

# The Unity of Ordinary Life: The Quest for the Good and the Divine

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The message of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá is a perennial one: as old as the Gospel and yet like the Gospel ever new. As long as there are men who work on this earth, and undoubtedly workers there will be until the end of time, the message of the Founder of Opus Dei will be heard<sup>1</sup>. Blessed Josemaría's thought is simple and yet profoundly wise, in consonance with the writings of the Church Fathers, of the great medieval minds such as Thomas Aquinas, and of the present vicar of Christ, Pope John Paul II. He described himself as a poor sinner madly in love with Jesus Christ, who spoke not about politics but only about God and with God. Thus, in his writings we are never presented with an agenda for social and political reform; what interests him most especially is the interior reform of each man, since therein lies the key to the solution of so many problems in our world<sup>2</sup>. A realist, acutely aware of the ills of society and of the tensions and divisions in human hearts, Blessed Josemaría was equally cognizant of the human longing for truth and love, of that most profound desire for God. As God is Truth, whoever sincerely searches for the truth is actually searching for God.

<sup>1</sup> Job 5, 7: "Man is born to work, as birds to fly". In the instances in this paper where I refer to 'man' or 'men', I am using the term generically to also include women.

<sup>2</sup> J.M. CASCIARO RAMÍREZ, *Un libro sobre la amistad con Dios*, "Scripta Theologica" X, no. 3 (1978), p. 1079. All texts of this pauper whose references are in Spanish, are translated by the Author.

While the vocation of the philosopher has been called into question in recent times, there are still philosophers who true to their calling conceive their work in terms of a service to the truth. Contemporary philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, known as critics of modernity, present us with philosophical inquiry open to the transcendent, as well as to a 'new' or rehabilitated understanding of human life and of the self. The importance and timeliness of Blessed Josemaría's message on the unity of life and the affirmation of ordinary life can perhaps be better appreciated when we turn first to the moral predicament of contemporary man and then from the philosophical grounding proceed to the supernatural. I propose therefore to begin this paper with a consideration of what MacIntyre calls "the unity of a human life" as opposed to the modern fragmentation of the self; I will next proceed to Taylor's discussion of the revaluation of ordinary life and his interesting claim that the acknowledgement of the transcendent calls us to a change of identity. Having thus set the philosophical stage for Blessed Josemaría's message on the unity of ordinary life, we will focus on the theological foundations for this unity of life and on the ways in which we can achieve a unitary life. This message is embedded in a Christian anthropology, and I would venture to even suggest, as I will try to show, in a theological aesthetics, which has Christ as its center. I will in addition point briefly to Blessed Josemaría's life as an example of coherence, that is, his message was one with his life, he lived what he taught, and will end this paper with a reflection on the coherence of his doctrine with the Magisterium, as is evident most recently in the apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.

## 2. ALASDAIR MACINTYRE ON THE UNITY OF A HUMAN LIFE

In *After Virtue* MacIntyre clearly shows us that the modern conception of the self is fragmented: our life seems to have compartments, such that, for example, we separate our 'private' beliefs from our 'public' life. It is possible therefore that a person may hold beliefs in his mind and heart, which may be at variance with the beliefs expressed in his actions given his social role<sup>3</sup>. MacIntyre reflects on the modern separation between the individual and the roles that he or she plays or between the different role enactments of an individual life that seem to have no interconnectedness or continuity such that "life comes to appear", according to MacIntyre, "as nothing but a series of unconnected episodes, a liqui-

<sup>3</sup> A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame 1981, p. 29.

dation of the self”, as well as of the unity of human life<sup>4</sup>. MacIntyre proposes as an alternative to this stance an intrinsically relational model of the human person, whereby the individual’s identity is linked to his membership in a variety of social groups. The relationships that I acquire by being a daughter, sister, cousin, member of a particular household or community define partially or wholly what my obligations are<sup>5</sup>. And furthermore, it is in the fulfillment of the duties incurred by my social relationships that I become good, that I achieve the human good, the *telos*. As MacIntyre says: “To know oneself as such a social person is however not to occupy a static and fixed position. It is to find oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress — or to fail to make progress — toward a given end. Thus a completed and fulfilled life is an achievement and death is the point at which someone can be judged happy or unhappy”<sup>6</sup>. For MacIntyre an Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding of the pre-modern self furnishes us with the key for a recovery of the unity of human life, for within this tradition human life has the form of a certain kind of story, of a narrative which links birth to life to death, as any story links beginning to middle to end. In the pre-modern conception of the self, the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest, the quest for the good<sup>7</sup>. Through MacIntyre’s recourse to narrative history he also clearly reinstantiates teleology in human life and understands the virtues as precisely those qualities which enable us to arrive at the *telos*. As he says: “The narrative [...] in which human life is embodied has a form in which the subject [...] is set a task in the completion of which lies their peculiar appropriation of the human good; the way towards [...] the completion of that task is barred by a variety of inward and outward evils. The virtues are those qualities which enable the evils to be overcome, the task to be accomplished, the journey to be completed”<sup>8</sup>. While there are differences between the Aristotelian and the medieval conception of the good for man and of the community in which the good is achieved, I will only add here that for the medievals the central virtue, that virtue which unifies all the other virtues, is charity. Now MacIntyre’s “revolutionary reconstitution”<sup>9</sup> of the Aris-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>7</sup> The recovery of the Aristotelian-Thomistic moral tradition in MacIntyre’s ethical inquiry is made possible through a “revolutionary reconstitution” of that tradition. See A. MACINTYRE, *First Principles, Final Ends, and Contemporary Philosophical Problems*, Milwaukee 1991.

<sup>8</sup> A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, cit., p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> See note 7.

totalitarian-Thomistic moral tradition enables us to recover the social and relational identity of the self, such that there be continuity between the individual and his roles, between his beliefs and his actions, to view human life as ordered to a given end and therefore to think about human actions not atomistically but as parts of a whole human life, parts which either distance us from or bring us to our end, and finally to consider virtues as characteristics of a unitary life, that is, the exercise of, e.g., one and the same virtue is intelligible only as a characteristic of a life conceived and evaluated as a whole<sup>10</sup>.

### 3. CHARLES TAYLOR ON THE AFFIRMATION OF ORDINARY LIFE

In our contemporary world the attempt to envisage each human life as a whole, as a unity, is of inestimable importance, as is also the affirmation of ordinary life. In both *Sources of the Self* and a lecture entitled 'A Catholic Modernity?', Charles Taylor points to the revaluation of ordinary life, which dates according to him to the early modern period and which was originally inspired by a mode of Christian piety. Rather than think that the 'good life' and the 'higher' activity of contemplation were to be reserved for a privileged few, the emphasis was on achieving goodness in ordinary living. Without going into the Reformers' attack on vocations to the monastic and religious life, as Taylor does, what is important here is the recognition of an active life that can at the same time be contemplative, or put in Taylor's words: "The really holy life for the Christian was within ordinary life itself, living in work and household in a Christian and worshipful manner"<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the quest for the good, and the right achievement of the good, were open to everyone, in the ordinariness of everyday living. According to Taylor, the foundation for the value of ordinary life is to be found in the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition: the repeated phrase of Genesis "and God saw that it was good" is God's own affirmation of being and life. Therefore, the activities of this life: work, marriage, family life, etc. can be seen as participating in this affirmation of God<sup>12</sup>. The goodness of reality, as Taylor rightly explains, is not independent from God's seeing it as good, from His loving it; it is precisely this loving vision of things which brings them into existence<sup>13</sup>. God's love for His

<sup>10</sup> A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, cit., p. 205.

<sup>11</sup> C. TAYLOR, *A Catholic Modernity?*, Oxford 1999, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> C. TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge 1989, p. 218.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 449.

creatures is inseparable from His ‘seeing good’<sup>14</sup>. If we adopt this same stance towards ourselves and the rest of reality, then this seeing good, which functions for Taylor as a moral source, empowers. “As in Genesis, seeing good makes good”<sup>15</sup>. Of course, Taylor is not oblivious to the fact that sin has distorted the original order of creation, such that we sometimes become overly absorbed in the goodness of creatures, we treat them as ends rather than as means to glorify God, and thus do not participate in God’s vision of things. Our affections therefore are to be purified and so asceticism will be practiced within ordinary life, since it is the ordinary life that is to be made holy. Moreover, there is the aid of grace, which enables human beings to become once again participants in God’s love, in His ‘seeing good’<sup>16</sup>. It is evident then that for Taylor the acknowledgement of the transcendent leads man to a ‘new’ vision of things, to a participation in divine love, which is transformative. It is for this reason, I believe, that Taylor says: “[A]cknowledging the transcendent means being called to a change of identity”<sup>17</sup>. There should be “a radical decentering of the self, in relation with God”<sup>18</sup>, such that we adopt His way of seeing things, His way of loving, and thus, we want His will rather than our own. According to Taylor, there is no conflict between man’s acknowledgement of the transcendent and human flourishing (as some contemporary philosophers think there is).

#### 4. THE SPIRIT OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS AND THE UNITY OF ORDINARY LIFE

Now for anyone conversant with the writings of Blessed Josemaría, one cannot help but think that the philosophical insights of MacIntyre and the work of Taylor can certainly profit from the spirituality of Opus Dei, since what is found in the latter serves not only to reinforce what these philosophers are saying but also to complete it, by grounding it in what is most fundamental to human existence. The affirmation of ordinary life is found in the very beginnings of Christianity. There were, at least in the first two centuries after Jesus Christ, no monks or religious then who by separating themselves from the world sought union with God, contemplation of the divine<sup>19</sup>. There were simply men and

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 516.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 454.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 222-23, 516.

<sup>17</sup> C. TAYLOR, *A Catholic Modernity?*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> See R. GÓMEZ PÉREZ, *La Fe y los días*, Madrid 1973.

women engaged in diverse activities in society living the message of Christ and thus transmitting this message to those whom they met. By living the Gospel message in the world, knowing that they were called to be holy as Christ and His Father are holy, and also called to be light in the world thus spreading the light of Christ, the first Christians not only sanctified themselves in and through their ordinary life, but also converted the pagan world. It is in great part due to Blessed Josemaría's recovery of this spirit of the first Christians-spirit to which he likened *Opus Dei* — that the way of holiness in ordinary life, “this *high standard of ordinary Christian living*” has been repropose to everyone<sup>20</sup>.

By living their faith in the ordinariness of their lives, the first Christians gave witness to Christ: there was no separation between everyday, normal life and the life of faith<sup>21</sup>. Blessed Josemaría presents us with just this vision of the Christian life which emphasizes the unity of life; not a double life: on the one hand, our spiritual life, i.e., our relationship with God, and on the other hand, our professional, social, and family life, our material life, as it were, or, our “private” life of faith and our ‘public’ life within the community. For Blessed Josemaría if we want to be truly Christian, we cannot be schizophrenics, divided between the spiritual and the material; there is only one life, made of flesh and spirit, which should be holy, full of God's presence. Thus, to that deformed vision of Christianity as a spiritualism, which frowns upon the world and essentially makes the temple the one meeting place with God, and to those present-day materialisms closed off to the spirit, Blessed Josemaría presents as a marvelous alternative a Christian materialism, which takes into consideration the unity of human life, man as a composite of matter and soul, who finds the invisible God in the visible and in the material. As the founder of *Opus Dei* would put it: we have to materialize the spiritual and spiritualize the material. The latter can only be brought about when we find God in our ordinary life, since all the ordinary circumstances of our life can become a continuous meeting with Him. God awaits us in our work, in our family life, in every moment of the day; there is, as Blessed Josemaría said, a *quid divinum*, something holy, divine, in the most common of situations which each one of us has to discover<sup>22</sup>.

“All the [ordinary] circumstances in which life places us bring a divine message asking us to respond with love and service to others”<sup>23</sup>. We are therefore to be attentive to the divine traces present in our ordinary life, in the world — and

<sup>20</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31.

<sup>21</sup> R. GÓMEZ PÉREZ, *La Fe y los días*, cit., pp. 51-52.

<sup>22</sup> See Homily *Passionately Loving the World*, included in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, New Rochelle 1975.

<sup>23</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 111.

not only in the temple — which is our meeting place with Christ. There is, I believe, a striking similarity between what MacIntyre calls the unity of a human life in terms of the unity of a narrative quest for the good, and Blessed Josemaría's own notion of the unity of life in terms of the Christian's quest for the good, for holiness in the middle of the world, a quest which seeks Christ and His kingdom, which is the ultimate good. This similarity or coherence between the philosophical and the theological should come as no surprise since grace presupposes and builds on nature. We are thus to live out our life not only in accordance with our dignity as rational beings but also “in a way worthy of our sublime vocation as ‘sons in the Son’”<sup>24</sup>.

## 5. THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF UNITY OF LIFE

### *a) Creation, Unity, and Sin*

The notion of the unity of ordinary life clearly undergoes a transformation in the teachings of Blessed Josemaría. This transformation cannot be understood without reference to salvation history and more specifically to the person of Jesus Christ. To really understand unity of life, we have to refer to the Creator's original intention and plan for man: God intended for man a perfect unity of life, whereby he was constituted in friendship with the Creator and in harmony with himself and with all of creation. Adam and Eve were in a state of original justice and holiness<sup>25</sup>. The unity that man experienced within himself, his union with God through friendship and sonship, was a gift; but to that gift man was to respond freely. To his ontological unity, man, through his right use of freedom, through the free election of the end for which he was made, i.e., God, had to add a dynamic, existential unity<sup>26</sup>. As we well know, sin entered into the world because man did not accept the limits placed on his freedom<sup>27</sup>. Original sin thus

<sup>24</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Veritatis Splendor*, 18.

<sup>25</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 374.

<sup>26</sup> I. CELAYA, *Vivir como hijos de Dios*, p. 97 cited in F. FERNÁNDEZ-CARVAJAL and P. BETETA LÓPEZ, *Hijos de Dios*, Madrid 1999, p. 146.

<sup>27</sup> According to the Holy Father, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil symbolizes the limit that man as a creature must recognize and respect. Man not only depends on the Creator but is also subject to the laws which the Creator has established for the order of the universe and to the moral norms which regulate the use of human freedom. See General audience, 3-IX-1986, quoted in F. FERNÁNDEZ-CARVAJAL and P. BETETA LÓPEZ, *Hijos de Dios*, cit., p. 146, n. 4.

brought about the loss of man's perfect unity and the initial harmony in which he lived. Man's break from his friendship with God also produced a disharmony within himself, in his relationship with other human beings and with the rest of creation. He will now experience fatigue, illness, death, error; instead of having self-dominion and dominion over the world, he will often find himself dominated by his lower faculties, by the world, by others, and thus experience tension from without and within himself. In order for the world, for creation, to be brought once again to a state of harmony, man would have to bring about his own interior harmony. But this task of recreation could not be carried out by man alone — a mediator was necessary between God and man.

*b) The Reconstruction of Unity through Christ:  
The Son of God as Our Model*

The recreation of man and the world is made possible by Jesus Christ. As Blessed Josemaría put it: "The world is good; it was the sin of Adam which shattered the divine harmony of creation, but God the Father sent His only begotten Son in order to reestablish this peace. So that we, made children by adoption, could liberate creation from disorder, reconcile all things to God"<sup>28</sup>. It is interesting to note here how Blessed Josemaría, in following the tradition of the Church Fathers and of St. Thomas Aquinas, speaks of the order and harmony of creation prior to the fall of our first parents, prior to the evil which sin constitutes. According to Aquinas, the order of the diverse things that compose the universe is the "chief beauty in things"<sup>29</sup>. It is because of this original order and beauty that the Creator could gaze on His handiwork and find it to be good, very good. Radiance, harmony or proportion, and integrity are all features of the beautiful and thus of the order of the universe; but since sin is disruptive of order and thus of beauty, it causes darkness, disharmony, and division. Only Christ, the God-Man, could reconcile man to God, thus re-creating man and the universe, and re-establishing peace. And this peace, as St. Augustine conceived it, is "tranquillity in order"<sup>30</sup>; where there is this peace, there will also then be beauty and goodness.

Once Christ has reconciled man to God by regaining for him his sonship and his friendship with God, then man can freely carry out the task of reuniting all of creation to God through his own personal unity of life. Man's model for this

<sup>28</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, chap. 71.

<sup>30</sup> See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 103, a. 2, arg. 3.

task of reconciliation and of unification will be Christ Himself. In order to explain the unity of life which man must achieve, the founder of Opus Dei usually refers to the mystery of Jesus Christ: Perfect God and Perfect Man, a duality of natures in the salvific person of Christ, He is the 'supreme exemplar' for all men; in imitation of Christ, the disciple will actually be seeking union with God, contemplative life in the midst of all earthly activities<sup>31</sup>. The Christian's unity of life will therefore be the result of his struggle to re-present in his own life the life of Christ; this re-presentation is only possible through his identification with Christ. The Christian is to be not only an *alter Christus*, but *ipse Christus*, Christ Himself. When the Christian is not struggling to live this unity of life, then his very identity comes into question. If we live in Christ, if we are centered in Him, becoming each day more like Him, then the redemptive mission which He has entrusted to us will become a reality<sup>32</sup>. Our being and our role, or mission, should be fused into an indissoluble unity, as they were in the 'supreme exempla'<sup>33</sup>. In Christ, "there is an identity between the message and the messenger, between saying, doing, and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces: he proclaims the 'Good News' not just by what he says or does, but by what he is"<sup>34</sup>. When the Christian identifies himself with Christ and His mission, then there are no identity crises; the Christian's being and his role become one, thus avoiding the fragmentation of the self and of human life to which MacIntyre refers in *After Virtue*. Besides, the acknowledgement of the transcendent, as Taylor calls it, which is here acknowledgement of Christ, does bring about a change in identity, for as St. Paul says, "I no longer live, for Christ lives in me"<sup>35</sup>. This is, however, paradoxical, since in imitating Christ, Perfect God and Perfect Man, the human person not only reaches beyond himself toward divinization, but comes to the perfection of his own humanity. We cannot be divine if we are not fully human<sup>36</sup>.

And the divinization to which we are called, that participation in divine life, that sharing in the intimacy of the Trinity which is a communion of persons, is

<sup>31</sup> F. FERNÁNDEZ-CARVAJAL and P. BETETA LÓPEZ, *Hijos de Dios*, cit., pp. 148-50.

<sup>32</sup> P. RODRÍGUEZ, *La Economía de la salvación y la secularidad cristiana. Algunos aspectos de la aportación de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer a la teología y a la espiritualidad*, "Scripta Theologica" IX, no. 1 (1977), p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> A. ARANDA, "The Christian, *alter Christus*, *ipse Christus*, in the Thought of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer", in *Holiness in the World*, eds. M. BELDA, J. ESCUDERO, et al., Princeton 1997, p. 136.

<sup>34</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Mission of the Redeemer*, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Gal. 2, 20.

<sup>36</sup> *Friends of God*, 93 and 75. See also *Christ is Passing By*, 166.

none other than divine filiation. God the Father sent His Son to redeem us so that by grace we could become what Christ is by nature, that is, a son or a daughter of God. The story of the Christian's being and mission is the story of Christ's approach and call to man. As Blessed Josemaría says, "Our Lord calls us to come nearer to him, to be like him. 'Be imitators of God, as his dearly beloved children', cooperating humbly but fervently in the divine purpose of mending what is broken, of saving what is lost, of bringing back order to what sinful man has put out of order, of leading to its goal what has gone astray, of re-establishing the divine balance of all creation"<sup>37</sup>. The mystery of the Incarnation, of the God-Man, thus lays the foundations for an anthropology whereby man can become divine and for a re-ordering of all of creation to its Origin and End, a re-ordering, which as I indicated above, is related to the beauty of the universe. This order and beauty is brought about through the right use of man's freedom. Thus, the Christian anthropology which is contained in Blessed Josemaría's thought also calls for the elaboration of a theological aesthetics.

As the Church Fathers have seen so clearly, God became man so that man could become a child of God<sup>38</sup>. Blessed Josemaría quotes Clement of Alexandria who said: "A man becomes God because he loves whatever God loves"<sup>39</sup>. We cannot live the life of Christ unless we unite our will to the will of His Father, unless we love what God the Father will, even when that will means embracing the cross. When as liberated children of God we are able to identify our will with God's, loving what He loves, then we are giving glory to God, not seeking and loving ourselves, but seeking and loving only God in all we do and thus giving pleasure to our Father God. Blessed Josemaría warns us, as does the Gospel, against harboring two loves in our heart, against having a divided and thus disordered heart. Just as Christ strips Himself of glory and thus undergoes a radical *kenosis*, so we too must tear out all that is an obstacle to the love of God: all attachments to our own self, glory, things. We too must undergo a *kenosis* if we are to be filled with the love of God and become Christ Himself.

c) *The Re-orientation of all Human Activities to God:  
Instaurare Omnia in Christo*

Christian perfection, the imitation of Christ in ordinary life, in the exercise of our profession in the world, is brought about through the contemplation of God in all we do, uniting the divine and the human in our life, following the

<sup>37</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 8.

example of the God-Man. In the Person of Jesus Christ, God Himself has willed to become one with man. This is the foundation for the Christian's love of the world and of work. Those of us who have received the gift of faith are to manifest to others that original, optimistic vision of creation — God saw that it was good —, that love for the world that is present in Christianity<sup>40</sup>. Since the Word of God took on human nature and lived among men sharing their experiences, there is no thing that is exclusively worldly, no happening in our life that is devoid of God's call. Just as the Son of God through His life, death, and resurrection was to repair the disorder brought about by Adam's sin and reconcile all things to God, so too we as "sons in the Son" are called in the middle of the world, in the ordinariness of our life to this same task of freeing creation from the disorder of sin and of reuniting all things to God. Of course, we cannot do this unless our activity, our work, like the creative and redemptive activity of God, the very work of God, is born of love.

The task of reconciliation can only be brought about when the Christian re-orders all his faculties and activities to the one end for which he was made, that is, the glorification of God through knowledge and love. According to Blessed Josemaría, "Man should not limit himself to making things, to constructing objects. Work is born of love, manifests love, is ordered to love. We recognize God not only in the marvels of nature, but also in the experience of our own labor, of our effort. Work like this is prayer, an act of thanksgiving, because we know that we have been placed on this earth by God, that we are loved by Him, and that we are heirs to His promises"<sup>41</sup>. If the ordinary life of a Christian can and should become his meeting place with God, then his work, which occupies so many hours of that life, provides him with the opportunity to contemplate God, which contemplation is not only the goal of his life but is to permeate his life even now. Thus understood, work can be transformed, converted into prayer, dialogue with our Father God. In the effort to work well, the Christian must exercise both the human and the supernatural virtues, which are the way to find happiness both now and into eternity. In the struggle, e.g., to conquer one's laziness, to be more diligent, to be patient and understanding with colleagues, the Christian will recognize the invitation that his Father God offers him to leave his comfort zone and egoism behind — to leave the orbit of the self — and to enter into the orbit of God — by responding freely in love. As Blessed Josemaría said: "[The spirit of Opus Dei] leads you to do your work perfectly, to love God and

<sup>40</sup> *The Forge*, 703, cited in F. FERNÁNDEZ-CARVAJAL and P. BETETA LÓPEZ, *Hijos de Dios*, cit., p. 169, n. 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 48, quoted in R. GÓMEZ PÉREZ, *La Fe y los días*, cit., p. 109.

mankind by putting love in the little things of everyday life [...]. When a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God [...]. The Christian vocation consists in making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my children, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives”<sup>42</sup>. Work done in this way imitates the life of Christ, where is found that fusion of the human and the divine: whose whole life is a manifestation of the love of the Father.

The sanctification of our work not only brings about our own holiness but also helps to sanctify others and the world in which we live. Therefore, it is natural for the Christian to bring the love of God to others and thus to carry out an intense apostolate by means of his work. Like Christ, the Christian is to bring the message of salvation, of holiness, to all those with whom he comes into contact at work, in his family, in the everyday circumstances of his life. To be the bearer of this message is only possible if the Christian is truly becoming Christ Himself, such that again, the Christian’s being and his message, or his role, are one, as they were in the life of Christ. To achieve this, we need to contemplate the life of Christ, we need to pray, as Christ Himself did, offering our work to God and talking to Him about souls: our friends, family members. Without prayer, without loving dialogue with his Father God, the Christian will not acquire the single-mindedness that he needs in order to sanctify himself and his activities, nor to bring Christ to others in the apostolate. The Christian who does not pray falls into activism, as Blessed Josemaría puts it, and thus is not carrying out *opus Dei*, but rather *opus diaboli*. What Blessed Josemaría preached is a marvelous unity of life whereby work, apostolate, our ascetic struggle are all united in our desire to glorify and serve our heavenly Father. The one supernatural aim we have permeates the whole of our life, such that there is unity.

When the ordinary life of a person achieves this unity, because he is being deified, converted into Christ, when in the ordinary we respond freely to the divine, giving ourselves as Christ did, then by our ordinary life so transformed we can become for others ‘Christ passing by’; through our life they can catch a glimmer, as it were, of the face of God. According to Blessed Josemaría, when we identify ourselves with Christ, then in our conduct Our Lord is reflected as in a mirror. If the mirror is as it should be, then it will reflect the likeness of Christ without disfigurement, and others will feel drawn to Christ and follow Him<sup>43</sup>. Our ordinary life, reflecting Christ, will not only transform us but will lead to the

<sup>42</sup> *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> *Friends of God*, 299.

transformation of others and to the creation of a new moral order, where the face of God, the splendor of truth, will in effect reign. This is, I believe, what is meant by saying that when the time comes the Lord will be “all in all things”<sup>44</sup>. Then there will be the unity and harmony which God willed from the beginning.

## 6. THE COHERENCE OF FAITH AND LIFE. THE UNION OF CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION

Blessed Josemaría has been called a pioneer of the Christian unity of life<sup>45</sup>. He lived what he taught, in imitation of the life of Christ, in which the divine and the human are fused in an admirable unity of life. Through his own personal life, Blessed Josemaría shows us that we can be contemplatives in the midst of all human activities, that we can arrive at a union between contemplation and action, between our interior life and our ordinary activity. In his life the supernatural virtues were united to the human virtues, making him an example of a sanctity marked by simplicity and naturalness, and based on faithfulness in little things<sup>46</sup>. For him sanctity did not consist in doing extraordinary things, but rather in living an ordinary life — made up of many little things — with extraordinary love. For those who have followed him, the school of Mariano — the name he adopted (to sign letters) during the Spanish Civil War — is the school of little things. It is faithfulness in the little things which won for Blessed Josemaría — as it should for every Christian — the acclamation: “Well done, good and faithful servant, since you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many; enter into the joy of your master”<sup>47</sup>. His fondness for the little things, his attention to the details, is a clear manifestation of his love for God and of his humility, and of a life lived in God’s presence. He liked to refer to the construction of the cathedrals in the Middle Ages and the intricate work done by the craftsmen, which could only be seen from the tower, not from the streets. Those craftsmen finished their work with perfection and beauty; they were seeking not glory from men but rather the glory of God<sup>48</sup>. It is this aim which gives eternal value to the temporal; it is in this type of work that heaven and earth meet.

<sup>44</sup> 1 Cor. 15, 28 in *Christ is Passing By*, 166.

<sup>45</sup> D. LE TOURNEAU, *Las enseñanzas del Beato Josemaría Escrivá sobre la unidad de vida*, “Scripta Theologica” XXXI, no. 3 (1999), p. 636.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 637.

<sup>47</sup> Matt. 25, 21.

<sup>48</sup> *Friends of God*, 65.

If we know that God is present everywhere, that He is our Father, we will want to offer to Him the little that we do, with love; we will want to give pleasure to our Father God. The spirituality of Opus Dei is rooted in divine filiation: we are sons, daughters, of a God who is caring and loving. The child who relies on his Father God is somehow omnipotent; he can ask for the moon: *omnia possibilia sunt in eo qui me confortat*<sup>49</sup>. This experience of being a child of God profoundly marked the heart and soul of Blessed Josemaría; in the beginnings of Opus Dei, the founder readily recognized the disproportion between himself and his means and the work that God was entrusting to him. He would say that he was 26 years old, having good humor and the grace of God. So, he needed to count on the strength provided by his heavenly Father to realize what humanly seemed impossible. In 1931 riding on a tram in Madrid he heard that invocation: *Abba! Pater!*, which made him fully aware that a son or a daughter of God, in imitation of Christ, can carry on a loving dialogue with the Father in the middle of the street. For the ordinary Christian, the world is not an impediment to prayer, to contemplative dialogue; it is the place where the human and the divine can meet. While walking through the streets in Spain and in Europe Blessed Josemaría would raise his mind and heart to God, praying for souls, for the apostolic expansion of his work, realizing that God could do what he alone could not. His faith, which he described as being so thick that it could be cut with a knife, was manifest in his words and in his actions; difficulties did not deter him — they were, on the contrary, the incentive for more prayer, more mortification, and more work. He saw the hand of his heavenly Father in what was good and in what to human eyes appeared to be bad; relying thus on divine providence more than on his own talents and strength, he was able to be a true sower of peace and joy.

For anyone who has come in contact with the founder of Opus Dei, it was evident that this was a man living in and for Christ. He became a light for others; the clarity of his words and actions was actually the light of Christ radiating through him. Because he lived so immersed in Christ, before his death the message of Opus Dei had spread to the five continents and counted some 60,000 members — a clear sign of his contemplative and apostolic life, a life in which prayer and action were marvelously fused as they were in Christ. It is no wonder that Pope Paul VI would have said that in the 20th century the founder of Opus Dei was the person who had received the most charisms from God. And to these gifts was added the loving correspondence of Blessed Josemaría; his will was intimately united to the will of God. Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, his longtime collaborator and confessor, noted that Blessed Josemaría never willingly said no to God's inspi-

<sup>49</sup> See *The Way*, chapter on “spiritual childhood”.

rations. It was his loving union with God, the unity of his life with his message, which has made possible the fruitfulness of Opus Dei throughout the world.

There is an admirable single-mindedness in the life of Blessed Josemaría: from the moment in which as a youth he thought that God was asking something from him — which mission remained unknown to him for years — he sought to see and to unite his will with that of God's. He repeated time and time again: *Domine, ut videam* — “Lord, that I may see” — and *Domine, ut sit* — “Lord, that it be”. Once he knew exactly what God was asking of him, he worked tirelessly and generously, emptying himself and filling himself with the love of God and love of souls, spending his life doing Opus Dei and becoming Opus Dei. It is no wonder that in the last years of his life, being the contemplative soul that he was, he would repeat the aspiration *Vultum tuum, Domine, requiram* — “I long to see your face, O Lord”. Now he is happily contemplating the face that he so thirsted after, a face that through the unity of his life he has made accessible to countless persons all over the world.

## 7. THE MESSAGE OF BLESSED JOSEMARÍA FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The spirit of Opus Dei, still seemingly new and revolutionary in the 1940s when Blessed Josemaría first went to Rome seeking Church approval — he was told that he had come one hundred years too early —, has been echoed in Vatican II documents such as *Lumen Gentium* and in the writings of Pope John Paul II, notably *Christifideles laici* and more recently, in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*.

For those of us who struggle to live the spirit of Opus Dei one cannot help but marvel at the consonance which exists between the Holy Father's apostolic letter for the new millennium and the teachings of Blessed Josemaría. As the Pope so beautifully and urgently puts it: “A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its ‘reflection’. This is the *mysterium lunae*, which was much a part of the contemplation of the Fathers of the Church, who employed this image to show the Church's dependence on Christ, the Sun whose light she reflects. It was a way of expressing what Christ himself said when he called himself the ‘light of the world’ (Jn 8:12) and asked his disciples to be ‘the light of the world’ (Mt 5:14). This is a daunting task if we consider our human weakness, which so often renders us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task which we can accomplish if we turn to the light of Christ and open ourselves to the grace which makes us a new creation”<sup>50</sup>. If we sanctify our work, the

<sup>50</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 70.

activities in which we engage in our ordinary life, then we will bring the light of Christ to those around us, to all human activities, and to the world. We cannot, however, do this unless our life is centered in Christ, unless we have embraced the mission of Christ: He comes to bring liberation from sin and salvation and thus manifest the love of God; He comes to reestablish man's communion with God and with others by interior healing, making human nature share in divine life through grace, making us children of God. It is only by becoming like Christ, by being deified through grace, that all things are reconstituted and achieve their permanence. For this purpose, prayer is indispensable and so the Holy Father reminds us that we cannot give adequate witness to Christ and His mission if we do not first contemplate the face of Christ<sup>51</sup>. This echoes what Blessed Josemaría himself preached: "...to be *ipse Christus*, we must *look at ourselves in Him* [...]. If we want to bring other men and women to our Lord, we must first go to the Gospel and contemplate Christ's love [...]. In order to bring men his message of salvation and show them God's love, Christ, who was perfect God and perfect man, acted in a human and a divine way"<sup>52</sup>. We are called to precisely this unity in our being and in our activity; the contemplation of the face of Christ is to penetrate our entire life. The Holy Father's *Novo Millennio Ineunte* reaffirms the grandeur of the unity of ordinary life — unity of prayer and action, the unity of interior life, work, and apostolate; as the Pope says, "Intense prayer [...] does not distract us from our commitment to history: by opening our heart to the love of God it also opens it to the love of our brothers and sisters, and makes us capable of shaping history according to God's plan"<sup>53</sup>. Unity of life brings order to our being and our activity, and with this order, as we mentioned earlier, beauty. When we achieve unity of life by being centered in Christ, then the light of Christ, the radiance of truth and goodness, will be made manifest in and through us and we will bring all things to Christ. The new millennium provides us with a new opportunity to participate in God's creative and redemptive task, to spend our life so that Christ reign in all human hearts and activities. I cannot help but think that the spirit of the first Christians which is the spirit of Opus Dei is the spirit needed to bring about the definitive kingdom of Christ. Creation is indeed awaiting the revelation of the sons of God, and we as inheritors of the spirit of Blessed Josemaría, along with other like-minded wayfarers, can bring the light of Christ to our world.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> *Christ is Passing By*, 107.

<sup>53</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 33.