others see and envy. Add to all this your human grace and qualities, and we have the content of the 'compelle intrare'"⁸⁶.

The imperative and efficacious character of Christian apostolate is not opposed, therefore, to the humanity and gentleness of the life of Christ present in the believer. Again the example of the Apostle to the Gentiles, who "became

⁸⁴ FOG 37.

⁸⁵ FOG 37. The text cites St Augustine: "See how the Father attracts. He delights in teaching, and not in imposing necessity on men. That is how he attracts men towards himself" *In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26,7 (PL 35,1610).

⁸⁶ "No es como un empujón material, sino la abundancia de luz, de doctrina; el estímulo espiritual de vuestro oración y de vuestro trabajo, que es testimonio auténtico de la doctrina; el cúmulo de sacrificios, que sabéis ofrecer; la sonrisa, que os viene a la boca, porque sois hijos de Dios: filiación que os llena de una serena felicidad—aunque en vuestra vida, a veces, no faltan contradicciones—, que los demás ven y envidian. Añadid, a todo esto, vuestro garbo y vuestra simpatía humana, y tendremos el contenido del 'compelle intrare'" *Letter*, 24-X-1942, n. 9.

all things to all men, that I by all means may save some” (1 Cor 9,22), comes easily to mind.

“*To hide and disappear is for me, so that Jesus alone may shine out*”. Throughout his life the Founder of Opus Dei took the following as his personal motto: ‘to hide and disappear is for me, so that Jesus alone may shine out’⁸⁷. He always preferred to communicate the love of God to others in the most human and natural way possible: through the clear and serene though not dazzling light of his ordinary, everyday life, words and example. For him this aspiration to stay in the background was one of the clearest manifestations of the ‘bonus odor Christi’, that characterises the life of the Christian, of the apostle⁸⁸.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has considered a variety of aspects of Blessed Josemaría’s description of the Christian as ‘alter Christus – ipse Christus’, and may be summed up as follows: Christian holiness is inseparable from Christian apostolate, because the Person of Christ is inseparable from his mission, and his very life has become fused with that of the Christian at Baptism and through responsible, conscious Christian commitment and correspondence to grace.

The validity of this hypothesis has been tested in four ways. *First*, it is seen to be fully in consonance with Paul’s doctrine of participation in Christ and its

⁸⁷ “Ocultarme y desaparecer es lo mío, que sólo Jesús se luzca”. “He sentido en mi alma, desde que me determiné a escuchar la voz de Dios —al barruntar el amor de Jesús—, un afán de ocultarme y desaparecer; un vivir aquel *illum oportet crescere, me autem minui* (Jn 3,30); conviene que crezca la gloria del Señor, y que a mí no se me vea” *Letter 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966*, n. 16, cited in A. VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *El Fundador del Opus Dei, vol. 1: ¡Señor que vea!*, Madrid 1997, p. 317. As a result, when Opus Dei began, “yo no puse a la Obra ningún nombre. Hubiera deseado, de ser posible —no lo era—, que no hubiera tenido nombre, ni personalidad jurídica [...] Mientras, llamábamos a nuestra labor sencillamente así: ‘La Obra’” *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1867, cit. in *ibidem*, p. 331. “Otros institutos tienen, como una bendita prueba de la predilección divina, el desprecio, la persecución, etc. La Obra de Dios tendrá esto: pasar oculta” *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 581, cit. in *ibidem*, p. 351.

⁸⁸ “We have to behave as God’s children toward all God’s sons and daughters. Our love has to be a dedicated love, practised every day and made up of a thousand little details of understanding, hidden sacrifice and unnoticed self-giving. This is the ‘aroma of Christ’ that made those who lived among our first brothers in the faith exclaim: See how they love one another!” CPB 36.

myriad outworkings, with the mission discourse of the gospels, particularly that of Matthew, and with major recent Church documents. *Second*, the position is theologically coherent from an anthropological and ecclesiological standpoint. *Third*, the practical apostolic experience of Blessed Josemaría demonstrates the validity of this position. *Fourth*, and finally, the same basic position is to be found in several other Scripturally-based ways in which the Founder of Opus Dei describes the reality of Christian life and apostolate: Christ present among Christians, the *bonus odor Christi*, the *compelle intrare!*, and Founder's personal desire to hide and disappear.