

Education in Freedom and Responsibility: A Summary of the Philosophy of Education of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

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1. INTRODUCTION

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the Founder of Opus Dei, and the first Chancellor of the University of Navarre and the University of Piura never wrote a book about the science of education nor did he expound any particular educational theory throughout his life. However, we will see that the Founder of Opus Dei has made very valuable personal contributions to the science of education without having written any great treatise about the subject for he was himself, an exceptional educator and an extraordinary teacher.

A philosophy of education is commonly understood to be a study of the ultimate causes of education: formal, material, efficient, and final. In other words, who is being educated, by whom, how and for what purpose, or end? This framework will be used to outline the pedagogical richness and philosophy of education contained in the life and teachings of Blessed Josemaría. There are three sources that we can examine to elucidate his educational philosophy: first, his own priestly life which was, in his own words, “a great catechesis”, that is, a work of teaching and forming others; second, the successful spreading of his teachings throughout the world by those he formed, reaching some 60.000 people from 80 different countries in his own lifetime; and third, the educational centers around the world that are inspired by his spirit¹.

¹ Cfr. V. GARCÍA HOZ, *Tras las huellas del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (Ideas para la educación)*, Madrid 1997, pp. 11 y 32. F. PONZ, *La educación y el quehacer educativo en las enseñanzas de Monseñor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Pamplona 1976, pp. 64-65, 103. All texts of this paper whose references are in Spanish, are translated by the Author.

The first source is his own life and his oral and written catechesis. He was a teacher all of his life. His first job, through which he supported his family in the 1920's, was as a college teacher, tutoring and giving classes in law and philosophy². As he said himself, he never lost contact with the university³. He spent fifty years as a priest preaching and speaking only about God. Preaching is a form of teaching and here we see that Blessed Josemaría used a variety of formats in order to bring people closer to God: catechism classes, short talks, days of recollection, retreats, and personal spiritual guidance⁴.

His oral catechesis encompasses the most formal to the most causal communication. Formal speeches given at the University of Navarre in his role as Grand Chancellor⁵ and formal communications in the form of interviews granted to major world journals and newspapers have been published⁶. An informal means used abundantly by the Founder of Opus Dei to arrive at souls was the get-together, a family reunion in which he opened his heart, and made himself available for all by answering their questions. These get-togethers were filmed in the last years of his life and give us an important primary source for his oral teachings. Escrivá also used varied informal means of communication in his work of formation of others – from personal conversations of advice, precise indications, and open and simple dealings in the circumstances of family life⁷.

Many of these informal suggestions, words of advice, and supernatural considerations were later written down by the Founder and his collaborators and organized into three books — *The Way*, *Furrow* and *Forge*. In addition, his homilies have been published in three different volumes⁸. A final written source for his pedagogical ideas are the many letters he wrote to members of Opus Dei in which he explained key points of the spirit that God had entrusted to him. According to Don Alvaro del Portillo, one of his closest collaborators and his successor, «some of the characteristics of Blessed Josemaría's writing style are its theological depth; the immediate connection the writings establish between the theory they expound and its relation with everyday life; and their simple, direct,

² Cfr. P. BERGLAR, *Opus Dei: Life and Work of its Founder Josemaría Escrivá*, Princeton 1994, p. 30. J.L. ILLANES, *La universidad en la vida y en la enseñanza de Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Pamplona 1994, p. 105.

³ Cfr. *Conversations with Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, 276.

⁴ V. GARCÍA HOZ, *Tras las huellas*, cit., p. 12. IDEM, *La educación en Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Pamplona 1994, p. 81.

⁵ Cfr. VV.AA., *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la universidad*, Pamplona 1993.

⁶ Cfr. *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, New Rochelle 1972.

⁷ Cfr. F. PONZ, *La educación*, cit., p. 79.

⁸ Cfr. J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Christ is Passing By*, New Rochelle 1974; *Friends of God*, New Rochelle, 1981; and *In Love with the Church*, New Rochelle 1989.

and easy style which makes them readily intelligible to people of various cultural and social backgrounds»⁹.

There is therefore, substantial data in the oral and written words of the Founder of Opus Dei, both to understand the message that our Lord wanted him to communicate to the world, and to analyze his personal pedagogy.

The second source for his educational philosophy is the successful spreading of his teachings throughout the world by those he formed. He taught others how to teach with his own life, personally incarnating the spirit of Opus Dei and passing it on to others, leaving it sculptured in their minds and hearts. This is one of the great educational works of his life —teaching others how to pass on the spirit of Opus Dei— no matter what one's professional training and situation may be in the world. He gave a minimum of methodological instruction, mostly in the form of general modes of operating, teaching those not trained as teachers how to give catechism classes, talks and, for his priest sons, mediations and homilies. He worked up complete curriculum outlines and lesson plans for all talks and classes, emphasizing the important points to be covered. However, his main advice was to look at Christ, the teacher, and teach as he taught: «“Coepit facere et docere”. Jesus began to do and then to teach. You and I have to bear witness with our example, because we cannot live a double life. We cannot preach what we do not practice. In other words, we have to teach what we are at least struggling to put into practice»¹⁰.

The third source of evidence is the educational centers around the world that are inspired by his spirit and are for students of all ages and conditions. These educational enterprises are staffed by a great number of people who, attracted by the ideal of service, have chosen to dedicate their professional life to the field of education. In the words of Blessed Josemaría, «Opus Dei fosters technical training centers for industrial workers, agricultural training schools for farm laborers, centers for primary, secondary and university education, and many other varied activities all over the world, because it's apostolic zeal... is like a sea without shores»¹¹.

In all the educational activities animated by the spirit of Opus Dei, one finds the same ethos: «Their principal features can be summed up as follows: to train people in personal freedom and in personal responsibility [...]. Another characteristic is the spirit of living together in harmony without discrimination of any kind [...]. Finally, there is the spirit of human brotherhood [...] The corpo-

⁹ A. DEL PORTILLO, *Forward, Christ is Passing By*, New Rochelle 1990, pp 10-11.

¹⁰ *Forge*, 694.

¹¹ *Conversations*, 120.

rate works which Opus Dei runs throughout the world are always at the service of everyone because they are a Christian service»¹².

According to Victor García Hoz, a close collaborator of Blessed Josemaría in these educational initiatives, «such an intense work of creating and developing so many educational institutions could not have been done without a very clear and strong understanding that education in all its manifestations is principally the development of the person to search for the tendency to the truth»¹³. This belief in the transcendental value of the search for the truth which brings one to the responsible exercise of his/her freedom summarizes, in my opinion, the essence of the philosophy of education of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Educators today would gain much by criticizing the current American educational philosophy of constructivism with its relativistic attitude toward truth and moral values in the light of Escrivá's realist philosophy.

2. HIS NOTION OF THE PERSON TO BE EDUCATED

Every philosophy of education is necessarily rooted in a notion of the human person, his nature and end. Francisco Ponz Piedrafita, former Rector of the University of Navarre analyzes Escrivá's philosophy of the human person: «Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer had an elevated concept of the dignity of the human person, totally in conformity with Christian thought of all times, but understood by him with great vitality and without separation from the numerous and demanding consequences of this reality»¹⁴. This Christian anthropology sees man as created by God in his image and likeness with a spiritual and immortal soul, with intelligence and free will, destined to eternal pleasure with God as his ultimate end. In the words of Blessed Josemaría, «If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness and gave him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to uncover the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be attained only by dint of hard work»¹⁵.

The human being is thus understood as a free person responsible for his own acts; put on earth to work for love of God and to love God in his work; called to live in society as a brother among other men. This conviction of the dig-

¹² *Ibidem*, 84

¹³ V. GARCÍA HOZ, *Tras las huellas*, cit., p. 12.

¹⁴ F. PONZ, *La universidad al servicio de la persona*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 202.

¹⁵ *Christ is Passing By*, 10.

nity of each person led Blessed Josemaría to consider all men, and therefore all students, as equals; consequently, he promoted schools for those economically well-off as well for those more disadvantaged, at the elementary level, the technical level and university level. He often said, «There is only one race, the race of the children of God». This conviction led members of Opus Dei to begin the first inter-racial, inter-tribal college in the continent of Africa. «Everyone who has sufficient ability should have access to higher education, no matter what his social background, economic means, race, or religion»¹⁶.

According to Ponz, in the teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei, education is contemplated from a theological point of view. It considers man in the fullness of his being and in his end, in conformity with the Christian sense of life¹⁷. Two important theological consequences of this Christian anthropology are: 1) the fundamental dignity of the human person life lies in its divine filiation, being a child of God; and 2) this gives an important unity to one's life, all that one does, even the most unimportant little actions, should be means of drawing closer to God¹⁸.

«This divine filiation —this awareness that God is our Father— is the basis of the spirit of Opus Dei [...]. Precisely because we are children of God, we can contemplate in love and wonder everything as coming from the hands of our Father, God the Creator [...]»¹⁹.

Education, therefore, has to promote the integral development of the human person in the natural order —to develop the intelligence and to form the will and heart so that it can also develop in the supernatural order. Thus, the human personality unfolds with all its rich possibilities—the student will learn the responsible exercise of his/her freedom and will be able to fulfill with competence his/her professional work done for the love of God in the service of others.

«Christian faith makes us see the world as God's creation and appreciate all its nobility and beauty, recognizing the dignity of each person made in the image of God. It makes us admire the splendid gift of freedom which gives us power over our own actions and enables us —with heaven's grace— to build our eternal destiny»²⁰. Because Blessed Josemaría understood freedom as the most important human attribute given to man by God, you could say that he saw education as learning how to legitimately use your freedom.

¹⁶ *Conversations*, 74.

¹⁷ F. PONZ, *La educación*, cit, p. 66.

¹⁸ V. GARCÍA HOZ, *La educación*, cit., p. 83.

¹⁹ *Christ is Passing By*, 64-65.

²⁰ *Christ is Passing By*, 99.

The goal of integral education is to help students develop their character; that is, to grow in human virtues. Escrivá understood well that character is only developed through repeated opportunities to practice the good and therefore he encouraged a system of personal advising and coaching for students. «The human virtues are, I insist, the foundation for the supernatural ones. These in turn provide us with constant encouragement to behave as good human beings. In either case, it is not sufficient merely to want to have these virtues. We have to learn how to practice them. Learn to do good. We need to make a habit of exercising each virtue, by actually being sincere, truthful, balanced, calm and patient... for love is proved by deeds and we cannot love God only by word, but with deed and in truth»²¹. This can be considered another of his essential contributions to educational thought, especially as so many schools today are attempting to foster character development to counteract societal problems. Character education is only successful when the student is understood in this context.

This understanding of the role of education as promoting the integral formation of the student is especially apparent in Blessed Josemaría's words about the university student and the goal of university education. «The ideal I would propose (to the students of our day) is above all one of work well done and of adequate intellectual preparation during their college year [...] A university should [...] prepare students for a life of generous help to their neighbors, of Christian charity. College years are a period of preparation to find solutions to these problems»²².

The need for inculcating in the students a mentality of service to others is another of the constant teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei²³. Beginning at the lowest educational grades and continuing through the university years, students have to be animated to live generously little acts of service to others, in their family, school, and neighborhood. «The university has service to mankind as its highest mission; to be ferment in the society in which it live [...]»²⁴. The spirit of Opus Dei is to sanctify yourself through your professional work and Blessed Josemaría saw study, the students' work, as essential in the fulfillment of this goal. «You must study,...but that is not enough...One has to study to gain the world and conquer it for God. Then we can raise the level of our efforts; we can try to turn the work we do into an encounter with the Lord and the foundation to support those who will follow our way in the future. In this way, study will become prayer»²⁵.

²¹ *Friends of God*, 91.

²² *Conversations*, 75.

²³ Cfr. F. PONZ, *La educación*, cit., p. 118.

²⁴ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Servidores nobilísimos de la ciencia*, in Josemaría Escrivá, cit.

²⁵ *Furrow*, 526.

According to Don Alvaro, Blessed Josemaría took into consideration, in all his teachings about education the two dimensions, human and supernatural, because both are essential if the integral development of the human person is to be procured²⁶. Education has to include the development of the supernatural dimension to bring students to know God, and thereby seek their true happiness, or it is not true education. Here is another message for today's universities that attract students by exclusively emphasizing the career preparation they provide. These institutions may be passing on knowledge and training but they are not 'educating' students.

3 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Blessed Josemaría had a very high consideration for the profession of education, which he saw as one with special possibilities to influence the human spirit. Although he always spoke about the value of all human work, one could say that he had a certain predilection for the work of teachers. After all, he was, as we have seen, a teacher all of his life.

A teacher in Barcelona, Spain asked him about her profession during a get-together. Escrivá told her that she had an admirable profession like that of Jesus who was called Teacher. Using the analogy of the artist he told her that the souls she had under her care were like soft clay. She could put her fingers on them and mold them with her faith and with her great desires of being an admirable Christian, a good servant of the others, of her country. She could be assured that she had many stupendous things she could teach them²⁷.

Blessed Josemaría was always encouraging educators to see the transcendental importance of their work and their responsibility to use their work to be of service to all men, human progress, and the entire society²⁸. As we saw above, Escrivá envisioned the work of a teacher as a sculptor or artist forming the students in front of them. As early as 1939, he wrote a letter to his children about the importance of this work: «You are God's instruments for a marvelous supernatural work of art. Do this conscientiously; putting your sights on Christ, who is your model. Painters, in fact, put themselves in front of the canvas every day, they paint and repaint it as much as is necessary. And the same happens to those who

²⁶ Cfr. A. DEL PORTILLO, *Prólogo*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 27.

²⁷ From ideas developed by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in *Brafa*, Barcelona, (Spain), in 1972.

²⁸ Cfr. F. PONZ, *La educación*, cit., p. 88.

polish stones; they take off what is superfluous or add what is lacking. In the same way, no more nor less, you are making statues. All of your time has to be dedicated to preparing, for God, these marvelous statues»²⁹.

As in all work, the teacher must be prepared professionally and have very high standards. The subject needs to be taught in accordance with the most recent knowledge in the field while also passing on the cultural heritage. The classes should be well prepared using teaching techniques that are most appropriate for the students and are therefore motivating. The teacher must generously put the necessary effort for the best professional and human preparation of the students. «Teacher: may you be eager to make your pupils understand quickly what has cost you hours of study to see clearly»³⁰.

However, since the goal is to integrally educate the student, humanly and supernaturally, it is important that teachers also continue to develop their own interior life, so that they can help the students to develop theirs. «Teacher: your undeniable keenness to know and practice the best methods of helping your students acquire earthly knowledge is good. But be equally keen to know and practice Christian asceticism, which is the only method of helping them and yourself to be better»³¹.

Blessed Josemaría spoke often with teachers, especially during his catechetical journeys during 1972, 1974, and 1975 in which he met with large numbers of people in get-togethers. On June 20, 1974, in *La Chacra*, Argentina, a teacher of many years asked him how she could better form her students and he told her that it was wonderful that she was a teacher for her students would look up to her and admire her because they saw that she knew a lot, was well prepared, dressed well and was kind, and patient. As always he recommended that along with these human means she put the spiritual means —prayer, mortification, example³².

Blessed Josemaría had clearly in mind that giving a Christian anthropology, education can only be understood as an intentional action carried out upon another person; thus, a relation exists between teacher and student. Escrivá saw education as a work of friendship, a love that brings the parents closer to their children, the professor to his students and the students to one another³³. He

²⁹ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Letter*, 2-X-1939 cited in A. VÁZQUEZ, *Tomás Alvira: Una pasión por la familia. Un maestro de la educación*, Madrid 1997, p. 231.

³⁰ *Furrow*, 229.

³¹ *The Way*, 344.

³² From ideas developed by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in *La Chacra*, Buenos Aires, (Argentina), in 1974.

³³ Cfr. V. GARCÍA HOZ, *La educación*, cit. p. 93.

reminded a son of his who was a teacher during a get-together in Barcelona, to be a Christian teacher and to pray for his students and for their parents, especially «those that are more interesting». He told him to prepare his classes well, and be loyal to his students in such a way that little by little he became friends of theirs and thus get to know them better³⁴.

Blessed Josemaría saw the importance of the teacher being a role model and a moral mentor for the children and would often be asked which virtues — human and supernatural—, he felt were essential for a teacher to develop: Loyalty, humility, good humor, affection, amiability and patience, he would reply that teachers need all the virtues, but above all they should manifest a great loyalty to their students. The students must see that you love them, he would say, that you sacrifice for them, that you have sufficient knowledge and that you know how to communicate it to them with grace, with light, with the gift of tongues in such a way that they understand you. He insisted that teachers cannot demand of their students what they themselves do not have; they must try to possess it themselves and then demand it of their students³⁵. Escrivá needs teachers dedicated to the integral formation of their students —with a clear concept that education has to respond to the needs and demands of the human person— the intellectual, aesthetic, technical, moral and religious demands and needs³⁶.

From all teachers, and especially the university professor, Blessed Josemaría asks for a dedication to their work that implies continual professional development. Constantly studying himself, he knew very well that the university professor had to continually conduct research in his/her field, advance knowledge, and then share this knowledge with students. In an academic discourse, as the Grand Chancellor of the University of Navarre he said to the faculty: «You are illustrious cultivators of knowledge, in love with the Truth, you search for it with zeal in order to then experience the disinterested happiness of contemplating it. You are truly the noblest servants of Science, because you have dedicated your lives to the prodigious adventure of uncovering its richness. In addition, the cultural tradition of Christianity, that transmits human fullness to your work, impels you to further communicate these riches to the students with open generosity»³⁷. In these words, Blessed Josemaría expresses an appreciation for the perennial goal of the university that was recently reiterated by John Paul II at the

³⁴ From ideas developed by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in *Brafa*, Barcelona, (Spain), in 1972.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Cfr. V. GARCÍA HOZ, *Tras las huellas*, cit., p. 157.

³⁷ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Servidores nobilísimos*, Josemaría Escrivá, cit., pp. 87-88.

Jubilee of University Professors on September 10, 2000³⁸. Universities in the 21st century will gain much by adopting this philosophy which sees no dichotomy between the multiple tasks of the academic — research should inform teaching and be used to serve society.

4. METHODS OF TEACHING

There is perhaps no better way to understand the methodology of teaching expounded by Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer than by looking at his own style of teaching. He taught others how to teach with his own life. «More than giving methodological indications», Tomas Alvira explains³⁹, «the Father gave us general orientations and encouragement». For example, the educator should have exemplary personal deportment, present a systematic exposition of the lessons, have a moderate tone of voice and cordiality in the use of expressions. The goal is to create a climate of respect and of confidence. He emphasized to teachers that they teach by who they are. «The wish to teach and to teach from the heart creates in pupils a gratitude which is a suitable soil for the apostolate»⁴⁰.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá was himself an outstanding teacher and others learned how to teach by modeling his style: F. Ponz Piedrafita identifies ten principal aspects of his teaching style⁴¹. Here I will comment on three of the more salient features of his style that he encouraged others to imitate because of their effectiveness in promoting learning.

He knew the importance of repetition; anticipating current educational research that indicates that a concept will be learned once it has been repeated at least seven times. Blessed Josemaría used the Spanish language in all its nuances in order to make the explanation sound new to the students each time. He taught key concepts by giving many different practical examples from everyday life. For example, in order to teach the concept of “sanctification of work”, an essential aspect of the spirit of Opus Dei, he used a phrase replete with repetition to

³⁸ «Every day you are committed to proclaiming, defending and spreading the truth», (JOHN PAUL II, Homily *Jubilee of University Professors*, Sept 10, 2000, in http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/homilies/2000).

³⁹ A. VÁZQUEZ, *Tomás Alvira: Una pasión por la familia, Un maestro de la educación*, Madrid 1997, p. 225.

⁴⁰ *Furrow*, 230.

⁴¹ 1) Living quality, 2) simplicity, 3) personal relationship 4) clarity and fortitude, 5) use of images and anecdotes, 6) founded in experience, 7) gift of tongues, 8) patience in repeating 9) positive tone, 10) interactive, (cfr. F. PONZ, *La educación*, cit., pp. 79-85).

emphasize the idea, «Sanctify your work, sanctify yourself in your work and sanctify others through your work». Then he pointed out practical examples of how to do this relating each example to the person's professional work, whether they were a teacher, a lawyer, a farmer, or a homemaker. He used a graphic metaphor from nature to illustrate the idea. «Heaven and earth seem to merge on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives»⁴². Finally, he used the Socratic questioning technique to see if the concept had been mastered. «And which of these occupations is better? I will tell you what I have always said, the best work is the one done with most love of God».

He shared this style with others during a get-together explaining to a teacher in the *Los Molinos* School in Argentina that of course you have to tell children the same things many times since they have a short attention span, their heads do not have that much capacity to be concentrating for a long time on one theme but if you use examples and stories that will attract them, it will help them remember⁴³.

Today a current topic of educational research is the value of teaching through storytelling. Blessed Josemaría was a masterful storyteller and thus able to teach in such a way that his audience never forgot the message. He told stories from his own life and from the lives of others to illustrate the idea that we are children of God, or other essential concepts, of the spirit of Opus Dei. A story he enjoyed telling was about a member of Opus Dei who was a truck driver driving along a country road when a man stopped him for a ride. Before he got in, he asked the truck driver if he was alone. The truck driver hesitated, but said, «Yes, I'm alone». The man got into the truck and then asked why the man had hesitated when asked if he was alone. «Well sir —said the truck driver— I am never alone, because God is always with me. Stop the truck! —yelled the other man.— Why? —said the truck driver— I am the parish priest, —said the man—, and I was running away from my parish because I felt all alone»⁴⁴. Now I realize that I was wrong. In this way, he dramatically taught the essential concept of Opus Dei mentioned above —divine filiation— for as children of God we are never alone. Can anyone forget that God is always with them after hearing a story like this?

The final aspect of Blessed Josemaría's pedagogy that I wish to highlight is his ability to speak with a gift of tongues. In his catechesis throughout different countries he would speak to the poor and the rich as well as the learned and the

⁴² *Conversations*, 116.

⁴³ From ideas developed by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in *La Chacra*, Buenos Aires, (Argentina), in 1974.

⁴⁴ An anecdote told by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in the *Tabancura* school, Santiago de Chile, (Chile), in 1974.

uneducated, and all would understand his message. Sometimes words were not necessary, his smile, his embrace, and his actions communicated across language barriers. Once a handsome man with a beard stood up to ask Blessed Josemaría a question. «I am a Jew the man began his question». Escrivá interrupted him and said, «I love the Jews. Jesus is a Jew and so is his mother, Mary. I love you, my son. And now continue with your question». The man laughed and said to him, «Father you have already answered my question»⁴⁵.

Blessed Josemaría's way of teaching was a reflection of the spirit of Opus Dei that he incarnated. As always, he sought for the source of all he did in the life of Christ. His main suggestion to his followers, who were to teach others the spirit of Opus Dei, was to look to Christ. In a get-together he pointed out how the test of the Acts of the Apostles tell us that after the Resurrection, the Lord reunited his disciples and they talked of many things. They asked the Lord questions; they had a get-together. Blessed Josemaría told them that the Lord did what they were trying to do all over in the world, to give a great catechesis. Jesus gave them examples, parables. This, the Founder of Opus Dei would say, is the great catechesis: questions and answers⁴⁶.

Today some people think that anyone can become a teacher, and a rigorous academic preparation is not needed. Escrivá shows that there is a real science to effective teaching and a methodology that needs to be learned. Teaching involves helping students to learn and educate themselves assisted by the direction and mentoring of the teacher.

5. THE PURPOSE OF THE SCHOOL

The final aspect of a philosophy of education is the end or purpose. This has been considered above when considering both the student and the teacher. It is perhaps most evident in the purposes behind the starting of so many schools – elementary, technical and university. The University of Navarre was founded in 1952 after many years of prayer by the Founder of Opus Dei. He had high apostolic goals for this initiative which he expressed in 1960: «We want to make Navarre a cultural center of the first order in the service of Our Mother the Church; we desire that here learned men will be formed with a Christian sense of life... We want them to cultivate science rooted in the most solid principles and

⁴⁵ Cfr. S. BERNAL, *A Profile of Msgr. Escrivá*, Chicago 1996, p. 263.

⁴⁶ From ideas developed by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in *La Chacra*, Buenos Aires, (Argentina), in 1974.

that this light will project itself to all the roads of knowledge»⁴⁷. The main ideas of Blessed Josemaría's philosophy of education outlined above are valid for all types of educational institutions; nevertheless, we have some of the clearest statements of his thought in the area of educational purpose in his words addressed to the university⁴⁸.

Blessed Josemaría's discourses show that he has a clear understanding of the ends of the university: teaching, research, cultural extension and service to society⁴⁹, expressing each in the light of his educational philosophy. He saw the goal of teaching as «helping to shape the future, (this) is the work of many, but a very specific obligation of university professors. There is not a true university in the schools where they transmit knowledge but do not unite it to an integral formation of the young students' personalities»⁵⁰. The goal of research is two-fold: «The university with its eyes set on its supreme end —the health of all souls— dedicates itself with generous effort to the cultivation and progress of the holy and profane sciences»⁵¹. Research needs to lead to cultural improvement: «To face the future with hope and with supernatural faith does not mean at all to ignore problems. On the contrary, faith is the new incentive for the daily search for solutions... This world of ours will be saved... by those who have faith in God and in the eternal destiny of man and know how... to look for, to seek, to say and to hear the truth and thus to establish among men a climate of understanding and of harmony... throughout all the pathways of the earth»⁵². Finally the goal of education is service: «The university has service to mankind as its highest mission; to be ferment in the society in which it lives; therefore it should investigate the truth in all its fields [...]»⁵³.

Convinced of the good a university would do for society, Blessed Josemaría encouraged this apostolate in other countries; thus, the University of Piura was founded in Peru, the Sabana University in Colombia, and the Panamericana University in Mexico during his lifetime.

It was this same spirit, seeking to find Christian solutions to societal problems that led Blessed Josemaría to encourage parents to start schools for their children. Tomas Alvira relates that it was during a get-together in Reparacea Casa

⁴⁷ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *La Universidad, foco cultural de primer orden*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 70.

⁴⁸ Cfr. L. POLO, *Universidad y sociedad*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 196.

⁴⁹ Cfr. C. CASTILLO, *Un ejemplo de espíritu universitario*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 165.

⁵⁰ J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Formación enteriza de las personalidad de los jóvenes*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 77.

⁵¹ IDEM, *La universidad al servicio del mundo*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 61.

⁵² IDEM, *El compromiso de la verdad*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., pp. 108-110.

⁵³ IDEM, *Servidores nobilísimo de la ciencia*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 90.

in Spain on September 13, 1962 that the Founder told them: «You have to mobilize the parents of families...What is more natural than that the parents start schools for their children?»⁵⁴. Alvira explains that the parents who started these Fomento schools, as they would be called in Spain, had very clear that they were not just starting some schools for their children, but they were trying to open new roads in society and contribute solutions to shape the future so that spiritual values would have the place that corresponds to them⁵⁵. These schools were infused with the philosophy of education outlined in this paper — integral formation of the student, love for freedom expressed in the development of human virtues through personal responsibility, and a unity of life based on divine filiation and knowledge of one's supernatural end.

On November 25, 1972 at *Brafa* in Barcelona, Spain, Blessed Josemaría complimented the parents on what they had accomplished. He especially praised them for wanting to give their children their ideals, faith, moral conduct, and many other virtues that they lived in their families. He assumed them that they would achieve all this, promoting this type of school all over the world⁵⁶.

He continued to encourage parents all over the world to consider this initiative. On June 1, 1974 in the *Centro de Convenções* of the *Parque Anhembi*, in Brazil he told a father who asked him for advice regarding a school for his children that all over the world parents who were concerned about the school for their children had started their own schools, in which the parents play the principal part, followed by the teachers, and then the students. These parents wanted their children to learn human knowledge and human courtesy, but also to learn their Christian faith. He told him he would pray for this initiative in Brazil asking God to bless it⁵⁷.

In one way, you could say that he saw starting schools as a natural consequence of parents living their responsibility as the primary educators of their children, a part of their Christian vocation. In another get-together, he told them that the Lord had chosen them in order to do this work for the advantage of their children, of their souls, of their intelligence, of their character. He referred to the *Brafa* school as a place where they do not just teach, but they educate and the teachers participate in the rights and duties of the father and the mother, and that the same occurs in so many similar schools around the world⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ A. VÁZQUEZ, *Tomás Alvira*, cit., p 224.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

⁵⁶ From ideas developed by Blessed J. Escrivá, in a get-together in *Brafa*, Barcelona, (Spain), in 1972.

⁵⁷ IDEM, in *Parque Anhembi*, São Paulo, (Brasil), in 1974.

⁵⁸ IDEM, in *Brafa*, Barcelona, (Spain), in 1972.

To emphasize the important role of parents — in all levels of education he used to say: «In the school, there are three important things: first the parents, second, the teachers, in the third place the students»⁵⁹. Tomas Alvira and Victor Garcia Hoz, who helped begin the Fomento schools in Spain admit that they were surprised the first time they heard the Founder make this statement, but later were able to see its prophetic timeliness⁶⁰. In short, one can see that the mission of the parents is to make possible the action of the teachers and professors. They choose the school for their students and pay for its maintenance through tuition or tax monies. They need to work with the teachers so that both can help the student develop his/her full potential. The mission of the teachers is to stimulate the integral development of the student — intellectually, socially, morally, and spiritually. The mission of the students is their own education and perfection, their struggle to learn and to develop their character.

Today some educators think that on-line courses will take the place of in-class instruction. Perhaps these on-line classes can teach factual concepts well, but an understanding of Blessed Josemaría's philosophy shows that on-line classes cannot meet the true purpose of education: to help students develop their character.

6. CONCLUSION

Truly, a pedagogical richness is found in the life, words, and works of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. "Education in freedom and responsibility" summarizes the ethos of Opus Dei and each of the educational institutions inspired with its spirit⁶¹. This motto expresses the anthropological richness of his understanding of the student as a person endowed with intellect and free will, who develops his human potentiality with human virtues so that he is free to do, to work, and to love. The teacher is seen as an artist who helps the student become the best person that they can be, by teaching them human and divine science. The school's role is to provide students with an environment in which they can search for true knowledge, and once they have found it, use it in the service of society. The ultimate aim of education, as Blessed Josemaría saw it, is to form persons capable of learning the joy of living on this earth as children of God so

⁵⁹ He said this many times. Examples are found in the get together in *Brafa*, Barcelona, (Spain), 1972, and in *Parque Anhembi*, São Paulo, (Brasil), in 1974.

⁶⁰ V. GARCÍA HOZ, *La educación*, cit., pp. 94-95; IDEM, *Tras las huellas*, cit., p. 141; A. VÁZQUEZ, *Tomás Alvira*, cit., p. 232.

⁶¹ A. LLANO, *La libertad radical*, in *Josemaría Escrivá*, cit., p. 261.

that they can finally enter eternal joy. This philosophy of education can offer much to today's schools lost in relativism, materialism, and agnosticism. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer presents us with a clear, well thought out philosophy, but as Tomás Alvira said many years ago: «Do you realize what is left to be done? The Father has told us everything, we don't have to invent anything, however, to carry his ideas to their ultimate consequences will take centuries»⁶².

⁶² A. VÁZQUEZ, *Tomas Alvira*, cit., p. 232.