

THE CHARISM OF THE FOUNDER OF OPUS DEI

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Summary: I. Ecclesial charisms - III. The Universal Call to Holiness - III. Theological elements involved in the universal call to holiness: work, divine filiation, the Cross - IV. The charismatic and human character of the message of Blessed Josemaría - V. How was this message and conviction implanted in the mind and heart of Blessed Josemaría - VI. Forged by the Spirit - VII. Conclusion.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (1902-1975) considered October 2nd, 1928, as the day when his true life began. On that day, during a retreat he was doing in Madrid, he "saw" Opus Dei. That was the way he always described the event that took place on the feast of the Guardian Angels seventy two years ago: he did not dream up Opus Dei, nor did he make up his mind to found it, nor did he get together with other people to draw up its statutes and rules.¹ «On that occasion», he said, «Jesus moved into my soul with an act of authority». ²

¹ In the words of Msgr. Javier Echevarría, the present Prelate of Opus Dei, who worked side by side with Blessed Josemaría for more than twenty years: «El Fundador no concibió el propósito de fundar el Opus Dei. El Señor le hizo ver la Obra el 2 de octubre de 1928, cuando se encontraba haciendo unos ejercicios espirituales (...) Fue, pues, una inspiración que el Señor transmitió exclusivamente al Siervo de Dios. Por lo tanto, no fue una idea que concibió por su cuenta, ni tampoco un proyecto nacido con la participación de otras personas», in VP 296, note 113. The abbreviation "VP" refers to the recent biography of A. VAZQUEZ DE PRADA, *El Fundador del Opus Dei*, vol. 1: *¡Señor que vea!*, Rialp, Madrid 1997, which I have used extensively in this study.

² Jesus «se metía con ese acto de autoridad en el alma» Letter 9-I-1932, n. 9, in VP 295, note 109.

Blessed Josemaría was indeed the Founder of Opus Dei. Yet he always felt reluctant about calling himself a Founder. And not only out of *humility*. «I am a Founder with no foundations», he repeated.³ Sometimes he quipped: «the best Founder I know is in a bottle»,⁴ speaking of a popular, not very expensive, kind of Spanish brandy (“Fundador”). He was uncomfortable about calling himself the Founder of Opus Dei⁵ for he was keenly aware that its “birth” was not his doing.⁶ «On that day», he said, «Our Lord founded his Work, he brought Opus Dei into existence».⁷ He saw it as a gift of God, a work of God, *Opus Dei*, and, as if to clarify what this meant in saying so, he added that it was *operatio Dei*, God’s action, God’s doing, God’s own work. That is also why he used the term “to see” Opus Dei when speaking of that occasion. And that is why the title

³ He termed himself as a «Fundador sin fundamento» *Instruction* 19.3.1934, n. 11, note 13.

⁴ «El mejor *Fundador* que conozco está embotellado», cited by J.L. SORIA, *Maestro de buen humor*, Rialp, Madrid 1993², p. 122.

⁵ He resisted founding anything, since the idea of «comenzar una nueva fundación podría ser por soberbia, por un deseo de eternizarse» *Letter* 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966, n. 17, in VP 317 f. «Sabéis qué aversión he tenido siempre a ese empeño de algunos —cuando no está basado en razones muy sobrenaturales, que la Iglesia juzga— por hacer nuevas fundaciones. Me parecía —y me sigue pareciendo— que sobraban fundaciones y fundadores: veía el peligro de una especie de *psicosis de fundación*, que llevaba a crear cosas innecesarias por motivos que consideraba ridículos» *Letter* 9-I-1932, in VP 318.

⁶ «Y llegó el 2 de octubre de 1928. Yo hacía unos días de retiro, porque había que hacerlos, y fue entonces cuando vino al mundo el Opus Dei» *Meditation* 14.2.1946, in VP 296. «Rompió la Obra en el mundo, aquel 2 de octubre de 1928» *Meditation* 2.10.1962 in *ibid*. During its first months Opus Dei had «una vida de gestación, nonnata, pero activísima» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 179, in VP 330. «La Obra crecía para dentro, nonnata, en gestación: sólo había apostolado personal» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 164 in VP 330. «La O. de D. no nacerá perfecta. Nacerá como un niño. Débil, primero. Después, comienza a andar. Habla, luego, y obra por su cuenta. Se desarrollan todas sus facultades. La adolescencia. La virilidad. La madurez... Nunca tendrá la O. de D. decrepitud: siempre viril en sus ímpetus, y prudente, audazmente prudente, vivirá en una eterna sazón, que le ha de dar el estar identificada con Jesús, cuyo Apostolado va a hacer hasta el fin» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 409, in VP 582 f.

⁷ «Ese día, el Señor fundó su Obra, suscitó el Opus Dei» *Apuntes íntimos*, 306, in VP 296. «Y el Señor dio luz a los ojos del ciego —a pesar de él mismo (del ciego)— y anuncia la venida de un ser con entraña divina, que dará a Dios toda la gloria y afirmará su Reino para siempre» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 290, in VP 303. Already in Logroño, Blessed Josemaría had the presentiment of something which was to stay forever in me and for me in me» *Letter* 25-V-1962,

given to this paper is not fortuitous: it deals with the founding “charism” of Opus Dei.

I. Ecclesial charisms

In common parlance, the term “charism” is used in widely differing ways, not uncommonly with considerable lack of precision. Three popular usages could be mentioned.

The term may evoke the figure of a “charismatic” figure, one whose every word and simplest gesture appears to be charged with an irresistible force to empower and direct the lives and actions of those who come under his influence. Such a person seems, as it were, to be “inspired” from beyond and above himself. Perhaps it is this hidden or suspected presence of a divine inspiring agent that ultimately facilitates acceptance of the person and the message they communicate.⁸

At times the term “charism” is employed to give expression to the freedom and spontaneity of the Spirit in contrast with the immobility and drudgery of nature and of civil or ecclesiastical institutions. The Spirit is perceived to be the source of novelty, life, creativity, renewal in the Church and in society, purging inertia, tedium, institutionalism, short-sightedness and egoism.⁹

In the last place, the term “charism” as applied to an ecclesial body or institution and defining its purpose and specificity, readily evokes two ideas. *First*, that the charism in question, insofar as in principle it derives directly from the Holy Spirit, must in some ways be untouchable, sacred and unchangeable, and as a result respected

⁸ The sociologist Max Weber takes the terms “charism” and the “charismatic” in a purely sociological sense as referring to any kind of spiritual force capable of providing coherent and effective leadership: cf. M. WEBER, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*, vol. 3, Tübingen 1921.

⁹ On the possible tensions that can exist between “institution” and “charism”, cf. E. CORECCO, *Istituzione e carisma*, in *Das konsoziative Element in der Kirche. Akten des VI. Internationalen Kongresses für kanonisches Recht* (1987), ed. W. AYMANS, EOS, St. Ottilien 1989, pp. 79-98 (Eng. tr., in E. CORECCO, *Canon Law and Communio. Writings on the Constitutional Law of the Church*, add. G. BORGONOVIS - A. CATTANEO, Ed. Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1992, pp. 316-42).

by all in the Church. *Second*, and inseparably, that the specific *content* of the charism should correspond to a well defined particular aspect of the Church's wider mission, for example, that of looking after the poor, spreading devotion to a particular saint, teaching the young.

All three understandings of the term "charism" just mentioned, though helpful to some degree, do not express its full import. For a "charism" (from χάρις gift), in the theological sense, is *a special gift of the Holy Spirit destined for the common good of the whole Church*.¹⁰ In general terms it may be said that all grace is "charismatic", in that it derives from the action of the Holy Spirit and is directed towards the good of the *individual* Christian, and sooner or later to that of the whole Church. Yet certain "graces" are termed *charisms* in the strict sense not so much because they are present in the "everyday" sanctification of the members of the Body of Christ, but insofar as they constitute, to a greater or lesser degree, *a light and power* with which Christians *as a whole* can perceive and understand their faith and Christian life in greater depth, and thus communicate it more effectively to others.

All the members of the Christ's faithful may receive charisms for the edification of the People of God.¹¹ Bishops, certainly, in union with the Roman Pontiff and the Episcopal College, enjoy the charism of infallibility in teaching Christian doctrine.¹²

Although it should be obvious, it may be noted that the authority and ultimate value of a "charism" does not derive so much from the inner consistency or vibrancy of the message being communicated, or from its tangible efficacy, but directly from the action/initia-

¹⁰ «Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of man and to the needs of the world» *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 799; cf. *ibid.*, n. 2003. On charisms in general cf. for example J.V.-M. POLLET, *Les charismes*, in AA.Vv., *Initiation théologique*, vol. 3: *Théologie morale*, Cerf, Paris 1955, pp. 1081-1108. On the history and theological meaning of the term, cf. D. GRASSO, *I carismi nella Chiesa: teologia e storia*, Queriniana, Brescia 1982. Cf. also: N. SILANES, *La Iglesia de la Trinidad: la Santísima Trinidad en el Vaticano II: estudio genético-teológico*, Secretariado Trinitario, Salamanca 1981, especially pp. 425-34; E. CORECCO, *Carisma*, in *Digesto delle Discipline Pubbliciste*, vol. 2, UTET, Torino 1987, pp. 504-8 (Ed. tr. in E. CORECCO, *Canon Law and Communio...* cit., pp. 297-306).

¹¹ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Const. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 12; Decr. *Apostolicam Actu-*

Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

Os titulare, n. 3.

tive of the Trinity. Blessed Josemaría claimed quite openly that the spirit of Opus Dei was inspired by God. As a result, the question must be asked: how can it be *verified* that the alleged “charism” is in reality the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit? This is the question that will be the object this study: it will not offer a prayerful reflection on the life of Blessed Josemaría, nor a historical account of the founding of Opus Dei, nor an explanation of its spirit and place in the Church. It offers something quite specific: a critical theological reflection on whether or not what Blessed Josemaría “saw” on October 2nd, 1928, was a genuine founding charism.¹³

Of course the *content* of the charism at the heart of the apostolic work Blessed Josemaría founded is well known: all Christians, whatever their state in life, are called to the fullness of Christian life, what may be termed the doctrine of “the universal call to holiness”. The Church in fact had never taught openly that *all Christians* are called to holiness, among other reasons because nobody had ever really denied it, at least in formal terms. Doubtless the fact that the universal call to holiness was eventually taught in solemn terms by Vatican Council II¹⁴ can be seen as providential, not only in the context of facilitating the ecclesial approval of the charism of the Founder of Opus Dei,¹⁵ but in overcoming a kind of popular disdain towards the possibility of acquiring holiness in the middle of the world in the first place.¹⁶ In practice many considered the call to holiness to be reserved to priests and the consecrated.

Blessed Josemaría of course did not put forward the universal call to holiness as a mere *message*, which might be reflected upon and gradually assimilated in an academic or institutional context.¹⁷

¹³ Cf. the study of J.L. ILLANES, *Dos de octubre de 1928: alcance y significado de una fecha*, in Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei. En el 50 aniversario de su fundación, edd. P. RODRIGUEZ - P.G. ALVES DE SOUSA - J.M. ZUMAQUERO, EUNSA, Pamplona 1982, pp. 65-107.

¹⁴ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Const. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 39-42 (chapter 5).

¹⁵ For testimonies of eminent Churchmen who held that Blessed Josemaría prepared the way for the conciliar declaration, cf. J.L. ILLANES, *Dos de octubre de 1928: alcance y significado de una fecha*, op. cit., p. 65, note 2.

¹⁶ Cf. J.L. ILLANES, *La santificación del trabajo*, Palabra, Madrid 1981¹⁸.

¹⁷ «La Obra no viene a innovar nada, ni mucho menos a reformar nada en la Iglesia (...) A la vuelta de tantos siglos, quiere el Señor servirse de nosotros para que todos los cris-

He was deeply convinced that the whole meaning of his life and eternal vocation lay in the day-to-day *promotion* of that message; «heaven is bent on it being carried out», he said to the early members of Opus Dei, obviously giving expression to his personal experience and drive.¹⁸ But how can this be verified? How can it be established that the need to disseminate the message of the universal call to holiness actively springs from a true gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, a charism?

Three criteria of charism discernment are generally accepted.¹⁹

First, personal or subjective discernment. The so-called “fruits” of the Holy Spirit, as listed by saint Paul towards the end of the letter to the Galatians (Gal 5:22), are well known. Their presence is highly indicative of the Spirit’s presence and action in the person who claims to have received a special charism. The holiness of life of such a person, the degree of persevering heroism with which they live the virtues, their firm decision to do the will of God are all critical here, as is their refined, supernatural obedience to and respect for the legitimate authorities of the Church.

tianos descubran, al fin, el valor santificador y santificante de la vida ordinaria —del trabajo profesional— y la eficacia del apostolado de la doctrina con el ejemplo, la amistad y la confidencia» *Letter 9-I-1932*, n. 91, in VP 568.

¹⁸ Blessed Josemaría drove home the following message to the first members of the Work: «1) *La Obra de Dios viene a cumplir la voluntad de Dios*. Por tanto, tened una profunda convicción de que el cielo está empeñado en que se realice. 2) Cuando Dios Nuestro Señor proyecta alguna obra en favor de los hombres, piensa primeramente en las personas que ha de utilizar como instrumentos... y les comunica las gracias convenientes. 3) Esa convicción sobrenatural de la divinidad de la empresa acabará por daros un *entusiasmo y amor tan intenso por la Obra*, que os sentiréis dichosísimos sacrificándoos para que se realice» *Instruction 19.3.1934*, nn. 47-9, in VP 576.

¹⁹ The tradition of charism-discernment in the Church is very ancient. In the period after the New Testament it is common to retrace it, at least in explicit terms, to Saint Anthony, in his *Life*, nn. 35 f., in P.G. 26, 894 f. Cf. also Saint Bernard, *Sermo 33*, Card. de Bona, *De discretione spirituum*, cap. 6, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Exercitia spiritualia*, week 4. Cf. the summaries of R. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE, *Le tre età della vita interiore*, vol. 3, Vivere in, Roma 1984, pp. 295-303; Y.M.-J. CONGAR, *Credo nello Spirito Santo*, Queriniana, Brescia 1998), pp. 387-92; J.V.-M. POLLET, *Les charismes*, op. cit., pp. 1097-9, who summarises the criteria in question as follows: «On reconnaîtra donc le charismatique chrétien authentique à ces signes: la docilité à l’Esprit, le respect de la norme, le vif sentiment des exigences du bien commun, auxquelles l’exercice des charismes demeure subordonné» *ibid.*, p. 1099.

Second, ecclesial discernment. Unless the charism is received and accepted by the Church as such — by the hierarchy who approve it,²⁰ and by at least some of the faithful who make it their own²¹ — it would be difficult to claim that it is “for the good of the whole Church”.²²

Third, doctrinal or objective discernment. The content of the “charism” in question must be in keeping with the teaching of the Church, in particular with its Christology, anthropology, ecclesiology and ethics.²³ Fulfilment of this criterion, of course, does not guarantee the strictly charismatic quality of the teaching or way of life being propounded; it assures principally that the latter does not derive from the “evil spirit”.²⁴ In fact ecclesial charisms should not only reflect the teaching of the Church; they are also meant to *inspire and*

²⁰ «... Discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds. “Their office is not indeed to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things and to hold fast to what is good” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 12), so that all the good and complementary charisms work together (1 Cor 12:7)» *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 801. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Ap. Exhort. *Christifideles laici* (1988), n. 24.

²¹ «Objectivement... le phénomène charismatique... se manifeste par la qualité, spéciale elle aussi, du résultat obtenu: miracle (ordre physique); efficacité du témoignage ou de la prédication, fécondité de l'œuvre (ordre morale)» J.V.-M. POLLET, *Les charismes*, op. cit., p. 1095.

²² «Les charismes ordonnés pareillement à l'édition et au bien de l'ensemble de l'Église ne sauraient se contrarier l'un l'autre... C'est pour avoir enfreint cette règle et avoir oublié qu'ils n'étaient que des individualités au service du groupe chrétien, encore que magnifiquement douées, que les glossolales de Corinthe se sont vus rappelés à l'ordre par saint Paul. Le danger de l'individualisme mystique n'a pas disparu depuis» ibid., p. 1098.

²³ «Saint Paul lui-même, quand il aborde ce sujet, le fait en homme préoccupé avant tout de sauvegarder les valeurs morales authentiques... La pierre de touche de l'authenticité des charismes sera la foi véritable telle que l'Église en conserve le dépôt (cf. Rom 12,3)» ibid., pp. 1097 f. The action of the Holy Spirit cannot go “beyond” the saving work of Christ, nor for that matter as it were can it “fall behind” it: on the pneumatic aspect of all Christology and the Christological conditioning of pneumatology, cf. my study *L'agire dello Spirito Santo, chiave dell'escatologia cristiana*, in «Annales Theologici» 12 (1998), pp. 327-73, especially pp. 344-54.

²⁴ St Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* distinguished between three kinds of thought: our own, derived from pure intellect and will; and two others coming from beyond us, either from the evil spirit, or from the good spirit: cf. his *Exercitia spiritualia Sancti Patri Ignatii de Loyola* (Torino/Roma: Marietti 1928), ex. 32. On this cf. J. CLÉMENCE, *Le discernement des Jeux dans les exercices spirituels de Saint Ignace de Loyola*, in «Revue d'Actualité Marianiste» 27 (1952), pp. 347-75, in particular p. 348 f.

*promote Christian life and theological thought, and in that sense truly renew Church life and teaching.*²⁵

To these three criteria, one might usefully add a *fourth*, which might be termed "humanity". The "charism" in question should be fully human, very human. Popular misconceptions of the action of the Holy Spirit are often linked with mistaken perception of charisms as something marginal, exceptional, out-of-the-ordinary. The charism should be "human" in two ways: it must express a vision and way of life which falls *within the bounds* of concrete human possibility, and besides must be *authentically human*, capable of fulfilling and even surpassing the most noble aspirations of the human heart. To put it in another way, the charism must reflect integrally the dynamism of Christian charity, which necessarily involves the *acceptance* of others in their concrete reality,²⁶ along with an unreserved *generosity* towards them. Charity, according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers «the true measure of all charisms».²⁷ Besides, the Holy Spirit is the *Spiritus creator*, Creator, along with the Father and the Son, of every last shred of human existence. His extraordinary gifts or special charisms can hardly be out of tune with his everyday divinising action of gentle and incessant purification and illumination.²⁸

Each of the above criteria could be examined further, and applied in detail to the content and dynamic of the message of Blessed Josemaría, as well as to the human and ecclesial reality of vast proportions he set in motion. Such a study would not go beyond the *purpose* of this paper, though it would most certainly go beyond its *bounds*. Doubtless the first criterion is important in respect of the personal sanctity of the Founder of Opus Dei. The second one is

²⁵ On the theological and pastoral fruitfulness of ecclesial charisms, cf. U. BETTI, *La rivelazione divina nella Chiesa: la trasmissione della rivelazione nel capitolo II della costituzione dommatica Dei verbum*, Città Nuova, Roma 1970, pp. 229 f.; F. CIARDI, *I fondatori, uomini dello Spirito: per una teologia del carisma di fondatore*, Città Nuova, Roma 1982, pp. 144 ff.

²⁶ Notice the centrality of the notion of "man as the way of the Church" in all Pope John Paul II's teachings.

²⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 800.

²⁸ St Thomas Aquinas affirms that the charismatic phenomenon is as an aspect of a wider phenomenon of the action of the Holy Spirit in the universe, which includes the activ-

likewise critical and determinative: official approval and concrete acceptance of the message preached by Blessed Josemaría by many people of widely differing conditions in many ways dispenses with the rest.²⁹ The Church has already given its judgement in respect of both elements with the beatification of the Founder in 1992³⁰ and with the different stages of the juridical approval of Opus Dei leading to its erection as a Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church in 1982.³¹

In the coming pages however I intend to concentrate principally on the third and fourth criteria mentioned, referring as they do to the doctrinal propriety of the message and spirit lived and preached by Blessed Josemaría, centred on the promotion of the universal call to holiness, and, for want of a better word, its integral "humanity".³²

Besides, I intend to base this reflection mainly on Blessed Escrivá's personal testimony of God's grace and light (his *Apuntes íntimos* or *Catalinas*)³³ over the period which went from the foundation

²⁹ It should be added here that Blessed Josemaría sought confirmation of the divinity of his message from his confessor. Nearly two years after founding the Work Blessed Josemaría started spiritual guidance under Fr. Valentín Sánchez S.J., for he had nobody «a quien abrir el alma y comunicar en el fuero de la conciencia *aquellos* que Jesús me había pedido» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1864, in VP 331 f. Speaking of Fr. Sánchez, he says: «Entonces, despacio, comuniqué la Obra y mi alma. Los dos vimos en todo la mano de Dios. Quedamos en que yo le llevara unas cuartillas —un paquete de octavillas, era—, en las que tenía anotados los detalles de toda la labor. Se las llevé. El P. Sánchez se fue a Chamartín un par de semanas. Al volver, me dijo que la obra era de Dios y que no tenía inconveniente en ser mi confesor» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1864, in VP 332. Regarding the beginning of apostolic work with women, he also received confirmation from Fr. Sánchez: «esto es tan de Dios como lo demás», in *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1871, and *Meditation* 14.2.1964, in VP 323.

³⁰ Pope John Paul II counted him among the blessed on May 17th, 1992: cf. his apostolic letter in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 84 (1992) 1058-60.

³¹ Opus Dei was erected as a Personal Prelature of the Catholic Church on November 28th, 1982, with the apostolic constitution *Ut Sit*, in «Acta Apostolicae Sedis» 75 (1983) 423-5. For an account of the juridical history of Opus Dei, and for its statutes, cf. A. DE FUENMAYOR - V. GOMEZ-IGLESIAS - J.L. ILLANES, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei: the History and Defense of a Charism*, Scepter/ Midwest Theological Forum, Princeton NJ/ Chicago IL 1994.

³² I have already reflected on this question in the writings of Blessed Josemaría in respect of the theological virtue of hope: *La virtù della speranza e l'ascetica cristiana in alcuni scritti del Beato Josemaría Escrivá, Fondatore dell'Opus Dei*, in «Romana» 12 (1996), pp. 262-79.

³³ For an account of the role, history and content of Blessed Josemaría's *Apuntes íntimos*, cf. VP 325-422. See my introduction (n.) to the bilingual edition published by Edizioni Lumen Christi, Rome 2006.

in 1928 until the spring of 1932, and not so much on later testimonies and experiences of his own or of others, in other words from the time in which his spirit began to take on life and bear fruit in society and in the Church. In spite of the Founder's extensive apostolate over these four years,³⁴ the tangible results of his founding endeavour did not really begin to consolidate until the mid-1930's. Another reason for choosing this period of his life is that it was, to all appearances, one of extraordinary charismatic intensity. Over these years he seemed to have been *carried along* as it were by the grace of God, by the clarity and urgency of his mission,³⁵ inebriated with the Love of God and of souls.³⁶ Perhaps it could be added that whereas

las y que me servían de recuerdo y de despertador. Creo que, ordinariamente, mientras escribía con sencillez pueril, hacía oración» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1862, in VP 338. He called them his *Catalinas* on account of his devotion to St Catherine of Siena. Cf. VP 338. «Los santos resultan necesariamente unas personas incómodas, hombres o mujeres —¡mi santa Catalina di Siena!— que con su ejemplo y con su palabra son un continuo motivo de desasosiego, para las conciencias comprometidas con el pecado» *Letter 9-I-1932*, n. 73, in VP 338.

³⁴ «Desde el primer momento hubo una intensa actividad espiritual, y empecé a buscar vocaciones» *Letter 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966*, n. 90, in VP 315.

³⁵ 1.10.33: «Mañana, cinco años desde que vi la O. ¡Dios mío, cuánta cuenta me pedirás! ¡Qué falta de correspondencia a la gracia!» 6.10.33: «No pierdo la paz, pero hay ratos en que me parece que me va a explotar la cabeza, tantas cosas de gloria de Dios —su O.— bullen en mí, y tanta pena me da ver que no comienzan a cristalizarse todavía en algo tangible.» 18.10.33: «Me duele la cabeza. Sufro, por mi falta de correspondencia y porque no veo moverse a la O.» «Me tortura, hasta dolerme la cabeza, el pensamiento de que dejo incumplida esa Voluntad: 1/ por el desorden de mi vida interior (...) 2/ porque no atiendo —no llego, no puedo abarcar más— a los muchachos que han venido a nosotros, traídos por El» *Apuntes íntimos*, nn. 1055, 1057, 1065, 1732, respectively, in VP 506 f.

³⁶ Cf. chapter 6 of Vázquez de Prada's biography, op. cit., for a general overview of Blessed Josemaría's *Apuntes íntimos*. For example: «12.XII.931: Hoy me ha abierto Jesús el sentido, durante el rezo del Oficio divino, como pocas veces. En momentos, fue una borrachera» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 475, in VP 342. «A renglón seguido de la borrachera de Amor: ¡mis habituales tonterías!» ibid., n. 691. «Después de la Sta. Misa, hoy, en la acción de gracias y más tarde en la iglesia de los Capuchinos de Medinaceli, el Señor me ha inundado de gracias. Se cumplió lo del Salmo “inebriabuntur ab ubertate domus tuae: et torrente voluptatis tuae potabis eos”. Lleno de gozo con la Voluntad de Dios, siento que le he dicho con San Pedro: ecce reliqui omnia et secutus sum te. Y mi corazón se dio cuenta del “centuplum recipies”... Verdaderamente, he vivido el Evangelio del día» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 415, in VP 343, note 46. February 1932: «El sábado último me fui al Retiro, de doce y media a una y media (es la primera vez, desde que estoy en Madrid, que me permite ese lujo) y traté de

on October 2nd, 1928 he “saw” Opus Dei in full,³⁷ the principal elements of the founding charism’s theological profile did not come to be filled out in detail until the spring of 1932. Throughout this research, extensive use has been made of the first volume of Andrés Vázquez de Prada’s recent biography, *El Fundador del Opus Dei*,³⁸ which studies this period in depth.

II. The Universal Call to Holiness

The message of *the universal call to holiness* became a solid and immovable conviction for Blessed Josemaría on October 2nd, 1928. On that day, he said graphically, «the divine paths of the earth had been opened»,³⁹ and as a result, «from that moment onwards I knew no rest».⁴⁰ «Raising up the Work in those years, Our Lord has wished that the truth that all must be holy, should never more be ignored or forgotten, and that most Christians are meant to attain holiness in the world, through their ordinary work. For this reason, while men walk the earth, the Work will remain. The same phenom-

labios!» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 619, in VP 343. «Dije el otro día que hago poca oración [“y a destiempo” Blessed Josemaría added elsewhere], y he de rectificar o, mejor, explicar el concepto: no tengo orden —hago propósito de tenerlo, desde hoy—, no suelo hacer meditación (desde hoy también tendré una hora diaria), pero oración de afectos, muchos días, la estoy haciendo desde la mañana a la noche: claro, que algunos ratos, de un modo especial» *Apuntes íntimos*, nn. 317, 326, in VP 388. 11.3.1932: «Me veo inundado, borracho de gracia de Dios. ¡Qué grande pecado, si no correspondo! Hay momentos —hoy mismo— en que me vienen ganas de gritar: ¡Basta, Señor, basta!» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 653, in VP 418. The episode which recounts Blessed Josemaría’s realisation of his divine filiation is especially impressive in this regard: cf. VP 388 f. Cf. also *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 307, in VP 404 f.

³⁷ On October 2nd, «recibí la iluminación sobre toda la Obra...» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 306, in VP 293. «El 2 de octubre del 29 viene la idea clara general de mi misión» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 179, in VP 298.

³⁸ Cf. note 1 above.

³⁹ Blessed Josemaría often used the phrase «se han abierto los caminos divinos de la tierra» to express the pastoral and spiritual impact of October 2nd, 1928. Cf. for example *The Forge*, n. 553, *Christ is passing by*, n. 21, *Friends of God*, n. 314.

⁴⁰ «Desde ese momento no tuve tranquilidad alguna, y empecé a trabajar, de mala gana, porque me resistía a meterme a fundar nada» *Meditation* 2.10.1962, in S. BERNAL, *Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: apuntes sobre la vida del fundador del Opus Dei*, Rialp, Madrid 1977⁵, 111.

enon will always be found: people of all professions and walks of life who seek holiness in their state and situation, in that very profession or work, as contemplative souls in the middle of the world».⁴¹

In a letter to the members of Opus Dei dated a year and a half after the foundation, he said: «We have come to say, with the humility of one who knows he is a sinner and worth very little —*homo peccator sum* (*Luc. V, 8*), we repeat with Peter—, but with the faith of one who allows himself be guided by the hand of God, that holiness is not for the privileged ones: Our Lord calls us all; he awaits our Love: from all, wherever they are; from all, whatever state, profession or way of life they occupy. Because everyday, unspectacular, ordinary life can be the means towards holiness: unless Our Lord gives a soul a religious vocation, there is no need to abandon one's own state in the world to seek God, since all the ways of the earth can be an occasion of an encounter with Christ». ⁴²

The doctrine of the universal call to holiness is clearly contained in the Gospel and was unambiguously taught by Vatican Council II.⁴³ It is arguable that it may constitute the key interpretative doctrine of the Council.⁴⁴ Besides, its theological and pastoral

⁴¹ «Al suscitar en estos años su Obra, el Señor ha querido que nunca más se desconozca o se olvide la verdad de que todos deben santificarse, y de que a la mayoría de los cristianos les corresponde santificarse en el mundo, en el trabajo ordinario. Por eso, mientras haya hombres en la tierra, existirá la Obra. Siempre se producirá este fenómeno: que haya personas de todas las profesiones y oficios, que busquen la santidad en su estado, en esa profesión o en ese oficio suyo, siendo almas contemplativas en medio de la calle» *Letter 9-L-1932*, p. 92, in VP 304.

⁴² «Hemos venido a decir, con la humildad de quien se sabe pecador y poca cosa — homo peccator sum (*Luc.* V, 8), decimos con Pedro—, pero con la fe de quien se deja guiar por la mano de Dios, que la santidad no es cosa para privilegiados: que a todos nos llama el Señor, que de todos espera Amor: de todos, estén donde estén; de todos, cualquiera que sea su estado, su profesión o su oficio. Porque esa vida corriente, ordinaria, sin apariencia, puede ser medio de santidad: no es necesario abandonar el propio estado en el mundo, para buscar a Dios, si el Señor no da a un alma la vocación religiosa, ya que todos los caminos de la tierra pueden ser ocasión de un encuentro con Cristo» *Letter* 24-III-1930, n. 22, in VP 300.

⁴³ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Const. *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 39-42 (chapter 5).

⁴⁴ Pope Paul VI, in his "Motu Proprio" *Sanctitas clarior* (19.3.1969) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 61 (1969) 150 stated that the doctrine of the universal call to holiness was the chief teaching of Vatican II.

implications are surprisingly profound and far-reaching.⁴⁵ At least four aspects of the doctrine could be considered, all of which can be abundantly corroborated in the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei.⁴⁶

First, the doctrine of the universal call to holiness means that each person is "called" by God to a life of holiness; each and every human being receives an individual *vocation* to eternal communion with the Blessed Trinity (cf. Eph 1:3-14). This principle is at the root of the Christian understanding of the dignity of each and every human being,⁴⁷ which is of course the living centre of all Christian anthropology and ethics. This may be called the *subjective* dimension of the universality of God's call to holiness.

Second, it means that holiness is *proper* to and *possible* within all states, whether in the Church (priesthood, consecrated life and laity), or in society (women and men, rich and poor, healthy and sick, young and old). Ecclesial distinctions of one state or situation from another, therefore, do not relate to whether the search for Christian holiness is central, or secondary, or possible, or accessory, but rather to questions of an ecclesiological, apostolic, social or historical kind. For God does not in the first place call humans *to* particular "states", but rather to holiness *through* all particular states. This may be termed the *objective* dimension of the universal call to holiness.

sion of the Council (1985), II, a), 4. On the relationship between the universal call to holiness and the "holiness" of the Church, cf. my study, *The Holiness of the Church in «Lumen Gentium»*, in «The Thomist» 52 (1988) 673-701, especially pp. 678-83. Many of the papers delivered at the International Congress entitled "Attuazione del Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II", held at the Vatican City from 25-27 February, 2000, considered the call to holiness as a significant criterion for the interpretation of Council documents. Cf. R. FISICHELLA (ed.), *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Recezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2000.

⁴⁵ Pope Paul VI called Opus Dei «a sign of the perennial vitality of the Church» *Chirograph* of Paul VI, 1.10.1964, in AGP RHF-D15239. «Au niveau même de la race humaine, les charismes faciliteront la communication, non seulement d'homme à homme, mais d'une génération à l'autre» J.V.-M. POLLET, *Les charismes*, op. cit., p. 1097.

⁴⁶ Cf. F. OCARIZ, *The vocation to holiness in Christ and in the Church*, in «Holiness and the World. Studies in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá», ed. M. BELDA et al., Midwest Theological Forum, Chicago 1997, pp. 33-52, especially 39-44.

⁴⁷ On the link-up between the notion of vocation and person, cf. my study *La persona humana tra filosofía y teología*, in «Annales Theologici» 13 (1999) 71-105.

Third, as a consequence, the search for holiness is the very thing, and in a sense the *only* thing, that unites Christians, who are often designated “the saints” in the New Testament.⁴⁸ In other words, the reality of Christian holiness not only offers an assurance and expression of their *interior* liberty, but acts as a guarantee of their *exterior* freedom in society and in the Church, the «freedom of the glory of the children of God» (Rom 8:21). It may even be suggested that problems and conflicts within the Church and within society take a hold for the most part when the central message of the universal call to holiness is set aside.⁴⁹

Fourth and last, the doctrine of the universal call to holiness means that there can be *no objective obstacle* in the world or in man's own life and condition capable of blocking the power of God's sanctifying grace. In other words, holiness is a real possibility, not an abstract one. Nothing in the created order can *a priori* annul divine grace, since not only grace but *also the created order* is entirely God's work.

Each one of these areas could be taken separately and studied in detail. The ecclesiological, moral and social implications of the doctrine of the universal call to holiness are many and varied. Blessed Josemaría's preaching in many ways was and is like a breath of fresh air for the whole Church, indeed for society at large, certainly going beyond the institutional limits of the activities undertaken by the Prelature of Opus Dei.

Of the four areas mentioned, however, I wish to pay attention mainly to the last one. From the outset of Christianity, the revolutionary impetus of the new faith consisted in the very fact that the power of God, made present by the Holy Spirit in virtue of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in those who believe in Him, *can* save humankind from sin, death and enslavement of all kinds. In the context of their limited experience and particular cultures, yet moved by the Holy Spirit, Christians preached the liberating mes-

⁴⁸ For example, cf. Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1-2.7.14; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1.12; 13:12; Eph 1:1.15.18; 3,8.18; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:21.22; Col 1:1.2.4.22.26; 3:12; 1 Tm 5:10; Philem 5; Heb 3:1; 6:10; 13:24; 1 Pt 1:16.

⁴⁹ «Un secreto. —Un secreto, a voces: estas crisis mundiales son crisis de santos. —

Biblioteca Virtual Universitaria de Humanidades "Santísimo" y Opus Dei. —Dedicidad humana. —Después... "pax Christi in eis". —Chiribí, 2001. —Girón, 2001. —Girón, 2001. —Girón, 2001. —Girón, 2001.

sage of salvation, the Gospel or “Good News”, in straightforward and highly convincing terms. Often in the midst of a keen awareness of their limited talents and social influence, of their personal inadequacy and sinful inclinations, believers were joyfully convinced that “holiness is possible”: through God’s power and mercy, manifested in the incarnation of his Only Son and in the sending of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for any person to acquire holiness in the midst of the vicissitudes of this life. The witness of the New Testament and of so many periods of Church history — including our own — is a living proof of the fact.

At the start therefore of one’s acceptance of the doctrine of the universal call to holiness is to be found *a deep trust in God* who can fill humans with his love and grace, and in fact *wills* to do so. Let us examine how this spirit and conviction developed and consolidated in the mind and heart of Blessed Josemaría.

III. Theological elements involved in the universal call to holiness: work, divine filiation, the Cross

Of particular significance in the “filling out”, as it were, of the theological, spiritual and ascetical profile of the vision and spirit God confided to Blessed Josemaría on October 2nd, 1928, were a series of spiritual experiences over the years immediately following the foundation. Two particularly important ones took place during the second half of the year 1931.

On August 7th, 1931 the diocese of Madrid celebrated the feastday of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, the only bodily glorification of Jesus during his earthly sojourn that the canonical Gospels speak of. On that occasion, while celebrating the Eucharist, Blessed Josemaría had a singular experience.⁵⁰ «The time of the consecration came», he wrote. «At the moment I raised the Sacred Host... some words of Scripture came to my mind with extraordinary force and clarity: *et ego si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meip-*

⁵⁰ On this episode, cf. VP 380-4, and on its theological significance, P. RODRIGUEZ, *Omnia traham a meipsum. Il significato di Giovanni 12, 32 nell’esperienza spirituale di Juan Evangelista Palma*, in *Acta I Theologica* 6 (1992), 5-14.

sum: "when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all things to myself" (John 12:32 [Vulgata]). Normally, in the presence of the supernatural I am afraid. Then comes the *ne timeas*, "do not be afraid. It is I". And I understood that it would be the men and women of God who will raise the Cross, with the teachings of Christ, to the summit of all human activity... And I saw Our Lord triumphant, drawing all things to himself». ⁵¹ From that moment on it became clear to Blessed Josemaría that *everyday work*, as a moment of special encounter with Christ dying and triumphant on the Cross, would be the raw material, ⁵² as it were, of the sanctification of Christians. ⁵³ Whereas the message was identical with the one seen in 1928, it might be said that the means to bring it about had now acquired a greater clarity.

A second encounter with divine grace took place some ten weeks later, on October 16th, 1931. In «the most sublime prayer»⁵⁴

⁵¹ «Llegó la hora de la Consagración: en el momento de alzar la Sagrada Hostia, sin perder el debido recogimiento, sin distraerme —acababa de hacer in mente la ofrenda del Amor Misericordioso—, vino a mi pensamiento, con fuerza y claridad extraordinarias, aquello de la Escritura: "et si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad me ipsum" (Jn 12, 32). Ordinariamente, ante lo sobrenatural, tengo miedo. Después viene el ne timeas!, soy Yo. Y comprendí que serán los hombres y mujeres de Dios, quienes levantarán la Cruz con las doctrinas de Cristo sobre el pináculo de toda actividad humana... Y vi triunfar al Señor, atrayendo a Sí todas las cosas» *Apuntes íntimos*, nn. 217 f., in VP 381.

⁵² «Porque esa tarea ordinaria es no sólo el ámbito en el que se deben santificar, sino la materia misma de su santidad: en medio de las incidencias de la jornada, descubren la mano de Dios, y encuentran estímulo para su vida de oración» *Conversaciones*, n. 70.

⁵³ In 1940 he commented on the incident, the Gospel passage and its meaning: «Unidos a Cristo por la oración y la mortificación en nuestro trabajo diario, en las mil circunstancias humanas de nuestra vida sencilla de cristianos corrientes, obraremos esa maravilla de poner todas las cosas a los pies del Señor, levantado sobre la Cruz, donde se ha dejado encclar de tanto amor al mundo y a los hombres (...) De esta manera, el trabajo es para nosotros, no sólo el medio natural de subvenir a las necesidades económicas y de mantenernos en lógica y sencilla comunidad de vida con los demás hombres, sino que es también —y sobre todo— el medio específico de santificación personal que nuestro Padre Dios nos ha señalado, y el gran instrumento apostólico y santificador, que Dios ha puesto en nuestras manos, para lograr que en toda la creación resplandezca el orden querido por El (...) El trabajo, que ha de acompañar la vida del hombre sobre la tierra (cf. Gen 2, 15), es para nosotros a la vez —y en grado máximo, porque a las exigencias naturales se unen otras claramente de orden sobrenatural— el punto de encuentro de nuestra voluntad con la voluntad salvadora de nuestro Padre celestial» *Letter I III 1940*, n. 195, in VP 383 f.

he had ever experienced, Blessed Josemaría came to perceive the beauty and richness of the *fatherhood of God*, and inseparably, of his own divine sonship. This notion came to constitute the very cornerstone of his own spiritual life, and of the spirit he would communicate to others.⁵⁵ «In the “Our Father” I had learned to call God my Father from when I was small», he said in a meditation in 1969. «But to feel, to see, to admire that desire of God that we should be his children...». ⁵⁶ Elsewhere he wrote: «I felt the action of Our Lord, who prompted me to cry out with my heart and with my lips, with the strength of something imperatively necessary, this tender invocation: *“Abbà, Pater”*. I was on the street, in a tram... I probably made that prayer in a loud voice... I was contemplating with a light that was not my own this overwhelming truth, which was seared like a brand onto my soul, never to be quenched». ⁵⁷ On October 2nd, 1928, he had come to appreciate the meaning of Our Lord's words which referred to the universal call to holiness: «Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect» (Mt 5:48). ⁵⁸ But on this occasion he understood the full significance of this phrase: to be perfect “as our heavenly Father” meant — no more and no less — to imitate Christ, the Only Begotten Son made man, and to live as a child of God, that is to have «an ardent, sincere, tender and deep desire to imitate Jesus Christ as our brother, son of God the Father». ⁵⁹

With these two experiences the search for Christian holiness took on in the mind of Blessed Josemaría a more defined profile: through their everyday work and activity in the world Christians would follow and imitate Jesus Christ, on the Cross and especially in

⁵⁵ «Aquel día, aquel día quiso de una manera explícita, clara, terminante, que, conmigo, vosotros os sintáis siempre hijos de Dios, de este Padre que está en los cielos y que nos dará lo que pidamos en nombre de su Hijo» *Meditation* 24.12.1969, in VP 390 f.

⁵⁶ «Aprendí a llamar Padre, en el Padrenuestro, desde niño; pero sentir, ver, admirar ese querer de Dios de que seamos hijos tuyos...» *Meditation* 24.12.1969, in VP 390.

⁵⁷ «Sentí la acción del Señor, que hacía germinar en mi corazón y en mis labios, con la fuerza de algo imperiosamente necesario, esta tierna invocación: *Abbà! Pater!* Estaba yo en la calle, en un tranvía (...) Probablemente hice aquella oración en voz alta (...) Estuve contemplando con luces que no eran más esa asombrosa verdad, que quedó encendida como una brasa en mi alma, para no apagarse nunca» *Letter* 9-I-1959, n. 60, in VP 389 f.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Letter* 24-III-1930, n. 2, in VP 390.

⁵⁹ «Un deseo ardiente, sincero, tierno y profundo a la vez, de imitar a Jesucristo como

his hidden life in Nazareth,⁶⁰ they would contribute towards establishing his kingdom on earth, *in this way* living their divine filiation to the full.

These special moments of grace received by Blessed Josemaría were not of course isolated events. God gave him many other lights during this period.⁶¹ Of particular importance to my mind were a series of episodes which brought home to him the central role of the *Cross of Christ* in the life of a son or daughter of God who, moved by God's grace, wishes to establish the kingdom of Christ on earth through his or her everyday work and activity. Only in the context of the centrality of the Cross can the *si exaltatus fuero a terra* and the spirit of divine filiation be appreciated fully. In the mind of the Founder, in fact, the Cross would become Opus Dei's guarantee of authenticity, efficacy and permanence.⁶²

Blessed Josemaría was not unaccustomed to adversity. Though he had good health, was optimistic in character⁶³ and experienced

⁶⁰ «Toda la vida del Señor me enamora. Tengo, además una debilidad particular por sus treinta años de existencia oculta en Belén, en Egipto y en Nazaret. Ese tiempo —largo—, del que apenas se habla en el Evangelio, aparece desprovisto de significado propio a los ojos de quien lo considera con superficialidad. Y, sin embargo, siempre he sostenido que ese silencio sobre la biografía del Maestro es bien elocuente, y encierra lecciones de maravilla para los cristianos. Fueron años intensos de trabajo y de oración, en los que Jesucristo llevó una vida corriente —como la nuestra, si queremos—, divina y humana a la vez; en aquel sencillo e ignorado taller de artesano, como después ante la muchedumbre todo lo cumplió a la perfección» *Amigos de Dios*, n. 56.

Of particular importance over this period of his life (especially from December 1931 to January 1932) was the particular way in which he lived his divine filiation, that is in following the path of "spiritual childhood". He saw himself as a little child: weak, poor, unrefined, selfish, yet straightforward and sincere, trusting and patient. He recommended this spirituality to the members of Opus Dei, but did not wish to impose it on them. Cf. VP 404-18.

«Nuestro Señor no quiere una personalidad efímera para su Obra: nos pide una personalidad inmortal, porque quiere que en ella —en la Obra— haya un grupo clavado en la Cruz: la Santa Cruz nos hará perdurables, siempre con el mismo espíritu del Evangelio, que traerá el apostolado de acción como fruto sabroso de la oración y del sacrificio. De este modo se vuelve a vivir, por la Obra de Dios y por cada uno de sus miembros, aquel secreto divino que enseñaba San Pablo a los de Filipos (2, 5-11), camino segurísimo de la inmortalidad y de la gloria: por la humillación, hasta la Cruz: desde la Cruz, con Cristo, a la gloria inmortal del Padre» *Instruction* 19.3.1934, nn. 28-29, in VP 387, note 140.

little or no difficulty at work or in getting on with people, external circumstances had brought him at different stages of his life to suffer more than most. To mention a few episodes: the death of three young sisters, the economic collapse of his family and consequent "exile" from his native town of Barbastro, numerous misunderstandings and difficulties as a seminarian in Saragossa (he spoke of «hatchet blows»), and as a priest in Saragossa and Madrid.⁶⁴

The Founder of Opus Dei doubtlessly bore up well under these adversities, seeing in them signs of divine providence. But during the years that followed 1928 God brought him to understand the presence of the Cross of Christ in terms of what might be called a "mystical changeover". In the early thirties, Blessed Josemaría began to ask God for what he called «una Cruz sin cireneos», "a cross without a Simon of Cyrene".⁶⁵ By this he meant the following: not only was he prepared to *accept* the crosses that God wished to send him, but he felt moved to *ask* God for a cross which, besides, would not weigh on others, a cross which would even *alleviate* the suffering of others. «I am very badly off economically», he wrote in September 1931, clearly referring to his responsibility of looking after his family. «But I am at peace. I am completely sure, truly certain that God, my Father, will resolve the situation once and for all. If only I could live alone!... Then poverty, I realise, would be marvellous. A priest and

gría, que podríamos llamar fisiológica, de animal sano; no es ésa la alegría a que me refiero, sino otra sobrenatural, que procede de abandonar todo y abandonarse en los brazos amantes del Padre-Dios» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 350, in VP 398.

⁶⁴ In Madrid, in the early thirties, over a period when God was giving him extraordinary lights and graces, he said: «Estoy con una tribulación y desamparo grandes. ¿Motivos? Realmente, los de siempre. Pero, es algo personalísimo que, sin quitarme la confianza en mi Dios, me hace sufrir, porque no veo salida humana posible de mi situación. Se presentan tentaciones de rebeldía: y digo serviam!» (9.9.1931) *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 274, in VP 396.

⁶⁵ «Ni ahora sé, Jesús, si es exceso o falta de generosidad mi deseo de Cruz sin Cirineo. Exceso, porque lo es ese dolerme tanto la Cruz de los demás... Falta, porque parece disconformidad con lo que Túquieres; porque parece que deseo, no tu Cruz, sino una Cruz a mi gusto» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 355, in VP 398. 28.10.1931: «Jesús hoy ha apretado la Cruz —la Santa Cruz— sobre los pobres hombros de los Cirineos: y ¡cómo me duele a mí!» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 356, in VP 399. «Hasta ahora, vengo ocultando a mi Madre y mis hermanos nuestra verdadera situación. Así lo he hecho otras veces. Señor, Jesús mío, no es que yo no quiera Cirineos —quiero cuanto quieras—, sino que, con verdadera generosidad y por tu Amor, me gustaría privártelas estos disgustos» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 388, in VP 399.

poor, without even the bare minimum. Wonderful!». ⁶⁶ And some days later, on the third anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei: «I said to Our Lord directly... that he would have to straighten out the situation of my family and afflict me alone». ⁶⁷ «Lord», he said, «what I find hard in the Cross is that others take part in it. Jesus, give me a cross without a Simon of Cyrene». ⁶⁸

Much could be said of Blessed Josemaría's instinctive tendency to avoid suffering for others, to look after the uninstructed, sick and dying in the depressed areas and hospitals of Madrid, ⁶⁹ to distract people from their worries, free them from their fears, help them advance gradually in their Christian life. ⁷⁰ However, this deep human compassion for those who are afflicted in any way and the concomitant desire to alleviate their suffering, could be expressed and resolved definitively only in the supernatural realm of faith and grace. As a son of God, who fervently wished to place Christ at the summit of all human activities, as one aware that baptismal grace brings the Christian to exclaim with St Paul that "Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20),

⁶⁶ «Me encuentro en una situación económica tan apurada como cuando más. No pierdo la paz. Tengo absoluta confianza, verdadera seguridad de que Dios, mi Padre, resolverá pronto este asunto de una vez. ¡Si yo estuviera solo!... la pobreza, entonces, me doy cuenta, sería una delicia. Sacerdote y pobre: con falta hasta de lo necesario. ¡Admirable!» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 301, in VP 396.

⁶⁷ 2.10.1931: «Y me encaré con Él y le dije: Que el padre Sánchez me tiene prohibido pedirle aquello [a grave illness in reparation]; que, por eso, no se lo pido, pero que (así, en baturro) que arregle a los míos y me fastidie a mí solico» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 307, in VP 397. «Pues, Señor: yo soy el hombre feliz, que no tenía camisa» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 587, in VP 404. «Señor, castígame a mí, y empuja la Obra» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1222, in VP 538.

⁶⁸ «Señor, lo pesado de mi Cruz es que de ella participan otros. Dame, Jesús, Cruz sin Cirineos. Digo mal: tu gracia, tu ayuda me hará falta, como para todo. —Contigo, mi Dios, no hay prueba que me espante: pienso en una enfermedad dura, unida, p.e., a una total ceguera —Cruz mía, personal— y audazmente, tendría, Jesús, el gozo de gritar con fe y con paz de corazón, desde mi oscuridad y sufrimiento: Dominus illuminatio mea et salus mea!...» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 351, in VP 398.

⁶⁹ Cf. VP 274 ff., 308 ff., 366 ff., 423 ff.

⁷⁰ He often spoke of the need to being people close to God by following an inclined plane. «Comprende Jesús nuestra debilidad y nos atrae hacia sí, como a través de un *plano inclinado*, deseando que sepamos insistir en el esfuerzo de subir un poco, día a día. Nos busca, como buscó a los dos discípulos de Emaús, saliéndoles al encuentro; como buscó a Tomás y le enseñó, e hizo que las tocara con sus dedos, las llagas abiertas en las manos y en

he wished to truly carry — like Christ — the pain and weight and tedium and sorrow of so many hearts on his own shoulders. He came to realise that a Christian can come to actually *love* suffering, not out of a pathological victim-mentality,⁷¹ but in actually carrying and alleviating the pain and distress of other people.⁷² He came to appreciate that the Christian never suffers alone, for in union with the Cross of Christ⁷³ pain and suffering are, as it were, turned inside out.⁷⁴ Of course living in this way put him in the best possible position to help people see and love the will of God in the vicissitudes of life.

⁷¹ «El día once de Agosto de 1929, según nota que tomé aquel día en una estampa que llevo en el breviario, mientras daba la bendición con el Santísimo Sacramento en la iglesia del Patronato de Enfermos, sin haberlo pensado de antemano, pedí a Jesús una enfermedad fuerte, dura, para expiación (...) Creo que el Señor me lo concedió» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 432, in VP 314 f. Realising however that in real terms Christ is the One who carries the Cross, Blessed Josemaría said: «nunca fue bien con mi alma ser o llamarle víctima» *Apuntes íntimos*, 413, note 362, in VP 315; and «nunca tuve simpatía ni a la palabra, ni al contenido del victimismo» *Apuntes íntimos*, nn. 1372, 1014, 1380, in VP 315, note 163.

⁷² Blessed Josemaría spoke of «lo que el Dios Nuestro Señor me ha dado particularmente a mí (...) Este no sé qué *santificador*, que hace que se enciendan las almas de muchos, al hablarles yo, aunque me encuentre para mí mismo *apagado»* *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1756, in VP 452.

⁷³ The words of Blessed Josemaría “love pain, glorify pain”, etc. must be understood in this sense. «Fueron unos años intensos, en los que el Opus Dei crecía para dentro sin darnos cuenta (...) La fortaleza humana de la Obra han sido los enfermos de los hospitales de Madrid: los más miserables; los que vivían en sus casas, perdida hasta la última esperanza humana; los más ignorantes de aquellas barriadas extremas» *Meditation* 19.3.1975, in VP 443. The annotation «bendito sea el dolor. Amado sea el dolor. Santificado sea el dolor... ¡Glorificado sea el dolor!» is of 14.1.1932: *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 563, in VP 443.

⁷⁴ Speaking of the persecution of the Church in August 1931, Blessed Josemaría said: «continúa la racha de insultos a los sacerdotes (...) Hice propósito —lo renuevo— de callar, aunque me insulten, aunque me escupan (...) Más: el propósito, de que vengo hablando, es apedrear a esos pobres *odiadores* con avemárias (...)» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 222, in VP 364. «18-IX-931: Tengo que agradecer a mi Dios un notable cambio: hasta hace poco, los insultos y burlas que, por ser sacerdote, me dirigían desde la venida de la república (antes, rarísima vez), me ponían violento. Acordé encomendares, con un avemaría, a la Ssma. Virgen, cuando oyera groserías o indecencias. Lo hice. Me costó. Ahora, al oír esas palabras in nobles, se me enternecen las entrañas, por regla general, considerando la desgracia de esa pobre gente, que, si obra así, cree hacer una cosa honrada (...)» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 291, in VP 365. On 24.1.1932 he wrote: «Jesús, siento muchos deseos de reparación. Mi camino es de amar y sufrir. Pero el amor me hace gozar en el sufrimiento, hasta el punto de parecerme ahora imposible que yo pueda sufrir nunca. Ya lo dije: a mí no hay quien me dé un disgusto. Y aún añado: a mí no hay quien me haga sufrir porque el sufrimiento me da gozo y paz» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 582, in VP 418 f.

Divine filiation — placing Christ at the summit of all human activities — gladly carrying the Cross of Christ: the three fundamental elements of Blessed Josemaría's spiritual experience during the first years after the foundation of Opus Dei, form a single whole, and in their distinction require one another, express one another, explain one another.

IV. The charismatic and human character of the message of Blessed Josemaría

Blessed Josemaría's conviction of the power and love of our Father God, its manifestation in the growth of the kingdom of Christ on the earth in the presence of the Cross, brought him, as we have seen, *to place unconditional trust in the power and goodness of God his Father*. Without such trust, of course, the proclamation of the universal call to holiness would be meaningless. Two questions however should be asked at this stage.

1. Can it be said that these were truly *charismatic* experiences, in the strictly theological sense of the term, that is, special and direct actions of the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole Church? Two points can be made.

In the *first* place, from the standpoint of strict theological *content*, it is fair to say that the fundamental message and its explicitations were distinctly charismatic in nature. And this for the simple reason that the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church is directed entirely towards making present in believers and in society at large, the life and words and saving power of Our Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen,⁷⁵ and as a result towards promoting holiness in the Church.⁷⁶ The Paraclete is the one who gives growth to the king-

⁷⁵ Doctrinally speaking, of course, the message of Blessed Josemaría added nothing to the content of the faith. It was simply a living renewal of that doctrine. He often said that the spirit of Opus Dei is «viejo como el Evangelio y como el Evangelio nuevo» in VP 302. Cf. *Conversations with Mons. Escrivá*, n. 24.

⁷⁶ According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n. 2024), all charisms are ordered in the first place towards sanctifying grace, towards the sanctification of the Church.

dom of Christ on earth, bringing it to eschatological fullness in and through believers. Besides, according to St Paul, the Holy Spirit is the very One who insinuates and cries out in the hearts of Christians that they are children of God (cf. Rom 8:15-16) and, inseparably, brothers of Jesus Christ and of their fellow humans, very often partaking in his Cross (cf. Rom 7). This he does by making present, in their minds and hearts, some faint echo of the eternal dialogue of total self-donation between the eternal Father and his only-begotten Son, which constitutes the Spirit's own divine Being, and which culminates *for us* on Golgotha:⁷⁷ "You are my Father from whom I have received all"; "you are my son with whom, on account of my only-begotten Son, I am well pleased".

Under the Spirit, Christians constantly experience God's consoling, paternal protection as they partake in his providence through their work and everyday activity, even in the presence of the Cross, and perhaps especially in such moments. Blessed Josemaría experienced this vibrant sense of divine filiation tangibly, mystically, unequivocally, definitively.

In the second place, Blessed Josemaría had no doubt but that the founding grace was a charismatic experience. He always said he "saw" or "knew" what God wanted of him; on more than one occasion he claimed that God "confirmed" him tangibly in his mission.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Cf. my study *L'agire dello Spirito Santo, chiave dell'escatologia cristiana*, op. cit., pp. 355-7.

⁷⁸ Blessed Josemaría refers on some occasions to what Fr. Juan Postius Sala, CMF, his confessor at that time, said to him: «llegará tiempo en que la prueba consista en no sentir este sobrenatural impulso y amor por la Obra» (15.2.1932) *Apuntes íntimos*, 599, in VP 498; «no sentir la divinidad de su Obra» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 742, in VP 498. On June 22nd of that year, the day before the Feast of the Sacred Heart, «sentí la prueba cruel que hace tiempo me anunciara el P. Postius (...) A solas en una tribuna de esta iglesia del Perpetuo Socorro, trataba de hacer oración ante Jesús Sacramentado expuesto en la Custodia, cuando, por un instante y sin llegar a concretarse razón alguna —no las hay—, vino a mí consideración este pensamiento amarguísimo: "¿y si todo es mentira, ilusión tuya, y pierdes el tiempo (...), y —lo que es peor— lo haces perder a tantos?"» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1729, in VP 499. «Fue cosa de segundos, pero ¡cómo se padece!». Then he said to Our Lord: «Si no es tuya, destrúyela; si es, confírmame (...) Inmediatamente me sentí confirmado en la verdad de su Voluntad sobre su Obra» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1730, in VP 499 f. Blessed Josemaría also commented how the stream of inspirations he had been receiving right up to October 2nd, 1938 stopped abruptly at that moment and did not return for a year or more: cf. texts in VP 299, 317, and 320.

In spite of his instinctive mistrust of anything that might whiff of “miracle-mongering” (*milagrerías*)⁷⁹ or divine exhibitionism, he was simply unable to account for the exceptional experiences he had had in any way other than through the agency of the divine.⁸⁰ They came to him, as it were, “out of the blue”. It could not but be a work of God.⁸¹ The “otherness” of God’s grace was apparent to him,⁸² as was the disproportion between the objective proposed and the

⁷⁹ Opus Dei, he said, is not based on «milagreras: os he enseñado con firmeza que no deseáis nunca caminos interiores extraordinarios» Letter 6-V-1945, in VP 293, note 105. «No soy “milagrero”. —Te dije que me sobran milagros en el Santo Evangelio para asegurar fuertemente mi fe. —Pero me dan pena esos cristianos —incluso piadosos, “¡apóstolicos!”— que se sonríen cuando oyen hablar de caminos extraordinarios, de sucesos sobrenaturales. —Siento deseos de decirles: sí, ahora hay también milagros: ¡nosotros los haríamos si tuviéramos fe!» *Camino*, n. 583.

⁸⁰ Blessed Josemaría had a small statue of Our Lady, for whom he had special devotion. “La Virgen de los Besos”, he called it, because he kissed it frequently with deep trust and filial piety. On more than one occasion he recounted how Our Lady smiled at him through this statue. One morning, «entre seis y media y siete menos cuarto vi, durante bastante tiempo, cómo el rostro de mi Virgen de los Besos se llenaba de alegría, de gozo. Me fijé bien: creí que sonreía, porque me hacía ese efecto, pero no se movían los labios» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 701, in VP 469. «Llegué a hacer pruebas, por si era sugerión mía, porque no admito fácilmente cosas extraordinarias. Inútilmente: la cara de mi Virgen de los Besos, cuando yo positivamente, tratando de sugestionarme, quería que sonriera, seguía con la seriedad hierática que tiene la pobre escultura» ibid., 702, in VP 470.

⁸¹ To a friend who asked Blessed Josemaría if he thought Opus Dei had any chance of being successful, the Founder replied: «Mira, esto no es una invención mía, es una voz de Dios» AGP, RHF, T-05829, pp. 2-3, in VP 309. Speaking about the urgency of setting up the first centre of the Work, he wrote: «Prisa. No es prisa. Es que Jesús empuja» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1753, in VP 511.

⁸² On several occasions Blessed Josemaría recounted how the special graces God gave him produced an initial sensation of anguish and fear, followed by a grace of God which confirmed him and filled him with consolation, which he expressed in terms of the *ne timeas* the archangel Gabriel addressed to Zechariah and Our Lady in communicating the will of God to them (cf. Lk 1:13.30). «Son palabras divinas de aliento. En el Testamento Viejo y en el Nuevo, Dios y los seres celestes las pronuncian, para levantar la miseria del hombre y disponerlo a un coloquio de iluminación y de amor, a la confianza en las cosas aparentemente imposibles o difíciles, a las que no llega la fuerza de la criatura (...) Os puedo asegurar, hijos míos, que esas almas no ambicionan ni desean las manifestaciones de esa ordinaria providencia extraordinaria de Dios, y que tienen una profunda conciencia de no merecerlas: os vuelvo a repetir que sus sentimientos ante ellas son de temor, de miedo. Aunque después, el aliento del Señor —*ne timeas!*— les comunica una seguridad inquebrantable, las enciende en ímpetus de fidelidad y entrega; les da luces claras, para cumplir su Voluntad amabilissima, y las eradece, para lanzarse a metas inaccesibles al alcance hu-

means available.⁸³ He was keenly aware of the difference between what God wanted of him, and where his own will often inclined him.⁸⁴ «The foundation of Opus Dei went ahead without me», he noted on one occasion. «The Womens' Branch against my personal opinion, and the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, wanting to find it but not finding it».⁸⁵

⁸³ «Me encontraba entonces solo con el único bagaje de mis veintiséis años y de mi buen humor» *Letter 11-III-1940*, n. 32, in VP 308. «Hemos empezado a trabajar en la Obra, cuando el Señor quiso, con una carencia absoluta de medios materiales: veintiséis años, la gracia de Dios y buen humor. Y basta» *Letter 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966*, n. 11 in VP 308. Cf. *Conversations*, n. 32.

⁸⁴ During the first years after October 2, 1928, in spite of the fact that he had worked hard, he saw his soul buried «en la tibieza y en el abandono» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 839, in VP 315. «Yo quería y no quería. Quería cumplir aquello que era una misión terminante, y desde el primer día se dio origen a una intensa labor espiritual. Y no quería, a pesar de que había estado desde los quince hasta los veintiséis años haciendo una continua llamada a Jesucristo, Señor Nuestro, diciéndole como el ciego del Evangelio: *Domine, ut videam!* (...)» *Letter 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966*, n. 19, in VP 316. «¡Siempre sin una vacilación, aunque yo ¡no quería!» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 306, in ibid. «Después de 1928, aunque comencé a trabajar enseguida, tuve mi sueño. *Ego dormivi, et soporatus sum; et exsurrexi, quia Dominus suscepit me* (*Sal 3, 6*); me dormí, me quedé como en un sopor; y fue el Señor el que me condujo y me sacó a trabajar con más intensidad cada día» *Letter 8-XII-1949*, n. 5, in VP 316. «Bien sabe el Señor que yo comencé a trabajar en el Opus Dei a regañadientes, y por eso os pido perdón muchas veces» *Letter 24-XII-1951*, n. 249, in ibid. This “reluctance” as it were brought him to inquire into the possibility of living his vocation by joining an institution already founded: «El Señor (...) viendo mi resistencia y aquel trabajo entusiasta y débil a la vez, me dio la aparente humildad de pensar que podría haber en el mundo cosas que no se diferenciaran de lo que El me pedía. Era una cobardía poco razonable; era la cobardía de la comodidad, y la prueba de que a mí no me interesaba ser fundador de nada» *Meditation 14.2.1964*, in VP 318 f. «Fui cobarde. Me daba miedo la Cruz que el Señor ponía sobre mis hombros» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1870, in VP 317.

⁸⁵ «La fundación del Opus Dei salió sin mí: la Sección de mujeres contra mi opinión personal, y la Sociedad Sacerdotal de la Santa Cruz, queriendo yo encontrarla y no encontrándola» in VP 324. In reference to the beginnings of the work of Opus Dei with women, he wrote: «Pasó poco tiempo: el 14 de febrero de 1930, celebraba yo la misa en la capillita de la vieja marquesa de Onteiro, madre de Luz Casanova, a la que yo atendía espiritualmente, mientras era Capellán del Patronato. Dentro de la Misa, inmediatamente después de la Comunión, ¡toda la Obra femenina! No puedo decir *que vi*, pero sí que *intelectualmente*, con detalle (después yo añadí otras cosas, al desarrollar la *visión intelectual*), cogí lo que había de ser la Sección femenina del Opus Dei. Di gracias, y a su tiempo mi fui al confesonario del P. Sánchez. Me oyó y me dijo: *esto es tan de Dios como lo demás*» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1871, in VP 323. «Yo había escrito: *nunca habrá mujeres —ni de broma— en el Opus Dei*» *Meditation 14.2.1964*, in VP 322. «Siempre creí yo —y creo— que el Señor, como en otras ocasiones, me trajo a la misa para que yo pudiera dar testimonio de su existencia, y que

As a result the Founder of Opus Dei was very conscious of the power of grace, even in his own pastoral work.⁸⁶ He gave complete priority to prayer and penance over apostolic action.⁸⁷ He preached that in all God must be glorified: *Deo omnis gloria*,⁸⁸ and had a very refined sense of gratitude to God and to others.⁸⁹

This conviction left a clear mark on his personal lifestyle and in the spirituality Blessed Josemaría promoted. He was keenly aware that his role in getting across the message of the universal call to holiness, or better, in *reminding* Christians of what was latent in their baptismal consecration, was an entirely instrumental one.⁹⁰ He not

Obra era suya. Yo: ¡no quiero mujeres, en el Opus Dei! Dios: pues yo las quiero» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1871, in VP 324.

⁸⁶ Cf. VP 280 ff. Vázquez de Prada comments: «nunca le faltó al sacerdote, a través de su ministerio, la eficacia infalible de la gracia. "No recuerdo un solo caso —asegura Asunción Muñoz [Patronato de Enfermos]— en el que fracasáramos en nuestro intento"» ibid., p. 283 and note 82. Blessed Josemaría confirms this in stating that «por la gracia de Dios, siempre había conseguido confesar a todos antes de su muerte» in VP 284.

⁸⁷ Cf. especially VP 308-15. «Primero oración, después expiación; en tercer lugar, muy en tercer lugar, acción» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 111, in VP 367 (cf. *The Way*, n. 82). He said he had «una verdadera monomanía de pedir oraciones (...) a todos ruego una limosna de oración, por mis intenciones, que son, naturalmente, la Obra de Dios y vocaciones para ella» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 302, cf. ibid., 569, in VP 312, note 156. «Desde el año 1928 procuré acercarme a almas santas, incluso a personas desconocidas, que tenían —como yo solía decir— cara de buenos cristianos: y les pedía oraciones» *Letter 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966*, n. 6, in ibid. «¿Qué puede hacer una criatura, que debe cumplir una misión, si no tiene medios, ni edad, ni ciencia, ni virtudes, ni nada? Ir a su madre y a su padre, acudir a los que pueden algo, pedir ayuda a los amigos... Eso hice yo en la vida espiritual. Eso sí, a golpe de disciplina, llevando el compás. Pero no siempre: había temporadas en que no» *Meditation 19.3.1975*, in VP 315. Of his own prayer he said: «De esto tengo una venturosa experiencia cuando, sin sensiblerías, pero con verdadera fe he pedido al Señor o a Nuestra Señora alguna cosa espiritual (y aun alguna material) para mí o para otros, me la ha concedido» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 128 in VP 368.

⁸⁸ He always considered this phrase, or better, this programme, alongside another one, *regnare Christum volumus*: «Jesús es el Modelo: ¡imitémosle! Imitémosle, sirviendo a la Iglesia Santa y a todas las almas. «*Christum regnare volumus*» «*Deo omnis gloria*» «*Omnis cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*». Con estas tres frases quedan suficientemente indicados los tres fines de la Obra: Reinado efectivo de Cristo, toda la gloria de Dios, almas» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 171, in VP 306.

⁸⁹ It would be impossible to give adequate expression to this feature of Blessed Josemaría's personality. By way of example he prayed for don Daniel Alfaro, a priest who had lent him money for his father's funeral, every day for the rest of his life: cf. VP 184.

⁹⁰ In the words of Card. Cajetan: «God did not choose Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, or the prophets because it suited them. They had the right dispositions... Rather, in giving his gifts

only called but sincerely considered himself a «mangy donkey»,⁹¹ «an inept and deaf instrument». ⁹² This also explains the motto he adopted and spoke about well after he had made it life of his life: «to hide and disappear is for me, so that Jesus alone may shine out». ⁹³ 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, full of the *bonus odor Christi*, the “good fragrance of Christ” (cf. 2 Cor 2:15). ⁹⁴ It is interesting to add that during his life-

tentively selected, God himself oriented them towards the gift *by the fact of giving them* the required disposition» Cajetan, *Comm. in II-II*, q. 172, a. 3, n. 2. Italics added.

⁹¹ He often applied the term “borrico sarnoso” to himself: cf. *Apuntes íntimos*, nn. 116, 173, 306, 313; cf. VP 347 f., 351.

⁹² «La Obra de Dios no la ha imaginado un hombre (...) Hace muchos años que el Señor la inspiraba a un instrumento inepto y sordo (...)» *Instruction* 19.3.1934, nn. 6-7, in VP 297. On October 2, 1962, he said during a meditation: «Es razonable que os dirija unas palabras en el día de hoy, cuando comienzo un año nuevo en mi vocación al Opus Dei. Sé que vosotros lo esperáis, aunque debo deciros, hijos de mi alma, que siento una gran dificultad, como un gran encogimiento de mostrarme en este día. No es la natural modestia. Es el constante convencimiento, la claridad meridiana de mi propia indignidad. Jamás me había pasado por la cabeza, antes de aquel momento, que debería llevar adelante una misión entre los hombres», in VP 297 f. «Una vez más se ha cumplido lo que dice la Escritura: lo que es necio, lo que no vale nada, lo que —se puede decir— casi ni siquiera existe..., todo eso lo coge el Señor y lo pone a su servicio. Así tomó aquella criatura, como instrumento suyo» *Meditation* 19.3.1975, in VP 296 f.

⁹³ «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, in VP 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, in VP 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, in VP 351.

⁹⁴ «Hemos de portarnos como hijos de Dios con los hijos de Dios: el nuestro ha de ser un amor sacrificado, diario, hecho de mil detalles de comprensión, de sacrificio silencioso, de entrega que no se nota. Este es el *bonus odor Christi*, el que hacía decir a los que vivían entre nuestros primeros hermanos en la fe: ¡Mirad cómo se aman! (...) No se trata de un ideal lejano. El cristiano no es un Tartarín de Tarascón, empeñado en cazar leones donde no puede encontrarlos: en los pasillos de su casa. Quiero hablar siempre de vida diaria y concreta, de la santificación del trabajo, de las relaciones familiares, de la amistad. Si ahí no conseguimos llegar, déjelo de lado. El Señor ha de librar a su gente de la lucha, de la

time Blessed Josemaría felt no inclination to communicate his spirit and vision to others *by means of* recounting his special experiences, fearing they might consider him a saint.⁹⁵ To avoid such an eventuality, in fact, he burned many of his earlier *Apuntes íntimos*.⁹⁶

It might be said that as a result his preaching and lifestyle took on something of the quality, refinement, naturalness and incisiveness of the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christians.⁹⁷ Blessed Josemaría was keenly aware that the task he was involved in was a work of God, an action of God, *operatio Dei*. He frequently repeated the words of the prophet Isaiah: *non est abbreviata manus Domini*, «the power of God, his holy arm, has not been shortened» (Is 59:1), that is to say: God's grace and power are no less abundant today than they were in other times.

The above reflections bring us to pose a second question.

2. Given that the grace-filled experiences of Blessed Josemaría were, in principle, charismatic in nature, can it be said that they were authentically *human* ones in the full Christian sense of the word?

The reason this question is being asked is as follows. Complete trust in God's power and grace, total abandonment in his hands, constitutes the most faithful response possible for a Christian. However, such a trust may conceivably spring in part from other sources, for example from an excess of human pessimism, or from an excess of its opposite, optimism.

An act of complete trust in God may indeed come about in the

que quema sin ostentación una multitud de granos; el *bonus odor Christi* se advierte entre los hombres no por la llamada de un fuego de ocasión, sino por la eficacia de un resollo de virtudes: la justicia, la lealtad, la fidelidad, la comprensión, la generosidad, la alegría.» *Els Cristo que pasa*, n. 36.

⁹⁵ Cf. the preliminary note to his *Apuntes íntimos*, in VP 339, note 35. He spoke often of God's action in his life over that period in terms of "operative graces", which meant that «de tal manera dominaban mi voluntad que casi no tenía que hacer esfuerzo» *Meditation* 14.2.1964, in VP 249.

⁹⁶ «Quemé uno de los cuadernos de apuntes míos personales —hace años—, y los hubiera quemado todos, si alguien con autoridad y luego mi propia conciencia no me lo vedaran» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1862, in VP 338 f. Cf. *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 1866, in VP 332, note 21.

life of a Christian as they despair of the world or of other persons. There may be nothing morally inappropriate with this manner of reacting; God's grace works in many ways.⁹⁸ Yet such "trust" in God may possibly constitute an elementary form of escape from an unbearable predicament, and, if considered normal, reflect a defective theology of creation (after all, our *ultimate* trust in God is inevitably expressed in terms of an *immediate* trust in his creatures, gifts of his love). A careful study of Jansenistic and Puritanical spiritualities may be of some assistance in understanding the image of God and of man underlying such experiences.

An act of complete trust in God may likewise be inspired by a careless and fleeting excess of human enthusiasm, simplistically negligent of the solid realism and limitations of human mediations.⁹⁹

To put it briefly: the presence of "strong" spiritual experiences closely tied in with a "complete" trust in God may tend to ride roughshod over the reality of the world, over its consistency and complexity, over the inertia and solidity of human nature, over the everyday problems people experience. And if this should take place, can the call to holiness be considered as truly universal, applicable to all persons, to all situations? The theological affirmation to the effect that God's grace is more powerful than any human obstacle, at the heart of the doctrine of the universal call to holiness, is all very well in general terms, but one should be most judicious before brushing aside the consistency of concrete human situations, as if God's grace could (or would) simply obliterate them or render them innocuous. It is quite understandable that throughout the centuries the notion has consolidated, in the secular world and at times among Christians, that by the very nature of things, holiness is either something esoteric,¹⁰⁰ or reserved to the privileged few,¹⁰¹ to those who on ac-

⁹⁸ Cf. the so-called "mystical" psalms: 37, 39, 73.

⁹⁹ Cf. my study *La mediazione cristiana*, in PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITÀ DELLA SANTA CROCE, *Inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1998-99* (October 5th, 1998), Roma 1998, pp. 85-103.

¹⁰⁰ «En aquella época —en 1928—, (...) a pesar del ambiente religioso, del fondo católico de mi patria, los hombres estaban bastante lejos de Dios. No se ocupaba nadie de ellos. Las mujeres tenían de ordinario un pietismo, casi siempre sin demasiado fundamento doctrinal. A los hombres les daba vergüenza ser piadosos. Se respiraba el aire de la Enciclopedia: una dura atmósfera puritana triste del siglo XIX». Lettera 29 XII 1947/14-II-1966, n. 28, in VP 353 f.

¹⁰¹ On the notion of holiness in the middle of the 19th century, see my article "La concezione di santo nell'opera di G. M. Dantini" in *Biblioteca di storia ecclesiastica* 2000, pp. 11-25.

count of formation, talents, opportunities, physical and mental health, are in a position to receive God's gifts in abundance. On the face of things, such an elitist view is clearly contrary to Christian faith, practice and experience. Yet the problem remains, an elementary one if you wish: did Blessed Josemaría in preaching the universal call to holiness take human reality sufficiently into account? Or did the power and intensity of his experience make such considerations seem banal or unimportant?

This problem is not a new one in the history of Christianity. During the sixteenth century, with the Protestant Reformation, it was commonly considered that God's saving grace was in fact being blocked or severely conditioned by widespread ecclesiastical abuse of a doctrinal, spiritual and administrative kind. In the minds of many, this called for an urgent, profound and — if necessary — drastic reform of the Church, without which the very essence of Christianity would be called into question.¹⁰² In recent decades, some theologians have suggested that *before* one speaks of the grace of God acting deeply in the human soul and bringing about a meaningful spiritual life through the preaching of the word of God and administration of the sacraments, one must first analyse and afterwards substantially resolve the basic problems present in society (oppression, corruption, injustice) which might obstruct or render ineffective the presence and action of God's grace.¹⁰³ In both cases,

work, etc., cf. the texts collected by J.L. ILLANES of well-known spiritual authors read in Spain in the first half of the twentieth century: *Dos de octubre de 1928: alcance y significado de una fecha*, op. cit., pp. 96-101.

¹⁰² This view was quite common among Lutherans, and brought them to consider the doctrine of justification (expressing the priority and definitiveness of God's grace and judgement over human mediations and human sinfulness) as a unique criterion for judging and correcting theology, spirituality and Church life: cf. my studies *The Mediation of Justification and the justification of Mediation. Report of the Lutheran/Catholic Dialogue: «Church and Justification: Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification»* (1993), in «Annales Theologici» 10 (1996), pp. 147-211; *Fides Christi. The Justification Debate*, Four Courts, Dublin 1997, pp. 161-9; 199-208; 239-49. The recent *Joint Declaration on Justification* signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation (31.10.1999) speaks of justification as *a* criterion, not as *the* criterion for measuring the theology and praxis of the Church (nn. 17 f. and Annex, n. 3).

¹⁰³ On the notion of Christology as the "second moment" of theological reflection, in

it would seem, human obstacles, whether in the Church or in society, must be accounted for and removed *first*, for holiness to be possible; in other words, the Christian's search for holiness is objectively conditioned by "the world".

Could it be, then, that the doctrine of the universal call to holiness —implying as it does that no objective aspect of creation or of man's life is in a position to definitively obstruct the saving and sanctifying power of God's grace— might be skipping over the human mediations too lightly? Taking it from a different angle: did Blessed Josemaría's powerful experience of God's paternal assurance and consolation in the face of adversity deeply permeate and relate to the mystery of real human life in all its limits and greatness?

As we move into the last part of our reflection, it may be helpful to point out that the Founder of Opus Dei never spoke of Christian sanctification *in spite of* whatever objective impediments might arise. He always saw particular situations, whether arduous or not, as so many opportunities of grace in which the paternal providence of God makes itself felt. Blessed Josemaría, however, though temperamentally optimistic and buoyant in character, was not merely a kind of "positive thinker". Rather he saw the Cross of Jesus Christ, especially as it presents itself in simple, ordinary, hidden, apparently banal, situations of human life, as the *source* of all grace, of salvation, of consolation, of apostolic effectiveness, of ultimate victory, indeed of the coming of the Holy Spirit. By God's grace, obstacles to holiness are turned into means towards holiness. The sanctifying power of grace in other words should not be said to pass "over" or "around" the objective impediments or possible limitations we experience, such as they are. Much less does it eliminate them. It might be said, rather, that it passes *through* them, sanctifying and transforming them in the process. This gives a highly novel way of understanding contemplative life, presence of God, Christian action in the middle of the world, topics which cannot be considered in detail at this juncture. Any dreamer can preach the universal call to holiness.

The Founder of Opus Dei was a dreamer,¹⁰⁴ undoubtedly, for his head was in heaven. «Dream and your dreams will fall short», he often said.¹⁰⁵ His was the optimism, the unstoppable, contagious optimism of a man of faith and hope.¹⁰⁶ However, like many holy men and women, he had his feet very firmly placed on the ground, as we shall now see.

V. How was this message and conviction implanted in the mind and heart of Blessed Josemaría

Above, when speaking of the founding of Opus Dei, it was suggested that Blessed Josemaría experienced it as something coming, as it were, "out of the blue". This of course is not the whole story. October 2nd, 1928 was not only a point of departure for him, but also the culmination of many years of intense preparation. In fact October 2nd, 1928 as an event can be appreciated in full only in the context of what went beforehand.

The winter of the year 1918-19 had been particularly bitter in the town of Logroño where Blessed Josemaría lived with his family after leaving Barbastro.¹⁰⁷ On one occasion, upon seeing the foot-

¹⁰⁴ «Os advierto, y no hay presunción de mi parte, que enseguida me doy cuenta de si esta conversación mía cae en saco roto o resbala por encima del que me escucha. Dejadme que os abra mi corazón, para que me ayudéis a dar gracias a Dios. Cuando en 1928 vi lo que el Señor quería de mí, inmediatamente comencé la labor. En aquellos años —¡gracias, Dios mío, porque hubo mucho que sufrir y mucho que amar!—, me tomaron por loco; otros, en un alarde de comprensión, me llamaban *soñador*, pero soñador de sueños imposibles. A pesar de los pesares y de mi propia miseria, continué sin desanimarme; como *aquello* no era mío, se fue abriendo camino en medio de las dificultades, y hoy es una realidad extendida por la tierra entera, de polo a polo, que parece tan natural a la mayoría porque el Señor se ha encargado de que se reconociera como cosa suya» *Amigos de Dios*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ «Soñad y os quedaréis cortos» *Letter* 24-X-1942, n. 48.

¹⁰⁶ The following divine locution dates from December 12, 1931 was reported by Blessed Josemaría in his *Apuntes íntimos*: «Ayer almorcé en casa de los Guevara. Estando allí, sin hacer oración, me encontré —como otras veces— diciendo: "Inter medium montium pertransibunt aquae" (Sal 104, 10). Creo que, en estos días, he tenido otras veces en mi boca esas palabras, porque sí, pero no les di importancia. Ayer las dije con tanto relieve, que sentí la coacción de anotarlas: las entendí: son la promesa de que la O. de D. vencerá los obstáculos, pasando las aguas de su Apostolado a través de todos los inconvenientes que han

prints of a Carmelite friar in the fresh snow, he was inwardly moved, and said to himself: «if others can make such sacrifices for the love of God and of neighbour, might I not offer him something?»¹⁰⁸

From that moment onwards he intensified and personalised the life of Christian piety he had been taught and had practised from his earliest years: prayer, Eucharistic devotion, Penance. The decade between 1918 and 1928 — his adolescence, his time in the seminary, the first three years of his priestly life — was filled with what he termed the «barruntos del Amor» (“hints or suggestions of the love of God”),¹⁰⁹ accompanied by a spiritual restlessness which brought him to echo, in the living intimacy of his prayer, the cry of the blind man of the Gospel, *Domine, ut videam!*, “Lord, that I may see” (Lk 18:41). And, as if surmising that what God wished to show him would go beyond something of a merely intellectual or sapiential kind, he completed this exclamation with a firm resolution to do whatever God might ask of him: *Domine, ut sit!* “Lord, may it be done, may your will be done”.¹¹⁰

The first practical manifestation of this new resolve was his decision to study for the priesthood.¹¹¹ And this in spite of being aware of his responsibilities towards his family,¹¹² and of the fact that humanly speaking the priestly life attracted him very little.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Cf. VP 96, especially note 75.

¹⁰⁹ «Cuando apenas era yo adolescente arrojó el Señor en mi corazón una semilla encendida en amor» *Letter 25-I-1961*, n. 3, in VP 97; «(...) comencé a barruntar el Amor, a darme cuenta de que el corazón me pedía algo grande y que fuese amor (...) Yo no sabía lo que Dios quería de mí, pero era, evidentemente, una elección. Ya vendría lo que fuera... De paso me daba cuenta de que no servía, y hacía esta letanía, que no es de falsa humildad, sino de conocimiento propio: no valgo nada, no tengo nada, no puedo nada, no soy nada, no sé nada...» *Meditation 19.3.1975*, in *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ The same prayers he directed to Our Blessed Lady, especially when he was at the seminary of Saragossa: cf. VP 174 ff.

¹¹¹ Cf. VP 98.

¹¹² In those days, Blessed Josemaría confidently asked God to send the family a male heir. His brother Santiago was born about a year after this request, ten years after his mother had given birth to her last child. Cf. VP 101.

¹¹³ «Yo recuerdo con qué cara de lástima —y como mirándome por encima del hombro— se fijaban en mí los compañeros de Instituto, cuando, al terminar el bachillerato, comencé la carrera eclesiástica» *Apuntes íntimos*, 53, in VP 114. «Yo nunca pensé en hacerme sacerdote ni me dije de decirme de Dios que quería. No se me había presentado ese problema, porque

All his decisions were made in the light of the «barruntos del Amor». ¹¹⁴ He was being carried along swiftly and firmly by God's hand, by «those motions», he said, «the thrust of grace, that "wanting" something and not knowing what it was». ¹¹⁵ He was looking for a light, a single light, which as yet he could not grasp. And he persevered in this prayer — *Domine, ut videam! Domine, ut sit!* — until God gave him the answer.

Most of us do not appreciate the grace of the *light* of faith simply because we have never fully experienced the *darkness* with which God surrounds souls he is preparing for a singular mission. Blessed Josemaría always considered October 2nd, 1928 as his Damascus, a kind of revelation which marked the end of a long period of blindness and uncertainty. ¹¹⁶ The parallel with the Apostle to the Gentiles is not fortuitous. St Paul's vocation was not simply one of personal conversion from a situation of sinfulness and desolation, to one of forgiveness and spiritual consolation, as has sometimes been thought. ¹¹⁷ His vocation, above all, constituted a *new mission*, a universal mission: no longer could he zealously proclaim the glory and power of God by defending the privileged status of God's own people, and persecute Christians for wantonly divulging the treasures of revelation and grace among the Gentiles. ¹¹⁸ In many ways Blessed Josemaría's eminently positive mission was not unlike St Paul's: he proclaimed that God's grace and love are not restricted to certain special situations and persons, for all without exception are called to

cio algún día, de tal manera que me sentía anticlerical. Amaba mucho a los sacerdotes, porque la formación que recibí en mi casa era profundamente religiosa; me habían enseñando a respetar, a venerar el sacerdocio. Pero no para mí: para otros», in VP 116.

¹¹⁴ Cf. VP 209, note 22.

¹¹⁵ «(...) aquellas mociones, aquellos empujones de la gracia, aquel querer algo, que yo no sabía lo que era» Letter 29-XII-1947/14-II-1966, n. 16, in VP 266 f.

¹¹⁶ «Consideraba yo por la calle, ayer tarde, que Madrid ha sido mi Damasco, porque aquí se han caído las escamas de los ojos de mi alma (...) y aquí he recibido mi misión» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 993, in VP 307 f.

¹¹⁷ On the theological significance of Paul's conversion, cf. my study *Fides Christi. The Justification Debate*, op. cit., pp. 169-85.

¹¹⁸ Commenting on the passage in Paul's letter to the Romans (8:15-17), which deals with our divine filiation, Blessed Josemaría expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Apostle to the Gentiles: «¡Sí, Pablo, San Pablo! ¡Gracias por esta doctrina que nos has dejado, porque el Espíritu Santo lleva inspiración!» BHE 20119, p. 13, in F. GONDRAND, *Al paso* (pp. 1-2), Madrid 1994, 67.

holiness. And this had another side to it: precisely because God's grace is destined to reach all humans and every human situation, Christian holiness is essentially, baptismally, *apostolic*, and as a result "secular", that is, fully directed towards the world, fully inserted into the earthly realities.¹¹⁹ That was why Blessed Josemaría came to realise that he *had* to preach the universal call to holiness; that was why he *had* to infect others with a divine enthusiasm for the same undertaking, or promoting the universal call to holiness.¹²⁰

VI. Forged by the Spirit

The Founder of Opus Dei knew in the flesh what it meant to experience human hardship, limitations and obstacles. Undoubtedly his early childhood in Barbastro was tranquil and normal. The family was comfortably well off, both parents were hard-working, dedicated, pious, generous with the poor. The early lessons were learnt

¹¹⁹ Blessed Josemaría had no illusions about the value of the "world" taken purely on its own, yet he lived to the full Our Lord's prayer to the Father «I am not asking that you take them out of the world but that you free them from the evil one» (Jn 17:15). The Christian's spirit of divine filiation would be their living "protection" from the "world" (cf. 1 Jn 2:16). «Te agradezco, Señor, tu continua protección y la realidad de que hayas querido intervenir, en ocasiones de modo bien patente —yo no lo pedía, ¡no lo merezco!— para que no quede ninguna duda de que la Obra es tuya. Viene a mi memoria esa maravilla de la filiación divina. Fue un día de mucho sol, en medio de la calle, en un tranvía: *Abba, Pater!*, *Abba, Pater!* (...)» *Meditation* 2.10.1971. «Entendí que la filiación divina había de ser una característica fundamental de nuestra espiritualidad: *Abba, Pater!* Y que, al vivir la filiación divina, los hijos míos se encontrarían llenos de alegría y de paz, protegidos por un muro inexpugnable; que sabrían ser apóstoles de esta alegría, y sabrían comunicar su paz, también en el sufrimiento propio o ajeno. Justamente por eso: porque estamos persuadidos que Dios es nuestro Padre» *Letter* 8-XII-1949, n. 41, in VP 391.

¹²⁰ «Si me preguntáis cómo se nota la llamada divina, cómo se da uno cuenta, os diré que es una visión nueva de la vida. Es como si se encendiera una luz dentro de nosotros; es un impulso misterioso, que empuja al hombre a dedicar sus más nobles energías a una actividad que, con la práctica, llega a tomar cuerpo de oficio. Esa fuerza vital, que tiene algo de alud arrollador, es lo que otros llaman vocación (...) La *vocación* nos lleva —sin darnos cuenta— a tomar una posición en la vida, que mantendremos con ilusión y alegría, llenos de esperanza hasta el trance mismo de la muerte. Es un fenómeno que comunica al trabajo un sentido de misión, que ennoblecen y da valor a nuestra existencia. Jesús se mete con un acto de autoridad en el alma, en la tuya, en la mía: ésa es la llamada» *Letter* 9-I-1932, n. 9, in VP 302 f.

well yet easily, even though God's grace began to make itself felt in small yet significant ways.¹²¹ He was an intelligent, cheerful and outgoing child. But later lessons came harder, for Blessed Josemaría had a propensity to rebel against injustice in any form, whether to himself or to others, and even in minor matters.¹²² He was keenly sensitive to suffering.¹²³ Many episodes could illustrate this aspect of his character and the exquisite way in which God prepared him through such events. Three of them are particularly indicative; others could have as easily been chosen.

1. Blessed Josemaría frequently recounted how, at the age of ten or eleven, shortly after the death of his two young sisters, he abruptly knocked down a castle of cards Carmen (his sister) and her friends had been building, and exclaimed: «that's the way God treats people: you build a castle and, when it is nearly finished, God knocks it down on you».¹²⁴ He felt the loss of his sisters very keenly, to such an extent that he began saying that «next year it is my turn».¹²⁵ On the face of things it is true that the suffering of the innocent, the pain of loving and dedicated parents, the apparent squandering of human life, is permitted by God. And many years, dark years, would go by before God allowed him see his loving, fatherly hand behind such happenings.¹²⁶ Long years being led by the

¹²¹ On this period of his life, what he termed «aquellos blancos días de mi niñez», cf. VP 29 ff. The day before his first Holy Communion the barber accidentally burned his scalp with a hot tongs: Blessed Josemaría decided not to say anything about it at home so as to avoid trouble for the barber and an upset for his mother. He often noticed how on special feastdays Our Lord blessed him with some trial, «como una caricia». «Hasta el día de mi Primera Comunión, cuando me estaban vistiendo, al peinarme, quisieron rizarme y me hicieron una quemadura con una tenacilla. No era una cosa grave, pero para un niño de aquella edad, era bastante» in VP 51. Receiving his Holy Communion for the first time, he said, Our Lord «quiso venir a hacerse el dueño de mi corazón» in VP 51, note 99.

¹²² Cf. VP 52 ff.

¹²³ Cf. VP 39 ff.

¹²⁴ «Eso mismo hace Dios con las personas: construyes un castillo y, cuando casi está terminado, Dios te lo tira» AGP, RHF, T-05080, p. 2, in VP 56.

¹²⁵ «El año próximo me toca a mí» in VP 57. He said this shortly after the death of a third sister; following the ages at which they had died, it seemed as if he was next in line. His mother assured him that, as he had been offered to Our Lady of Torreciudad (cf. VP 29 f.), he was safe. Later on, realising that such comments hurt his mother, he stopped making them (*ibid.*, note 111).

hand as it were, being forged by the Spirit, without seeing, without understanding, without knowing what to do: *Domine, ut videam!* *Domine, ut sit!*

2. A more severe trial for Blessed Josemaría was occasioned by the financial ruin of his family, which took place when he was about twelve.¹²⁷ As a child he gladly offered the beggar at the church door the alms his father had given him for that purpose.¹²⁸ Poverty as yet was a mere word for him. Yet on his own testimony he rebelled inwardly against his family's new-found penury.¹²⁹ The rebellion was not occasioned as such by personally having to suffer hunger, outright destitution or the like — things never got that bad — but more by the humiliation and discomfiture his family underwent, the kind of shame and embarrassment that can only be experienced in a small provincial town where everybody knows everybody else. Many of his relatives had criticised his father for not having assured personal solvency by legal means, instead of generously paying off his debtors in full.¹³⁰ Almost none of them turned up at his father's funeral more than ten years later,¹³¹ or for that matter at Blessed Josemaría's first Mass some months afterwards.¹³²

The suffering the Founder of Opus Dei underwent was not purely on his own account. His cheerful and open character, his natural magnanimity assured that. It was linked in one way or another with the situation of the people around him: more than anything else, perhaps, he winced under the coldness and studied indifference of the human heart, towards himself and his family. And he felt this

following ejaculation: «Hágase, cúmplase, sea alabada y eternamente ensalzada la justísima y amabilísima Voluntad de Dios sobre todas las cosas! Amén. Amén.» *Forja*, n. 769.

¹²⁷ Cf. VP 58-63.

¹²⁸ Cf. VP 36.

¹²⁹ «Me rebelaba ante la situación de entonces. Me sentía humillado. Pido perdón» *Meditation* 14.2.1964, in VP 62, note 130. «Dios me ha hecho pasar por todas las humillaciones, por aquello que me parecía una vergüenza, y que ahora veo que eran tantas virtudes de mis padres. Lo digo con alegría. El Señor tenía que prepararme; y como lo que había a mi alrededor era lo que más me dolía, por eso pegaba ahí. Humillaciones de todo estilo, pero a la vez llevadas con señorío cristiano: lo veo ahora, y cada día con más claridad, con más agradocimiento al Señor, a mis padres, a mi hermana Carmen...» in VP 83 f. Cf. also the texts in *ibid.*, note 50.

¹³⁰ Cf. VP 61, note 124.

pain keenly and hiddenly, as children do. His mother had always said: «Josemaría, you are going to suffer a lot because you put your heart into everything you do». ¹³³ Many years later he would surmise: «Why is it that I am almost always more of a friend to my friends than they are to me?» ¹³⁴

On top of it all, he was surprised and disconcerted by the fact that his parents took the set-back with serenity and abandonment in divine providence. They continued life as usual as if the reverse in family fortunes had little or no importance. ¹³⁵ In spite of their affliction, they offered Blessed Josemaría an example of Christian fortitude and sacrifice he would draw upon for the rest of his life. ¹³⁶ Yet when it happened he rebelled against the situation: he perceived that his father, who would die at a young age worn out with the strain of over-work, preferred to carry more weight so that others could carry less, to suffer himself so that others could be alleviated. ¹³⁷ «That was the way Our Lord prepared my soul», wrote Blessed Josemaría in a letter to the Mayor of Barbastro in 1971, «with an example full of Christian dignity and a hidden heroism always accompanied by a smile, so that later on, with his grace, I could become a poor instru-

¹³³ «Josemaría, vas a sufrir mucho en la vida, porque pones todo el corazón en lo que haces» in VP 164.

¹³⁴ «¿Por qué será que, a pesar de mis miserias, suelo yo ser siempre más amigo de mis amigos que esos amigos de mí? Seguramente es que me hace mucho bien, si lo acepto —fiat!—, ese despegó» *Letter 4889*, 19.8.1972, in VP 79.

¹³⁵ Cf. VP 80 ff. Vázquez de Prada adds: «La más dura prueba por la que pasó Josemaría, más dolorosa que las privaciones, fue el callado sufrir de los padres, cuya sonrisa y serenidad daban a entender el dominio interior con que aceptaban las adversidades. Pero esa mansa capa de amabilidad dejaba traslucir también las muchas renuncias que encubría. Esto, en lugar de calmar el muchacho, le violentaba. Y el oleaje rompía dolorosamente dentro de su alma» *ibid.*, p. 82.

¹³⁶ «Tengo un orgullo santo: amo a mi padre con toda mi alma, y creo que tiene un cielo muy alto porque supo llevar toda la humillación que supone quedarse en la calle, de una manera tan digna, tan maravillosa, tan cristiana» in VP 62. «Le vi sufrir con alegría, sin manifestar el sufrimiento. Y vi una valentía que era una escuela para mí, porque después he sentido tantas veces que me faltaba la tierra y que se me venía el cielo encima, como si fuera a quedar aplastado entre dos planchas de hierro» *Meditation 14.2.1964*, in VP 187.

¹³⁷ Blessed Josemaría recounts: «No le recuerdo jamás con un gesto severo; le recuerdo siempre sereno, con el rostro alegre. Y murió agotado: con sólo cincuenta y siete años, pero estuvo siempre sonriente. A él le debiera la vocación» cit. in J.L. ILLANES, *Dos de octubre* Biblioteca Virtual Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y Opus Dei

ment of his providence...». ¹³⁸ Blessed Josemaría's father was perhaps the one who, more than anybody else, taught him what it meant, humanly speaking, to carry the cross of others, "the Cross without a Simon of Cyrene".

«Those around me always suffered because of me», Blessed Josemaría reflected during a meditation in 1964. «I didn't provoke catastrophes, but Our Lord, to strike me, the nail — I am sorry to say this, Lord — struck the nail once and the horseshoe a hundred times. I saw my father as the personification of Job. They lost three daughters, one after another, in consecutive years, and then lost the family fortune. I felt the barbs of my young colleagues; because young children have no heart, or they don't think, or maybe neither one nor the other». ¹³⁹

3. A third trial took place during his period of studies for the priesthood in the seminary of San Carlos in Saragossa in the early 1920's. Blessed Josemaría's keen piety and lively faith always brought him to have a consistently high esteem for the ministerial priesthood, and an acute awareness of the demands of holiness and dedication it places on those destined to act *in persona Christi*. He entered the seminary purely and simply out of a desire to do the will of God. ¹⁴⁰ Yet this generous perception of the priesthood was not shared by many of his colleagues and contemporaries, who regarded it as one more career, ¹⁴¹ perhaps even less worthy than other ones. Later on

¹³⁸ «Así preparó el Señor mi alma, con esos ejemplos empapados de dignidad cristiana y de heroísmo escondido siempre subrayados por una sonrisa, para que más tarde le fuera pobre instrumento —con la gracia de Dios— en la realización de una Providencia suya (...)» *Letter 28-III-1971*, in VP 69.

¹³⁹ «Yo he hecho sufrir siempre mucho a los que tenía alrededor. No he provocado catástrofes, pero el Señor, para darme a mí, que era el clavo —perdón, Señor—, daba una en el clavo y ciento en la herradura. Y vi a mi padre como la personificación de Job. Perdieron tres hijas, una detrás de otra, en años consecutivos, y se quedaron sin fortuna. Yo sentí el zarpazo de mis pequeños colegas; porque los niños no tienen corazón o no tienen cabeza, o quizás carecen de cabeza y de corazón» *Meditation 14.2.1964*, in VP 59, note 118. Vázquez de Prada uses this text repeatedly as an interpretative key for special moments in Blessed Josemaría's life (cf. ibid., pp. 186, 197, 246, 317, 397).

¹⁴⁰ «Aquello no era lo que Dios me pedía, y yo me daba cuenta: no quería ser sacerdote para ser sacerdote, "el cura" que dicen en España. Y tenía veneración al sacerdote, pero no quería para mí un sacerdocio así» *Meditation 14.2.1964*, in VP 115 f.

¹⁴¹ «Entre los recuerdos que me vienen abrigo a la memoria con viva actualidad, hay uno de cuando era joven sacerdote. Desde entonces he recibido con no poca frecuencia dos

he would sum up his view and reaction in saying that the «priesthood is not a career, it is an apostolate!». ¹⁴²

The «hatchet blows» ¹⁴³ experienced in Saragossa, as he called them, brought him, in his own words, to be «profoundly anti-clerical». ¹⁴⁴ Over a certain period of his seminary life, he experienced serious difficulties on his way to the priesthood, even though in his heart of hearts he never doubted his divine vocation. ¹⁴⁵ As things

consejos unánimes para *hacer carrera*: ante todo, no trabajar, no hacer mucha labor apostólica, porque esto suscita envidias y crea enemigos; y, en segundo lugar, no escribir, porque todo lo que se escribe —aunque se escriba con precisión y con claridad— suele interpretarse mal (...) Doy gracias a Dios Nuestro Señor por no haber seguido nunca estos consejos, y estoy contento porque no me hice sacerdote para *hacer carrera*» *Letter 2-II-1945*, in VP 219, note 47. «Salían de allí [del Seminario] para seguir su carrera... Se comportaban bien y procuraban ir de una parroquia a otra mejor. El que estaba preparado, hacía oposiciones a una canonjía. Cuando pasaba el tiempo, los metían en el Cabildo, de donde procedían los elementos necesarios para ayudar en el gobierno de la diócesis, para la formación del clero en el Seminario...» in VP 115.

¹⁴² «Hace pocos días una persona, indiscretamente, me preguntó, desde luego sin que se le diera pie para ello, si los que seguimos la carrera sacerdotal tenemos retiro, al llegar a viejos... Me indigné. Como no le contestara, insistió el importuno. Entonces se me ocurrió la contestación, que, a mi juicio, no tiene vuelta de hoja: —El sacerdocio —le dije— no es una carrera, ¡es un apostolado! Así lo siento. Y he querido ponerlo en estas notas, para que, con la ayuda del Señor, jamás se me olvide la diferencia indicada» *Apuntes íntimos*, 127, in VP 117.

¹⁴³ Speaking of his seminary years in Saragossa he said: «pasó el tiempo y sucedieron muchas cosas duras, tremendas, que no os digo porque a mí no me causan pena, pero a vosotros sí que os las darían. Eran hachazos que Dios Nuestro Señor daba para preparar —de ese árbol— la viga que iba a servir, a pesar de ella misma, para hacer su Obra. Yo, casi sin darme cuenta, repetía: *Domine, ut videam! Domine ut sit!*» *Meditation 14.2.1964*, in VP 135.

¹⁴⁴ «(...) quizá —si no hubieras estorbado mi salida del Seminario de Zaragoza, cuando creí haberme equivocado de camino— estaría alborotando en las Cortes españolas (...) y no a tu lado, precisamente porque (...) hubo momento en que me sentí profundamente anticlerical, ¡yo que amo tanto a mis hermanos en el sacerdocio!» *Apuntes íntimos*, 1748, in VP 136.

¹⁴⁵ Vázquez de Prada observes: «Esas cosas duras, tremendas, esos hachazos no se referían, evidentemente, a las groserías o insultos de unos seminaristas (...) Pasado el tiempo calificaría de “pequeñeces” aquellas chinchorrerías, bien poca cosa comparadas con el gran bien que a su alma había hecho la estancia en el Seminario del que no recordaba sino cosas buenas. No; a ese otro recordatorio del San Carlos hay que buscarle raíces más amargas (...) A través de su confesión [this refers to *Apuntes íntimos* as cited in the above note] se vislumbra la resistencia de Josemaría a seguir la pauta clerical impuesta por el ambiente (...) Suma la comunión pastoral de schismáticos antieclesiales, que subían, como una marea,

turned out, some people in Saragossa did not wish him to remain there.¹⁴⁶ For many years even his continued residence in Madrid remained precarious and uncertain.¹⁴⁷

Perhaps it could be said that Blessed Josemaría's "anticlericalism"¹⁴⁸ (which he never lost) comes to this: the priest is meant to be like a living Christ. Hence on no account can he "live off the Church"; he must live *under it* as it were, *for it*, gladly and willingly burning his life out as a holocaust of service to God's people.¹⁴⁹

concepción del sacerdocio a una lucrativa "carrera eclesiástica". Sobre este punto guardaba absoluta reserva, aunque de algún modo se dejaba traslucir por fuera. "Se notaba que llevaba algo por dentro que hacía que el Seminario resultase un marco estrecho para sus inquietudes", dice uno de sus compañeros (Agustín Callejas)» VP 135 f. The simple fact that Blessed Josemaría was the only extern student to attend childrens" catechism lessons on Sunday mornings (externs were not obliged to do so) is indicative of this attitude (cf. *ibid.*, p. 112).

¹⁴⁶ Cf. VP 228-30. Vázquez de Prada comments, after studying the evidence: «examinando fríamente el comportamiento de la curia, es obligado aceptar el criterio (...) de quienes conocían los entresijos de la vida clerical en Zaragoza. Lo que estaba sucediendo lleva a pensar que alguien, valiéndose de su influencia, hacia lo posible para expulsarlo de la diócesis, ya fuese de buenas formas o "a palos"» VP 230. Blessed Josemaría called such efforts «providenciales injusticias»: cf. *ibid.*, note 82. The same can be said of his placement at Perdiguera, a rather inaccessible village some ten or fifteen miles from Saragossa, just a few days after ordination: cf. VP 199.

¹⁴⁷ Incardination was especially difficult for extradiocesan priests in Madrid over this period: cf. VP 251 ff. Vázquez de Prada speaks of «las lágrimas que le había de costar su condición de extradiocesano en Madrid» *ibid.*, p. 261. At times he felt he was like «una gallina en corral ajeno», "like a hen in somebody else's back yard" cf. VP 310.

¹⁴⁸ «Nunca ha dejado de molestarme la actitud del que hace de *llamarse católico* una profesión, como la de quienes quieren negar el principio de la responsabilidad personal, sobre la que se basa toda la moral cristiana. El espíritu de la Obra y el de sus socios es servir a la Iglesia, y a todas las criaturas, sin servirse de la Iglesia. Me gusta que el católico lleve a Cristo no en el nombre, sino en la conducta, dando testimonio real de vida cristiana. Me repugna el clericalismo y comprendo que —junto a un anticlericalismo malo— hay también un anticlericalismo bueno, que procede del amor al sacerdocio, que se opone a que el simple fiel o el sacerdote use de una misión sagrada para fines terrenos» *Conversaciones*, 47.

¹⁴⁹ Many moments of his priestly life could be referred to. During his first pastoral assignment, in Perdiguera (1925), he was deeply hurt by the state the tabernacle of the church had been left in, and by sacrilegious abuses of the sacrament of Penance: cf. VP 199 ff. In administering the latter sacrament, he did not hesitate to fulfil personally a good part of the penance due for the sins confessed: cf. VP 222 f. Speaking of the tendency to impose heavy penances, he encouraged the priests of Opus Dei in the following terms: «Vosotros no hagáis eso, ni con vuestros hermanos sacerdotes. Ya rezarán ellos (...) Imponedles una penitencia breve». Speaking of Mons. Álvaro del Portillo, his confessor for most of his life, he

Summarising and reflecting on the above episodes — many others could have been adduced — it might be said that Blessed Josemaría was moved to closeness with God and to trust in him not only in an interior, purely spiritual, fashion. God's grace moved him unrelentingly towards holiness *not* by taking him out of the world, nor by sparing him an extraordinary variety of difficulties and challenges, some big, some small, most hidden, but *in and through*¹⁵⁰ many situations which were or which might have constituted obstacles in his own life and in the path of Opus Dei:¹⁵¹ the fact that few of the earliest members of the Work persevered,¹⁵² the experience of death,¹⁵³ poverty,¹⁵⁴ or just the

said: «Álvaro me suele poner un Avemaría de penitencia. Luego me dice: *las penitencias de usted, las hago yo*. Y ciertamente he hecho igual, hijos míos, porque nunca he puesto penitencias grandes» in VP 223, note 54.

¹⁵⁰ «(...) Debéis comprender ahora —con una nueva claridad— que Dios os llama a servirle en *y desde* las tareas civiles, materiales, seculares de la vida humana: en un laboratorio, en el quirófano de un hospital, en el cuartel, en la cátedra universitaria, en la fábrica, en el taller, en el campo, en el hogar de familia y en todo el inmenso panorama del trabajo, Dios nos espera cada día. Sabedlo bien: hay *un algo* santo, divino, escondido en las situaciones más comunes, que toca a cada uno de vosotros descubrir» Homily *Amar el mundo apasionadamente* (8.10.1967), in *Conversaciones*, n. 114. Italics added.

¹⁵¹ «(...) estando nosotros siempre en el mundo, en el trabajo ordinario, en los propios deberes de estado, y allí, a través de todo, ¡santos!» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 154, in VP 302.

¹⁵² Few of the earliest members of the Work persevered: VP 423.94. «Yo entonces no sabía que casi ninguno iba a perseverar; pero el Señor conocía que mi pobre corazón — flojo, cobarde — necesitaba esa compañía y esa fortaleza» *Meditation* 19.3.1975, in VP 446.

¹⁵³ Conversely, several of those who were firm in their vocation died soon after joining the Work. When don José María Somoano passed away Blessed Josemaría wrote: «hoy, de buena gana, le he dado a Jesús ese socio. —Está con El y será una gran ayuda. Tenía puestas muchas esperanzas en su carácter, recto y enérgico: Dios lo ha querido para El: bendito sea» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 785, in VP 436. Speaking of María Ignacia García Escobar who died on September 13, 1933, he said: «En las vísperas de la Exaltación de la Santa Cruz, 13 de Septiembre, se durmió en el Señor (...) No la hemos perdido: la hemos ganado. — Al conocer su muerte, queremos que la pena natural se trueque pronto en la sobrenatural alegría de saber ciertamente que ya tenemos más poder en el cielo», cit. in Appendix XV of VP 627. Speaking of Luis Gordon, who also died, and of don Somoano, he wrote: «Amenemos la Cruz, la Santa Cruz que pesa sobre la Obra de Dios. Nuestro Gran Rey Cristo Jesús ha querido llevarse a los dos mejor preparados, para que no confiemos en nada terreno, ni siquiera en las virtudes personales de nadie, sino sólo y exclusivamente en su Providencia amorosísima» (5.11.1932), cit. in Appendix 14 of VP 626.

¹⁵⁴ «Estoy —más que nunca— sin un céntimo. Nuestra pobreza (gran señora mía, la

continuous pinpricks and chaffing of everyday life.¹⁵⁵

Those very experiences constituted the outer manifestations of the quiet and effective action of the Holy Spirit which forged and chiselled his personality to be like that of another Christ, a son of God,¹⁵⁶ as well as giving him a lucid and profound understanding of the workings of the human heart under the influence of grace. He came to realise in his own person that the call to holiness is entirely compatible with all the joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions and daily worries that humans could experience;¹⁵⁷ indeed the latter would constitute the very raw material of Christian prayer and holiness, and would be elevated, purified and divinised in the process.

Summing up, Blessed Josemaría's proclamation of the *universal call to holiness* would be intrepid and resolute not only because he had learned to trust in the abundance of the God "who wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tm 2:5), but *inseparably* because he and so many of his spiritual children and followers would make a vocational commitment to unostentatiously carry the "*cruz sin cireneos*".¹⁵⁸ They would attempt to shoul-

lo mismo que alimenta y viste a las aves, según dice el Sto. Evangelio. No me preocupa nada, nada, nada esta situación económica. Estamos acostumbrados a vivir de milagro» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 884, in VP 479 f. «Dios, mi Padre y Señor, suele darme alegría en medio de la pobreza total en que vivimos» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 957, in VP 497. Blessed Josemaría states quite clearly that he owes this spirit to his parents: «Si me echan en cara la pobreza de mis padres, alegraos y decid que el Señor lo quiso así, para que nuestra Obra, su Obra, se hiciera sin medios humanos: yo así lo veo. De otra parte mis padres, mis padres calladamente heroicos, son mi gran orgullo» *Letter* 4919, 14.10.1971, in VP 82.

¹⁵⁵ «Cuando yo era muy joven, y vivía en el Seminario de Zaragoza, una vez tuve un disgusto muy gordo. En aquellos días, el profesor de Derecho Canónico comenzó a contarnos esta historia [about the preparation of millstones by chafing one against another]. Esas palabras ["Así trata Dios a los que quiere. ¿Me entiendes, Escrivá?"] mi hicieron mucho bien. Efectivamente, ninguno se va a santificar por medio del Preste Juan de las Indias, sino con el trato de las personas que tenemos a nuestro lado» in VP 171, note 133. On the same idea, cf. *The Way*, n. 91.

¹⁵⁶ To "inspire" the Work, says Blessed Josemaría, «El me llevó, sirviéndose de adversidades sin cuenta y hasta de mi haraganería» *Apuntes íntimos*, 1090, in VP 250.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *The Way*, n. 91.

¹⁵⁸ «Lo extraordinario nuestro es lo ordinario: lo ordinario hecho con perfección. Sonréí siempre, pasando por alto —también con elegancia humana— las cosas que molestan, que fastidian; ser generosos sin tasa. En una palabra, hacer de nuestra vida corriente una continua oración» *Letter* 24.III.1930, n. 12, in VP 300 f.

der, as best they could, some of the pain, fatigue and loneliness¹⁵⁹ of their brothers and sisters in the faith, of their companions and colleagues in this pilgrim world,¹⁶⁰ to the exclusion of none,¹⁶¹ thus facilitating their path to holiness.¹⁶² *Frater qui adiuvatur a fratre quasi civitas firma*, says the book of Proverbs, «a brother helped by a brother is like a walled city» (Prov 18:19). Through this testimony and apostolate the universal call to holiness would become a real possibility in the lives of many people.¹⁶³ Blessed Josemaría and his followers would strive to carry out this mission firstly in the spiritual powerhouse of prayer and penance, and also in the hundred and one little acts of service¹⁶⁴ which go to make up real life, everyday life,¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ The group of priests Blessed Josemaría worked with became, he said, his “crown of thorns” because they didn’t understand the apostolic work of Opus Dei with priests. Fr. Valentín Sánchez and Blessed Pedro Poveda encouraged him to let them go, but the Founder resisted doing this, aware as he was of the need secular priests have for support and accompaniment. Cf. VP 542.

¹⁶⁰ The spirit of Opus Dei is characterised, Blessed Josemaría said, by «sencillez, el no llamar la atención, el no exhibir, el no ocultar (...) la repugnancia al espectáculo» *Meditation* 14.2.1964.

¹⁶¹ «El corazón del Señor es corazón de misericordia, que se compadece de los hombres y se acerca a ellos. Nuestra entrega, al servicio de las almas, es una manifestación de esa misericordia del Señor, no sólo hacia nosotros, sino hacia la humanidad toda. Porque nos ha llamado a santificarnos en la vida corriente diaria» *Letter* 24-III-1930, n. 1, in VP 299.

¹⁶² «Con mucha frecuencia, no pocas personas me han comentado con asombro la alegría que, gracias a Dios, tienen y contagian mis hijos en el Opus Dei. Ante la evidencia de esta realidad, respondo siempre con la misma explicación, porque no conozco otra: el fundamento de su felicidad consiste en no tener miedo a la vida ni a la muerte, en no acogotarse ante la tribulación, en el esfuerzo cotidiano de vivir con espíritu de sacrificio, constantemente dispuestos —a pesar de la personal miseria y debilidad— a negarse a sí mismos, con tal de hacer el camino cristiano más llevadero y amable a los demás» *Amigos de Dios*, n. 132.

¹⁶³ It is interesting to note the way Blessed Josemaría detected the firmness in vocation of the hospital chaplain don José María Somoano, one of the first members of the Work: «Con José M^a Somoano hemos conseguido, como dice por ahí, un *enchufe magnífico*, porque sabe nuestro hermano, admirablemente, encauzar el sufrimiento de los enfermos de su hospital, para que el Corazón de nuestro Jesús acelere la hora de su Obra, movido por tan hermosa expiación» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 545, in VP 433 f. Don José María Somoano died shortly afterwards (16.7.1932), probably as a result of poisoning. On his life, cf. J.M. CEJAS, *José María Somoano en los comienzos del Opus Dei*, Rialp, Madrid 1995.

¹⁶⁴ «Se escucha como un colosal *non serviam*, en la vida personal, en la vida familiar, en los ambientes de trabajo y en la vida pública» *Letter* 14-II-1974, n. 10, in VP 306.

transformed by the power of charity,¹⁶⁶ that is, “making the path towards holiness more pleasant and amiable”.¹⁶⁷

VII. Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have attempted to “test”, from a strictly theological viewpoint, the plausibility of the claim that the spirit and message Blessed Josemaría lived and preached from October 2nd 1928 onwards, constituted a true founding charism in benefit of the whole Church. A much more thorough reflection and research would be required to obtain a result which is satisfactory to the full. Nonetheless I hope to have shown in these pages not only that the message of the universal call to holiness as propounded by Blessed Josemaría is both ecclesial and charismatic in the *doctrinal* sense (as Vatican II recognised), but also that it is so insofar as it is a *human* message in the fullest, Christian, sense of the term. After all,

bía como una acción diferente —distinguida— de las acciones normales de la vida corriente: métodos, organizaciones, propagandas, que se incrustaban en las obligaciones familiares y profesionales del cristiano —en ocasiones, impidiéndole cumplirlas con perfección— y que constituían un mundo aparte, sin fundirse ni entretrejarse con el resto de su existencia» *Letter 6-V-1945*, n. 41, in VP 287 f. The “ordinariness” of the message of the Founder of Opus Dei would be its guarantee. «Mientras veremos caer grandes “apostolados” bullangueros, que ahora levantan fervor y entusiasmos humanos, la O. de D., cada vez más poderosa y recia, durará hasta el fin» *Apuntes íntimos*, n. 629, in VP 387.

¹⁶⁶ Blessed Josemaría took Paul's *caritas omnia suffert* (1 Cor 13:7) as his motto in his work of formation in the Seminary of San Carlos, in Saragossa: cf. VP 159-65. «Sobre mi mesa de trabajo, me puse ese recordatorio: *caritas omnia suffert*. Quería aprender a hacer todo por amor, y enseñarlo con el ejemplo a los seminaristas» in VP 159. «¡Con qué gozo anotaba yo los progresos de aquellos chicos! Y me servían de diálogo con el Señor, pidiéndole a El, con su Madre, que los cuidase» in VP 163. During his seminary years, Blessed Josemaría «escribía unos versos muy malos, y los firmaba, poniendo en mi firma todas las vibraciones de mi vida, así: “El clérigo Corazón”» *Letter 653*, 4.9.1938, in VP 164. And in 1950: «Recuerdo siempre con emoción aquellas palabras de la primera carta de San Pablo a los de Corinto, que tuve tanto tiempo delante de mi vista, cuando estuve de superior en el Seminario de San Carlos, en Zaragoza: *la caridad es paciente (...)*» *Letter 7-X-1950*, in VP 164 f.

¹⁶⁷ «Fomenta tu espíritu de mortificación en los detalles de caridad, con afán de hacer amable a todos el camino de santidad en medio del mundo: una sonrisa puede ser, a veces, la mejor muestra del espíritu de penitencia» *Forja*, n. 149. «Procuró dejarme la piel, para que mis hermanos pequeños “pisen blando”, como usted nos dice. ¡Hay tantas alegrías en este “pasarlas negras”!» *Surco*, p. 55.

St Paul was the one who insisted, when writing to the Corinthians, that *charity* is the greatest of all charisms, the only one that lasts, the one that really judges the rest (cf. 1 Cor 13). The vibrant, practical, unostentatious charity that Blessed Josemaría lived and taught was the unequivocal sign of his true humanity, the very thing in a position to make holiness a possibility for all, no matter what their circumstances, the surest guarantee of the living presence of the Holy Spirit.

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