

# What Impetus Can Theology Receive from the Teachings of Saint Josemaría

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## 1. The saints and the sources of theology

In 1993, in the context of a conference on the teachings of St. Josemaría, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said: “The theologian should be a man of scholarship; but he should also, precisely because he is a theologian, be a man of prayer. He must pay attention to the developments in history and scholarship, but, even more than that, he needs to listen to the testimony of those who, having gone the full way on the path of prayer, have, even in this life, attained the highest reaches of divine intimacy; that is, the testimony of those who, in ordinary language, we call saints.”<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary theology acknowledges the capacity of the spiritual life to give inspiration to its work, and consequently the role of the great saints, thus overcoming the rupture in previous centuries between theologians and spiritual authors.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, sufficient attention does not seem to have been paid, at least not explicitly, to the writings of the saints, except in questions more directly related to spirituality. In many cases, the testimonies of the saints influence theological work to some degree as regards the approach and verification of conclusions; but they are not seen as authentic sources or “sites” for the theologian’s work. In fact, they are cited scarcely or not at all, perhaps because the saints have not set forth their teachings in a discursive and deductive manner and, in many cases, these touch more directly upon the subjective states of the soul than on the objective topics of dogmatic theology.<sup>3</sup> But in reality, as noted by the International Theological Commission in 2011, “theology is not only a science but also a wisdom . . . The human person is not satisfied by partial truths, but seeks to unify different pieces and areas of knowledge into an understanding of the final truth of all things and of human life itself. This search for wisdom,

1. Joseph Ratzinger, “Inaugural Message at the theological symposium on the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá,” in *Holiness and the World: Studies in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*, Scepter Publishers/Four Courts Press/Midwest Theological Forum 1997, p. 27. Cf. Idem, *To Look on Christ: Exercises in Faith, Hope and Love* (New York, 1991), p. 33.

2. See Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, “Teología y Espiritualidad,” in *Scripta Theologica* 25 (1993) pp. 155-174.

3. See for example, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Word and Redemption: Essays in Theology 2*, Herder and Herder, New York 1965, pp. 62-66.

which undoubtedly animates theology itself, gives theology a close relationship to spiritual experience and to the wisdom of the saints.”<sup>4</sup>

We are not referring here, obviously, to the saints who have set forth their teaching in a theologically systematic way, as did St. Thomas Aquinas, but to those who, by their writings and example, have left us an extensive teaching on the practical manner of responding to God’s call to holiness: above all, those who have been “masters of the spiritual life.”

It is true that “the great spiritual teachers, each with their own nuances, always bring particularly deep insights not so much to theology, in the strict sense, as to the content and meaning of Christian life, on the imitation of and identification with Christ.”<sup>5</sup> These lights, however, can contribute greatly to academic theological reflection. The fact that they are masters of the spiritual life does not exclude their offering clear lights to systematic theology and being sources of inspiration for theological work. As John Paul II stated, St. Josemaría, “like other great figures in modern Church history, can also be a source of inspiration for theological thought. In fact, theological research, which has an irreplaceable role of mediation in the relationship between faith and culture, progresses and is enriched by drawing on the Gospel, under the impulse of the experience of Christianity’s great witnesses.”<sup>6</sup> There is certainly a theological knowledge attained by a discursive process of reasoning, but there is also another form of knowledge made possible by the “connaturality” brought about by the love of God. This second type is found especially in the saints, and theologians need to take it into account.

Many authors have addressed this topic. Some have stressed that the saints are the true theologians (they have known God deeply because they have loved him greatly); others have underlined that the theologian ought to be a person of prayer, someone who truly loves God.<sup>7</sup> As St. Josemaría wrote, charity “poured out in our soul by God . . . transforms from within our mind and will.”<sup>8</sup> For charity, which implies an affective communion with God, opens the soul to a deeper knowledge of him: it opens the soul to contemplation, to that *simplex intuitus veritatis ex caritate procedens* that St. Thomas Aquinas spoke of.<sup>9</sup> In the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, published by Pope Francis, we read: “Faith’s understanding is born when we

4. International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, November 29, 2011, no. 86.

5. Antonio Aranda, “La teología y la experiencia espiritual de los santos. En torno a la enseñanza de san Josemaría Escrivá,” in *Scripta Theologica* 43 (2011) p. 49.

6. John Paul II, Address to the participants of the theological symposium on the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, in *Holiness and the World: Studies in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*, op. cit., p. 17.

7. It has even been said that “all the saints are theologians, and only the saints are theologians” (François-Marie Léthel, *Connaître l’amour du Christ qui surpasse toute connaissance: la théologie des saints*, Éditions du Carmel, Venasque 1980, p. 3).

8. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, Scepter, New York, 1974, no. 71.

9. See St. Thomas Aquinas, In *III Sent.*, d. 35, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 1 c; *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 180, a. 6 ad 2; *Summa contra gentiles*, IV, c. 22.

receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enables us to see reality with new eyes.”<sup>10</sup> And he adds: “It is a relational way of viewing the world, which then becomes a form of shared knowledge, vision through the eyes of another and a shared vision of all that exists.”<sup>11</sup>

## 2. The saints; between *auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei*

In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II wrote that “theology is structured as an understanding of faith in the light of a twofold methodological principle: the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei*. With the first, theology makes its own the content of Revelation as this has been gradually expounded in Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the Church’s living Magisterium. With the second, theology seeks to respond through speculative enquiry to the specific demands of disciplined thought.”<sup>12</sup> *Auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei* should not be separated, for they are mutually intertwined.

We can pose here this question: for theology, does the teaching of the saints belong to *auditus fidei* or to *intellectus fidei*? First of all, we need to consider that the *intellectus fidei* does not make intelligible an *auditus fidei* that does not already have an intelligible content. *Intellectus fidei* brings the theological process to its goal, giving it unity, but it also places the intellect of the believer in a condition to penetrate more deeply into what God has revealed, the truth of which is already known from listening to the Word received with faith.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, we can begin by saying that the teaching of the saints pertains both to *auditus fidei* and to *intellectus fidei*. But we need to make a subsequent clarification regarding the relationship of this teaching with Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Church.

Regarding the saints and the interpretation of Scripture, Benedict XVI said in his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini*: “The interpretation of Sacred Scripture would remain incomplete were it not to include listening to those who have truly lived the word of God: namely, the saints.”<sup>14</sup> In this light, the teachings of the saints are part of the *intellectus fidei*, to the extent that they are an interpretation of Scripture. The same Pontiff adds: “In striving to learn from their example, we set out on the sure way towards a living and effective hermeneutic of the word of God.”<sup>15</sup>

The saints’ teaching regarding Scriptures is both an interpretation (or understanding) of them, and at the same time a source of interpretation (or understand-

10. Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 26.

11. *Ibid.*, no. 27.

12. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, no. 65.

13. See Fernando Ocariz, *Teologia sistemática ed esegesi bíblica*, Var. authors. (M. Sodi ed.), *Il metodo teologico. Tradizione, innovazione, comunione in Cristo*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2008, p. 62.

14. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, September 30, 2010, no. 48.

15. *Ibid.*, no. 49.

ing). Benedict XVI stressed that “every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God,”<sup>16</sup> and then cited the example of a number of saints, among these “St. Josemaría Escrivá in his preaching of the universal call to holiness.”<sup>17</sup> It is this dual sense—not only as an interpretation but also as a source of interpretation—that St. Thomas has in mind when he says, following St. Augustine: “*dicta et praecepta sacrae Scripturae ex factis sanctorum interpretari possunt et intelliguntur, cum idem Spiritus Sanctus qui inspiravit prophetis et aliis sacrae Scripturae auctoribus, moverit sanctos ad opus.*”<sup>18</sup>

Tradition, inseparable from Scripture and the Church’s Magisterium,<sup>19</sup> is also an irreplaceable source for theology. This Tradition is not passed on by mere repetition, but rather it is a living reality that, as the Second Vatican Council explains, (while transmitting only what has been received) “develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers, who treasure these things in their hearts (cf. *Lk* 2:19, 51) through a penetrating understanding of the spiritual realities which they experience, and through the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore the Fathers of the Church are not the only witnesses to Tradition, although they do have a special importance because of their antiquity (proximity to the Source), sanctity and depth of teaching.

The entire Church in every age transmits all that she is and all that she believes.<sup>21</sup> Within the Church, the saints are important witnesses to Tradition, as we read in this passage from the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: “In the lives of those who, sharing in our humanity, are however more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 3:18), God vividly manifests his presence and his face to men. He speaks to us in them, and gives us a sign of his Kingdom, to which we are strongly drawn, having so great a cloud of witnesses over us (cf. *Heb* 12:1) and such a witness to the truth of the Gospel.”<sup>22</sup>

The saints, with the exception of the Fathers of the Church, were not considered among the *loci theologici* in the famous work by Melchior Cano<sup>23</sup> which, for that matter, does not try to be exhaustive (for example, it does mention the liturgy or sacred art as theological “sites”). Nevertheless, from the previous reflections I think we can say that the teaching of the saints (not

16. *Ibid.*, no. 48.

17. *Ibid.*

18. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ev. Ioannis*, c. 18, lect. 4.

19. See Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, no. 10.

20. *Ibid.*, no. 8.

21. See *ibid.*

22. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 50.

23. See Cyrille Michon, “*Luoghi teologici*,” in Jean-Yves Lacoste (dir.), *Dizionario critico di Teologia*, Città Nuova, Rome 2005, p. 786; Karl J. Becker, Presentation, in Melchior Cano, *De locis theologicis* (ed. Juan Belda

only their words but also their deeds) are a *locus theologicus*, a “site” from which theologians can draw lights to help them penetrate more deeply into Revelation, and in which the circularity and inseparability between *auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei* is clearly seen. Moreover, we also need to keep in mind that Vatican II stressed the importance of viewing theology’s purpose in light of its service to man’s salvation, and thus to sanctity.<sup>24</sup> In any case, in viewing the saints as a true “theological site,”<sup>25</sup> “it is important to know not just the loci but also their relative weight and the relationship between them.”<sup>26</sup> How, then, should the teachings of the saints be used in the work of theology? Obviously not in the same way in every case. In general, from the above discussion it should be clear that the deeper understanding of God given to us by the saints cannot be reduced to confirming what has already been achieved by the science of theology, nor to a possible and undisputed point of departure for a specific argument. The saints offer not only conclusions or arguments in the realm of the *intellectus fidei*, but frequently also new insights on aspects of Revelation that for the theologian will form part of the *auditus fidei*.

### 3. St. Josemaría and Theology

I think it is opportune to point out here that, while St. Josemaría possessed an excellent theological formation, this is not the principal reason why he is a source of inspiration for theology. The origin of his possibility to influence theology in a deep and broad way, which I will discuss below, is tied to the supernatural charism of the foundational light regarding Opus Dei that he received on October 2, 1928.<sup>27</sup> But we should also note that his awareness of the ecclesial importance of the charism he had received never led St. Josemaría to undervalue the specifically “scientific” dimension of theology. In fact, during his entire life, and thus also in the most intense moments of his mystical experience, he turned to the science of theology as nourishment for his own spiritual life.<sup>28</sup>

St. Josemaría did not publish any academic treatises or systematic works, with the exception of the theological-juridical study *La Abadesa de Las Huelgas*. As is well known, almost all of his published writings, translated into many languages and with a circulation of more than five million copies, are collections of

Plans), BAC, Madrid 2006, p. XVII; Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, “Teología de los santos vs. Teología de la santidad. Una hipótesis de trabajo,” in *Scripta Theologica* 43 (2011) p. 606.

24. Vatican II, Decree *Optatam Totius*, no. 16; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Veritatis*, May 24, 1990, no. 7.

25. See Piero Coda, “La santità come luogo teologico,” /var, authors, *Il martirologio romano. Teologia, liturgia, santità*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2004, p. 40.

26. International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria*, November 29, 2011, no. 20.

27. See José Luis Illanes, “Dos de octubre de 1928. Alcance y significado de una fecha,” in Var. authors, Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei, Pamplona, 2nd ed. 1985, pp. 65-107.

28. See Fernando Ocariz, “El Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Teología,” in *Scripta Theologica* 26 (1994) pp. 977-991.

homilies and other texts of spirituality, aimed in a direct and lively way at helping readers make progress in their Christian life. These writings include collections of points for meditation (*The Way, Furrow, The Forge*), reflections on the mysteries of the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross, etc. In addition, in his still unpublished writings (which St. Josemaría called Instructions and Letters), he sets forth in a similarly direct and lively manner and without seeking to be systematic, the precise features of his teaching in the light of the charism received from God, with frequent historical references.

We are not dealing, then, with texts of systematic theology. Nevertheless, when referring to the published homilies (though his words are also relevant for all of St. Josemaría works), the soon to be blessed Alvaro del Portillo wrote that they are characterized by “their theological depth . . . Note, for example, how the author comments on the Gospel. He never simply brings it in for show or in a hackneyed way. Each verse has been meditated frequently and yields new aspects . . . A second characteristic is the immediate connection the homilies establish between the Gospel teaching and the life of the ordinary Christian.”<sup>29</sup>

St. Josemaría’s inspirational value for theological studies extends to many areas of theology. Cornelio Fabro wrote that St. Josemaría has “the spirit of a Father of the Church.”<sup>30</sup> His teachings are always centered on Christian life, also when he includes explicit references to its dogmatic foundations, doing so often in a novel way. For example, his quite original and apparently paradoxical way of referring to the *kenosis* of the eternal Word: “God humbles himself to the point of becoming man, and in doing so does not feel degraded for having taken on flesh like ours, with all its limitations and weaknesses, sin alone excepted . . . He does not lower himself by his self-emptying.”<sup>31</sup> We are offered here, not a paradox, but an insight to develop theologically: the “self-emptying” of God, who takes on a nature that on its own and without him would be nothing, is combined with the reality that this very humanity of Christ is the peak and perfection of creation; all of creation is ordered towards Christ’s humanity, united without confusion to the divine nature in the unity of his Person, as St. Paul words to the Colossians make clear (cf. Col 1:16).<sup>32</sup>

St. Josemaría’s writings contain many profound teachings that can serve as an inspiration for theology. For example, the universal call to holiness and

29. Álvaro del Portillo, “Presentation” to *Christ is Passing By*, op. cit., pp. 10-11. Regarding the use of Sacred Scripture in the works of St Josemaría, See in particular Salvatore Garofalo, “Il valore perenne del Vangelo,” in Cornelio Fabro – Salvatore Garofalo – M.A. Raschini, *Santi nel mondo. Studi sugli scritti del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Ares, Milano 1992, pp. 156-193. See also Santiago Ausín, “La lectura de la Biblia en las “Homilías” del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer,” in *Scripta Theologica* 25 (1993) pp. 191-220.

30. Cornelio Fabro, “La temprá di un Padre della Chiesa,” in Fabro – Garofalo – M.A. Raschini, *Santi nel mondo. Studi sugli scritti del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., pp. 22-155.

31. Saint Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 178.

32. See Ernst Burkhardt – Javier Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, vol. II, Rialp, Madrid 2011, pp. 51-53.



apostolate; the Christian meaning of temporal activities as the material and place for sanctification and apostolate; the laity's identity and mission within the Church; the centrality of divine filiation in the life of the faithful and their identification with Christ; the Holy Mass as the center and root of Christian life; the sanctification of work and the possibility of contemplation in the midst of professional, family and social activities; the relationship between the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood; unity of life; the original goodness of the world and the understanding of history, after original sin, as the process of redirecting all creation to God; etc.<sup>33</sup> As is well known, with regard to some of these topics—especially the universal call to holiness and the laity's identity and mission within the Church—many people (among whom we should first mention the soon to be St. John Paul II) have pointed to the Founder of Opus Dei as a precursor of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>34</sup> The influence of St. Josemaría in Vatican II has already been amply dealt with in the presentation given by Bishop Javier Echevarría.

#### 4. The Christological roots of the teachings of St. Josemaría

The above-mentioned aspects are intimately interconnected and each contains new lights to develop. Since it is impossible to deal exhaustively with all of them here, I will try to show how St. Josemaría's vision of their common theological root imbues them with unity and thus a particular inspirational force for theology. Lying at the root of all his teachings is a profound contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. St. Josemaría's Christocentrism presents "a deeply coherent vision. From whichever vantage point it is perceived—divine filiation, unity of life, identification with Christ, Jesus' example for us as true God and true man—the essential content of this spiritual message remains the same: the life of prayer and the sanctification of work, the universal call to sanctity and the effort to co-redeem with Christ. But rather than speaking of different vantage points, it would be better to speak of understanding Christian life from one vantage point: Christ himself and the mystery of his Incarnation, seen in parallel lines of inquiry."<sup>35</sup>

As the Pontifical decree on the heroic virtues of St. Josemaría states: "His vivid perception of the mystery of the Incarnation made him see how supernatural life

33. For a study on these topics carried out principally from the point of view of spiritual theology, see the three volume work of Ernst Burkhardt – Javier Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, *op. cit.*

34. See John Paul II, Address, August 19, 1979, in *Teachings of John Paul II*, 2 (1979) p. 142; Homily in the Mass of Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, May 17, 1992 and Address, May 18, 1992, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 18/19, 1992, pp. 4-5 and 6. See also Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, "Decree on the heroic virtue of the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá," April 9, 1990, in AAS 82 (1990) pp. 1450-1455

35. Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, "*Perfectus Deus, perfectus homo: The Mystery of the Incarnation and its Exemplarity for Christian Life in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*" in *Romana* 25 (1997) p. 379. See also Joaquín Paniello, "*En torno al núcleo de la mirada cristológica de S. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*," in *Annales Theologici* 18 (2004) pp. 449-468.

penetrates all human realities in the heart of a person reborn in Christ. These realities thus become the setting for holiness and the means to that goal.”<sup>36</sup>

Above all, St. Josemaría contemplates Christ as the revelation of God. We can certainly attain knowledge of God without explicit reference to Jesus. But it is only in the mystery of Christ that the supreme mystery of the Trinity is revealed: He who has seen me has seen the Father (*Jn* 14:9). St. Josemaría expresses this core Christian truth in many ways, but I have always found special light in his words on the human actions of Christ: “All this human behavior is the behavior of God . . . Everything Christ did has a transcendental value. It shows us God’s way of being and beckons us to believe in the love of God who created us and wants us to share his intimate life.”<sup>37</sup>

The consideration that Christ’s humanity shows us “God’s way of being” offers theology a light-filled perspective that needs to be developed and studied more deeply with the assistance of metaphysics. By recognizing with St. Thomas the unity of Christ’s act of being, we contemplate his human nature as the human way of being of the divine Person, which renders visible his divine way of being, to which it is united without confusion.<sup>38</sup> Any deeper understanding, therefore, of the humanity of Christ—his words, reactions, emotions, actions—speaks to us of how God is.

The reality that “God is Love” (*1 Jn* 4:8) is central to Christian life, and it is in Christ that God’s love for us becomes fully manifest. To know Christ’s love in faith is to know God, along with the unity of the divine plan of creation and redemption—not only the forgiveness of sins but also participation in the divine intimacy. St. Josemaría always viewed this participation in a Christological light. Christ is the Redeemer and the Sanctifier with his Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Moreover, our supernatural elevation makes us children of God in Christ, as theology and also the Magisterium of the Church have been reminding us now for a number of years. Thus, for example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: “We can invoke God as ‘Father’ because he is revealed to us by his Son become man and because his Spirit makes him known to us. The personal relation of the Son to the Father is something that man cannot conceive of nor the angelic powers even dimly see: and yet, the Spirit of the Son grants a participation in that very relation to us who believe that Jesus is the Christ and that we are born of God.”<sup>39</sup>

St. Josemaría, in continuity with the best theological tradition, and in particular with the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, considers our divine

36. Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, “Decree on the heroic virtue of the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá,” April 9, 1990, in AAS 82 (1990) p. 1451.

37. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 109.

38. See Fernando Ocariz – Lucas F. Mateo-Seco – Jose Antonio Riestra, *The Mystery of Jesus Christ*, (Four Courts Press, 2011), pp. 104-118.

39. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2780.



filiation as a participation in the Filiation of Christ: “Through baptismal grace we become children of God. As a result of this free divine decision, the natural dignity of man is elevated in an incomparable way. And although sin destroyed this marvelous reality, the Redemption re-established it in an even more marvelous way, enabling us to share more intimately in the divine filiation of the Word.”<sup>40</sup> The expression “more intimately” shows that St. Josemaría regards the Incarnation not only as a “means” for granting us adoptive divine filiation (with which one could then dispense, like a bridge once it has been crossed), but also and above all as the very purpose of God’s plan, which is to recapitulate all things in Christ (cf. *Eph* 1:10). Thus when we say that we are “sons in the Son,” we mean to say “in Christ,” united to him through his Humanity.

In the teaching of St. Josemaría, adoptive divine filiation is a participation in the incarnate and redemptive Filiation, a participation in the Word made flesh, a participation in Christ. This participation entails an identification with him not confined to the moral order (to sharing in Jesus’ feelings, etc.), but rather that belongs more radically to the ontological, metaphysical order. This means not only a likeness with and causal dependence on Christ, but also the very presence in the Christian of Christ, the Word incarnate. Certainly, the presence of our Lord’s humanity in us is not a substantial presence, as in the Eucharist, but it is a truly operative presence of his most holy and glorified Humanity that transcends space and time. We can be helped to understand this reality more fully by a deeper understanding of the mystery of grace, through which we come to share in the fullness of the grace of Christ’s humanity.<sup>41</sup>

St. Josemaría often spoke of this reality, insisting that each Christian is by grace, and ought to be ever more so, not only *alter Christus* but *ipse Christus*.<sup>42</sup> The forcefulness he attached to this expression did not have its origin in theological speculation, but rather in contemplation, above all to an event, in 1931, when God made him experience his divine filiation in an extraordinarily forceful way. Years later, St. Josemaría recalled it thus: “When God dealt me those blows, back in 1931, I couldn’t understand it. And then suddenly, in the midst of all that immense bitterness, came these words: You are my son (*Ps* 2:7), you are Christ. And all I could say was: *Abba, Pater! Abba, Pater! Abba! Abba! Abba!* And now I see it all with new light, like a new discovery, as with the passage of the years one sees the hand of God, of divine Wisdom, of the Almighty. You, Lord, have made me understand that to have the Cross means finding happiness, joy. And the reason, I now see more

40. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Letter March 19, 1967, no. 93.

41. See Fernando Ocariz, *Natura, grazia e gloria*, Edusc, Roma, 2001, pp. 104-106.

42. See, for example, *Christ is Passing By*, nos. 8, 11, 96, 104, 107, 115, 120, 121, 183, 185. On the Christian as *ipse Christus* in the thought of St. Josemaría, see Burkhart – Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 78-95.

clearly than ever, is this: to have the Cross means to be identified with Christ, to be Christ, and therefore a son of God.”<sup>43</sup>

Many lights emerge from this text, not only regarding divine filiation as identification with Christ, but also regarding the Christological nature of the meaning of suffering and the relationship between suffering and joy, etc. Here I would like to reflect briefly on the relationship between the Christian as *ipse Christus* and another central aspect of St. Josemaría’s teaching: the positive evaluation of the world and the greatness of ordinary life. “When we strive to be really *ipse Christus*, Christ himself, then in our own lives the human side intermingles with the divine. All our efforts, even the most insignificant, take on an eternal dimension, because they are united to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.”<sup>44</sup> The Incarnation of God in Christ is not only the efficient cause but also the exemplary cause of Christian life, where there takes place, in “all our efforts,” the union without confusion of the divine and human.

St. Josemaría insists: “Nothing can be foreign to Christ’s care. If we enter into the theology of it instead of limiting ourselves to functional categories, we cannot say that there are things—good, noble or indifferent—which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and death . . . We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam’s sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.”<sup>45</sup>

The concept “worldly” is not univocal. In St. Josemaría’s mind, “not being exclusively worldly” does not mean “being sacred,” but rather being an occasion and means of an encounter with Christ, because “there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations,”<sup>46</sup> which fully retain their natural, secular make-up. This “something divine” that St. Josemaría challenges each person to discover<sup>47</sup> is the presence of God, of Christ, in all created realities, which subsist in him and are ordered to him (cf. *Col* 1:16-17). It is also the plan of divine Providence which, in each situation, is the expression of God’s love for us.<sup>48</sup> “Children by adoption,” says St. Josemaría. That is, having become *ipse Christus*, and therefore capable of carrying out the works of Christ: to free the

43. St. Josemaría Escrivá, Meditation, April 28, 1963, (cited in Ocariz, *Natura, grazia, e gloria*, op. cit., p. 176).

44. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way of the Cross*, Tenth Station, no. 5.

45. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 112; see no. 120.

46. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations*, no. 114.

47. See *Ibid.*

48. See Ernst Burkhardt - Javier Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, cit., vol. III, pp. 56-63.

world from disorder and to reconcile it with God, through all honest human realities, and especially through sanctified work. In Christ's life here on earth, also in the years spent in Nazareth, work and prayer were fused in the union of the divine and human in his divine Person. The more each Christian becomes *ipse Christus*, the more he or she can unite prayer and work in daily life, transforming work into prayer and thereby sanctifying the work itself; and by sanctifying work one becomes more and more deeply *ipse Christus*. Transforming work and all human realities into prayer is the way we can truly pray always (*Lk* 18:1; cf. *1 Thess* 5:17).

St. Josemaría explained the sanctification of work in many ways and with many nuances.<sup>49</sup> In the context of the positive evaluation of the world and ordinary life, we can cite these words of his: "The true Christian, who acts according to his faith, always has his sights set on God. His outlook is supernatural. He works in this world of ours, which he loves passionately; he is involved in all its challenges, but all the while his eyes are fixed on heaven."<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere he says that being both in heaven and on earth is made possible by being children of God, and therefore being *ipse Christus*, being both human and divine ("divine," obviously, by participation): "If we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realize that God wants us to be very human. Our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground."<sup>51</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The inspirational impetus for theology contained in St. Josemaría's teachings varies according to the specific topics dealt with, but it is grounded ultimately in their Christological root. The mystery of Christ is the light that reveals ever anew that God is Love, that filiation is identification with Christ, that earthly realities, including work and all of ordinary life are a place and means of union with God. Furthermore, we can also say that St. Josemaría, in light of the mystery of the Incarnation, sees the Church as Christ who makes himself present in history with his word and his sacraments—the sacraments being the "footprints" left by our Lord on this earth of ours. And he sees the identity of the priest as that of Jesus Christ.

On these and many other topics, St. Josemaría's teachings do not merely contain particular interpretations that fall within the ambit of the *intellectus fidei*, but also lights that open up new perspectives, and therefore that pertain rather to the *auditus fidei*, in the mutual interdependence between *auditus fidei* and *intellectus fidei* that we mentioned above.

49. See, for example, Javier Echevarría, *Paths to God*, Scepter Publishers, 2010, pp. 104-109; José Luis Illanes, *The Sanctification of Work*, Scepter Publishers; Burkhart - Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, cit., vol. III, pp. 134-221.

50. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God*, no. 206.

51. *Ibid.*, no. 75.

The Christological root that illumines and confers unity on the many topics covered in St. Josemaría's teaching gives rise to a spirit of Christian life marked by unity of life,<sup>52</sup> centered on Christ as the path to the Father in the Holy Spirit. And as he always stresses, Mary, the Mother of Christ, is the Mother of all those who, by grace, become *ipse Christus*.

52. On unity of life in St. Josemaría, see Ignacio de Celaya, "Unidad de vida y plenitud cristiana," in Fernando Ocariz – Ignacio de Celaya, *Vivir como hijos de Dios*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2000, 5th ed., pp. 93-128; Ernst Burkhardt - Javier Lopez, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, cit., vol. III, pp. 617-653.