

Living the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría in Africa. A Model for Inculturation

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1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper is intended to indicate briefly how the teachings of Blessed Josemaría, as they are lived by the faithful of Opus Dei are relevant to the theme of inculturation in today's African socio-cultural context.

The pastoral importance of this subject matter is obvious: already at the beginning of the new Millennium, a good number of the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei are operative in different parts of the African continent, and more and more of the African peoples, particularly in black Africa, are attracted towards the spirit of the Founder of Opus Dei. Indeed there is reason to believe that this personal prelature is, sooner or later, going to be one of the institutions of the Church that are going to be most influential in African Christianity. In view of the teaching of Vatican II and other magisterial documents on inculturation of the Gospel message into local cultures, it is appropriate to reflect on how that Christian message—as already incarnated in the spirituality lived by the faithful of Opus Dei Prelature—could be inserted into the African traditional and contemporary cultures. For it is in this manner that the spirituality of Blessed Josemaría will bear fruit more effectively in the African continent.

The term *inculturation* designates the insertion or introduction of the Christian message into a particular culture, in such a way that the Christian message finds expression through the elements proper to that culture, and becomes a principle that animates, directs and transforms that culture. According to Pope John Paul II's Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, inculturation is grounded in the mysteries of Incarnation, Easter and Pentecost. For "just as the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14), so too the good news... must take root in the life situation of the hearers of the Word"¹. Likewise, "every culture needs to be

¹ JOHN PAUL II, Exhr. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 60. See also VATICAN CONCIL II, Dogm Const., *Ad Gentes*, 22.

transformed by [the] Gospel values in the light of the Paschal mystery”. Moreover, inculturation is closely linked to the mystery of Pentecost: “Thanks to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and His action, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all the peoples of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongue the one faith of Jesus Christ, and proclaim the marvels that the Lord has done for them. In this way the Church becomes ‘the bride who adorns herself with her jewels’ (cfr. Is. 61:10)”².

However, the present paper is not going to develop an inculturation of the spirituality of Opus Dei in the African cultures. Rather, it is going to show that this spirituality fits very well with the African traditional religious and socio-cultural context. In other words, an effort will be made in this talk to indicate the African “preparatory roads” for the theology of inculturation of the spirituality of Blessed Josemaría. Hence, the talk intends somehow, to pave the way for actual and effective inculturation of the spirituality of Opus Dei into the African continent. Obviously, the faithful of the Prelature who know and live this spirit and are Africans by birth and non-Africans alike, who live in this socio-cultural context, can best realize this task.

2. THE BASIC TEACHINGS OF BLESSED JOSEMARÍA

After the previous consideration of what is inculturation and what the Magisterium of the Church has to say about it, now a brief explanation of the spirituality of Blessed Josemaría will be developed. It is clear that in a forum like this when we are celebrating the centenary of the birth of Blessed Josemaría most people here may be familiar with his teachings. But, for the sake of our study we need to dedicate some space to the main items of this rich spirituality.

In one of the numerous biographies written about Blessed Josemaría³ it is stated that Blessed Josemaría for a long time had been asking God to allow him to see His will. He even repeated many times the aspiration that he took from the gospels, *Domine ut videam*, as Bartimeus, the blind man of Jericho who earned his sight by asking our Lord with those words for that well-known miracle.

On the 2nd of October 1928 Blessed Josemaría saw what God wanted him to do. He explained it in the following way: “We must keep in our sight the multitude, for there is no human being that we are not to love, that we are not to try to help and to understand. Everyone is of interest to us, because everyone has a soul to be saved, because we can bring to everyone, in the name of God, an invitation to seek Christian perfection in the world, repeating to them, *Estote ergo*

² *Ibidem*, 61.

³ Cfr. A. VAZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei, the Life of Josemaría Escrivá*; Vol. I: *The Early Years*, Princeton 2001. p 219.

vos perfecti, sicut et Pater vester caelestis perfectus est: ‘You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt. 5:48)⁴.

Blessed Josemaría saw something that God gave him; it was not a personal idea that he brought to fulfillment by founding Opus Dei. He expressed it in the following words: “...But I must tell you, children of my soul, that I feel a great difficulty, a sort of embarrassment, about appearing in public on this day. It is not natural modesty; it is the constant conviction, the clear-as-day obviousness, of my own unworthiness. Never had it entered my head, before that moment, that I should carry out a mission to humanity”⁵.

He insists that from that date, October 2nd he was illuminated with a “clear general idea”⁶. This idea was the universal call to sanctity, something old as the gospel and as the gospel new⁷. At that time that idea seemed revolutionary; most of the spirituality and the religious understanding at the time was that anyone who wanted to dedicate his or her life to God should either become a priest or enter any of the religious orders available. The spirituality of Opus Dei demands the explicit condition of not changing your state in life⁸. Here we have the beginning of a new approach to holiness that moves in the opposite direction of the spirituality known at that time. The evolution of the religious state begins outside the world but draws ever closer to it, seeking an impact on it. This new spirituality that Blessed Josemaría saw, however, seeks to make the temporal order holy from within, by leading it to God⁹.

This idea was later on taken and sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council: “All the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and of the perfection of charity”¹⁰. This is the basic message from the teaching of Blessed Josemaría, which became incarnated in the spirit of Opus Dei: we are in the world and the will of God is clear for everybody: to become saints; this is an obligation for all¹¹. This is the teaching of Holy Scriptures¹²; however, the originality is the way you achieve this holiness. Blessed Josemaría tirelessly taught that this holiness is achieved by the faithful fulfillment of the ordinary duties of our daily lives. We have to sanctify our work, which means, doing it to the best of our ability and offering it up to God as sacrifice of love¹³. This is

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 224.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ D. LE TOURNEAU, *All About Opus Dei*, Manila 1989, p. 29

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

¹⁰ II VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 40.

¹¹ Cfr. *The Way*, 291.

¹² Cfr. Eph. 1: 4.

¹³ Cfr. D. LE TOURNEAU, *All About...*, cit., pp. 29-36.

a characteristic feature of the spirit of Opus Dei, namely its emphasis on the call to holiness in daily life. In a document from the Congregation of Bishops it is explained in the following way: in the aims and spirit of Opus Dei stress is laid on the sanctifying value of ordinary work, that is to say, on the obligation to sanctify oneself in one's work and to turn it into an instrument of apostolate¹⁴.

In order to imitate Christ, which is the essence of Christian life, Blessed Josemaría taught to follow the footprints of Jesus Christ's hidden life. For thirty years the Lord lived a life which did not attract the attention of anybody. He did not single himself out from His contemporaries: "Since 1928 I have understood clearly that God wants our Lord's whole life to be an example for Christians. I saw this with special reference to his hidden life, the years he spent working side by side with ordinary men. Our Lord wants many people to ratify their vocation during years of quiet, unspectacular living. Obeying God's will always means leaving our selfishness behind, but there is no reason why it should entail cutting ourselves off from the normal life of ordinary men who share the same status, work and social position as we"¹⁵. Through this practice we can give a divine relevance to everything we think and do. We are enabled to discover something divine in the most ordinary things of our daily work, which we sanctify by offering it up to God, as a means to give Him glory.

The life of grace begins at baptism, where the Christian becomes a child of God. This awareness of our relationship with God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is the foundation of the teachings of Blessed Josemaría. It is as it were the coloured glasses that would give a new understanding to all dimensions of our spiritual life.

We already have in seed form the ends and aims of this spirit incarnated in Opus Dei: personal sanctity and apostolate. "The great mission that we have received in baptism is to redeem the world with Christ. We are urged on by the charity of Christ to take upon our shoulders a part of this task of saving souls"¹⁶.

The sacramental life becomes paramount for this lay spirituality that Blessed Josemaría taught and preached. The sacrament of Confession is the tribunal of divine justice where we find forgiveness. He used to call it the sacrament of divine pardon and mercy: "Sacramental Confession is not a human but a divine dialogue. It is a tribunal of divine justice and especially of mercy, with a loving judge who 'has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; I desire that the wicked turn back from his way and live' (Ezek. 33:11)"¹⁷.

The sacrament of the Eucharist is the climax and summit of Christian life, and with an expression that later on the Second Vatican Council adopted, the

¹⁴ Declaration of the Congregation for Bishops, August 23, 1982; II, c.

¹⁵ *Christ is Passing by*, 20.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 164.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 78.

founder of Opus Dei used to call this most excellent sacrament the center and the root of our interior life: “Thus our lives are a prolongation of the previous Mass and a preparation for the next”¹⁸.

Blessed Josemaría tirelessly taught that the continual awareness of God’s presence in the heart of ordinary activities comes about through participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We are to see it not only as the unbloody renewal of Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary, but also as the pact of each baptized person to imitate his redeemer¹⁹. The Christian “priestly soul” derives from the common priesthood of the faithful, a participation in Christ priesthood, although essentially different from the priest’s ministry²⁰.

The founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaría, has taught people all over the world to love the family. At a time, starting in the 1930’s when sanctity seemed to have become more or less the preserve of the religious and priests, God made use of him to make many married couples see that married life is a true path to sanctity on earth²¹. He always blessed large families and had encouraging words for them: “I bless parents who, joyfully accepting the mission that God entrusts to them to have many children. Moreover, I ask married couples not to block the well-springs of life and I invite them to have enough supernatural outlook and courage to bring up a large family, if it is God’s will”²².

These sacraments are like footprints left on earth by Christ in order to follow him closely. Blessed Josemaría would always considered these sources of grace as means of sanctification together with prayer and mortification. He put it in this way: “Anyone who wants to fight has to use the available means, which have not changed in twenty centuries of Christianity. They are prayer, mortification and the frequent use of the sacraments. Since mortification is also prayer — prayer of the senses— we can sum up these means in two: prayer and sacraments”²³. That’s why the spirit of Opus Dei insists that in order to live genuine Christian life we must get acquainted with this kind of practices that as means help us to identify ourselves with Jesus Christ. This prayer and mortification is soaked in the spirit of divine filiation; therefore it is the prayer and mortification of God’s children. It is not an obligation to be fulfilled, but a joyful duty to carry out for love of God and neighbour.

Together with the above, Blessed Josemaría always had a tender and intense love for the Mother of Jesus Christ. He used to call the Holy Family the Trinity

¹⁸ D. LE TOURNEAU, *All About...*, cit., p. 135.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

²⁰ Cfr. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

²¹ S. BERNAL, *Mmgr. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: a Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, Princeton 1977, p. 47.

²² *Conversations*, 94.

²³ *Christ is Passing by*, 78.

of the earth; he saw them as the path that leads us to union with the Trinity. In this family Mary has a special relationship with each one of the members of the heavenly Trinity: She is the most blessed Daughter of God the Father, the only Mother of God the Son and the unique Spouse of God the Holy Spirit²⁴. His entire life and the whole of Opus Dei's story have been marked by favours from God's Mother. Convinced that Jesus can refuse nothing to Mary, nor to us who are children of the same Mother, Blessed Josemaría invited people to put Mary into everything and over everything; thus he taught that we always should go to Jesus—and return to Him—through Mary²⁵.

Together with this love for our Lady and close to it, blessed Josemaría used to say: “Christ, Mary, the Pope. Have we not just indicated, in these three words, the loves that sum up the Catholic faith?”²⁶. This love for the Church and the Pope was borne of his faith in Jesus Christ. He regarded the Holy Father as the Vicar of Christ, the representative of God on earth. He wrote to his children in Opus Dei: “When you are old, and I have already rendered my account to God, you will tell... how the Father loved the Pope with all his soul, with all his strength”²⁷. This strong faith led him to have an intense respect and love for the Magisterium, and in the formation of the members of Opus Dei he gave the following advice: “In the common doctrine of the Church—in *libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei*—without having our own school in matters in which the Magisterium of the Church leaves to the free discussion of men: *Fortes in fide*, with purity of intention, with openness and vigilance, avoiding extremes and laziness of any kind. And without being cowed by passing fashions and moods: because our love for the Church, for the Work and for souls will lead us into the good and leave aside the rest, and sometimes to go against the current, out of loyalty to Jesus Christ and his doctrine”²⁸.

This teaching found strong criticism from those who criticized and dissented from the teachings from the Church. When talking about the confusion provoked by the disobedience of many after the publication by Pope Paul VI in 1968 of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he commented: “Over and above any private advice stands God's law, which is contained in Sacred Scripture, guarded and taught by the Magisterium of the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. When a particular piece of advice contradicts God's word as taught by the Magisterium, we have to reject it decisively”²⁹. Blessed Josemaría also had a deep

²⁴ *The Way*, 496.

²⁵ *The Way*, 495.

²⁶ S. BERNAL, *Mmgr. Josemaría Escrivá...cit.*, p. 93.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 252.

²⁹ *Conversations*, 93.

devotion to St. Joseph, whom he used to call our father and lord and also to the guardian angels.

Nevertheless, it would not be right to reduce Christianity to a set of practices or acts of piety. Therefore a Christian trying to be consistent with his faith cannot live a double life: living part-time a series of devotions, and then the rest of the time a godless life at work and social relations. Blessed Josemaría taught that in order to achieve an intense life of faith we need a unity of life, pure and simple that makes the faithful an all round Christian. He explained it at length in the homily he gave at the campus of the University of Navarre in 1968: “I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the thirties that they had to know how to ‘materialize’ their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side, an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities. No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics, if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life, which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things”³⁰.

In order to finish this succinct summary of the teachings of Blessed Josemaría let it suffice to say that there are many aspects of his teachings that have been left out; but we have pointed out those which are of particular relevance for getting a glimpse into the rich and deep spirituality of Blessed Josemaría.

3. THE SPIRITUALITY OF BLESSED JOSEMARÍA VIEWED FROM THE AFRICAN SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

It is particularly significant that the spirituality of Blessed Josemaría fits very well the African traditional and contemporary socio-cultural contexts. This might be one of the reasons, among others of supernatural nature, why a good number of people in Africa from different countries —both men and women, young and old— are deeply attracted towards the spirit of Opus Dei founded by Blessed Josemaría. There are several factors that are indicative of the appropriateness of the spirituality of Opus Dei for the African mind. In this short talk we cannot touch on all of them, therefore we would refer only to some of them that seem to stand out among the rest.

- 1) Traditional Africa is known for its great respect and faithfulness towards ancestral traditions and the authority of communal and religious leaders. Such traditions and communal or religious authority are, in many cases,

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 114.

believed to originate from the Supreme Being and reach the earthly members through ancestral mediation. For this reason they are regarded and venerated as sacred. Right from his/her childhood the individual is educated to respect them and to accommodate his/her behaviour in accordance with their demands or directives. Such kind of education starts in the nuclear family and is later on continued particularly through traditional initiation rituals where particular religious sponsors communicate that type of instruction³¹.

One of the most striking features of the spirit of Opus Dei is their fidelity to the Tradition of the Church and to the members of the magisterium, particularly the Roman Pontiff. In spite of the spread of the contemporary spirit of doubt, dissent, contestation and rebellious attitude towards the hierarchy of the Church in general and the Pope in particular, the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei manifest an unshakeable and at times heroic faithfulness to the living Church Tradition and ecclesiastical authority. This may be one of the reasons why many African individuals —both Catholic and non-Catholic alike— manifest special sympathy, love and confidence to those who follow the spirit of Blessed Josemaría, as true models, among others, of genuine Catholic spirituality. Indeed, the real African is not at all attracted by the spirit of rebellious contestation against traditional Catholic teaching and its magisterium, even though, you may always find some who have been erroneously influenced by these attitudes coming from non-Africans who live, work and teach in Africa and by some Africans who have been influenced by these attitudes while studying abroad.

It is due to this faithfulness to the rightful authority that many Africans consider the Prelature of Opus Dei as an instrument from God, among many others in the Church, to counteract the contemporary rebellion and anarchy in some churches.

- 2) By stressing the active role of the lay people in the sanctifying, prophetic and governing offices, thanks to their sharing in Christ's Priesthood, Blessed Josemaría was a precursor of the teaching of Vatican II and other

³¹ With regard to what is said here and in the subsequent paragraphs on African socio-cultural items the reader is referred to the following: L.V. THOMAS, *Les religions d'Afrique noire*, Paris 1969; ID., "Generalités sur l'ethnologie Negro-aficaine", in *Ethnologie Regionale (Encyclopedie de la Pleiade*, vol. I), Paris 1972, pp. 246-357; G. PARRINDER, *Religion in Africa*, London 1969; ID., *African Mythology*, London 1975; B.C. RAY, *African Religions. Symbol, ritual and commentary*, New Jersey 1976; J. V. TAILOR, *The Primal Vision*, London 1969; J. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London 1970; E. DAMMAN, *Die Religionen Afrikas*, Stuttgart 1963; M. ELIADE, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, London 1993; W. HIRSCHBERG, *Die Kulturen Afrikas*, Frankfurt am Main 1974; G.P. MURDOCK, *Africa. Its peoples and their culture history*, N. Y.-Toronto-London 1959.

magisterial documents. Thus, speaking about the grace of Baptism, the Catechism of the Catholic Church (henceforth CCC) states that through Baptism, the baptized “share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. They are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that [they] may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [them] out of darkness into the marvelous light’ (1 Pt. 2:9). Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers”³².

In Africa this active participation of the laity has to be stressed for various reasons. As is well known, the Catholic traditional ecclesiology, especially the one found in the old manuals of theology written shortly before Vatican II, was predominantly institutional and laid emphasis on the role of the hierarchical members, but not sufficiently on the active sharing of the laity in Christ’s priestly functions. Catholic theologians and canonists developed this ecclesiology since the late Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation period, mainly as a response to the attacks of the Reformers on papal primacy, the hierarchy in general and the visible structures of the Church. This explains why this ecclesiology conceived the Church primarily as a hierarchical visible society, whose task was predominantly, though not exclusively, the spiritual salvation of souls through the proclamation of the Gospel message (prophetic function), governing (pastoral function) and sanctification, particularly through the administration of the sacraments (priestly function)³³.

Since these functions were chiefly reserved for the members of the hierarchy, the laity were led to an amount of undesirable passivity in the Church. This is the ecclesiology, which was brought to Africa by Catholic missionaries in the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, the dictatorial forms of traditional governing in many African societies and colonial governments heightened the passivity of the lay people in the Church in Africa. Accordingly, the stress which Blessed Josemaría put on the active role of the laity in the Church is a most welcome additional factor to spread in Africa the teachings of the Church according to the guidelines described in Vatican II and other magisterial documents on this issue, without discarding the positive elements of the old ecclesiology, but enriching those contents with these relatively new insights.

- 3) As has already been mentioned in other talks, Blessed Josemaría emphasized in the spirit of the personal Prelature God wanted him to found, the idea of sanctifying the ordinary things of every day and to love the world passionately as the real theater of Redemption. This injunction is in line

³² CCC, 1268; see also VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 31, 33, 35, 36.

³³ A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, N.Y.-London-Toronto 1987, pp. 34-46.

with Holy Scripture³⁴ and the teachings of the recent magisterium, especially as regards the role of the laity. It was mentioned before, that the newness of Christian life, which the lay people obtain from Baptism, endows them with the right and duty to have an active share in Christ's priestly functions in the Church. However, as regards the laity "this one baptismal dignity takes on a manner of life which sets a person apart, without, however, bringing about a separation from the ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious". The Second Vatican Council has described this manner of life as "the secular character": "The secular character is properly and particularly that of the faithful"³⁵.

In order to grasp this properly, it is important to observe that the Church has a secular dimension, which is grounded in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation. In fact, although the Church is not *of this world*³⁶, it is, nonetheless, *in this world* where it lives. It is accordingly "sent to continue the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, which 'by its very nature concerns the salvation of humanity and also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order'"³⁷. All the Church members are, in different ways, partakers in this secular dimension of the Church. "In particular the sharing of the *lay faithful* has its own manner of realization and function, which according to the [Second Vatican] Council, is 'properly and particularly' theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression 'secular character'"³⁸. The secular world is, therefore, the place where the laity receive their specific call from God. More precisely, the lay faithful "are called by God so that they, led by the spirit of the Gospel, might contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially in this way of life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they manifest Christ to others"³⁹.

This teaching of the magisterium is in perfect agreement with the spirituality of Blessed Josemaría who was one of the forerunners in the Church when he started preaching this message in 1928. This understanding is fully in line with the traditional African religiosity. Indeed, unlike Oriental religions, most of which are world-denying, African traditional religions are intimately associated with the cosmic world and are particularly concerned with human bodily well-being.

³⁴ Jn. 3:15.

³⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Cost. *Lumen Gentium*, 31; JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 23.

³⁶ Cfr. Jn, 17:16.

³⁷ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Cost. *Lumen Gentium*, 31; JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 15.

³⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 15.

³⁹ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Cost. *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

- 4) The spirituality of Blessed Josemaría recommending personal sanctification through professional work and of the ordinary things of daily life is easily understood by traditional African religiosity which is characterized by the absence of individual or communal religious life in private localities separated from common societal way of living. This does not mean that the traditional African was in all cases less religious than for example, Muslims or Buddhist monks. The truth is that religion permeates the whole sphere of the African world, in such a way that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish in that world what is sacred and what is not.

After all, this is the kind of religious life which characterized the greater part of Christ's earthly existence: "During the greater part of His life Jesus shared the condition of the vast majority of human beings: a daily life spent without evident greatness, a life of manual labour. His religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the Law of God, a life in community"⁴⁰. That is why "the hidden life at Nazareth allows everyone to enter into fellowship with Jesus by the most ordinary events of daily life"⁴¹. This is, moreover, the kind of life that was embraced by His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, His foster-father.

- 5) In our contemporary times, the teachings of Blessed Josemaría stressing the importance of lay spirituality and active involvement of the laity in the Church are a powerful weapon to defend people in Africa against the modern process of secularization, and the widespread false ideologies and practices coming to our countries from the developed world. All these attitudes are trying to penetrate Africa —especially through the mass media— and by which the laity are in many cases the first to be badly affected because of their greater exposure.

What the present magisterium teaches with regard to the participation of the laity in Christ's priestly functions will particularly enforce the teaching of the Founder of Opus Dei regarding the active role of the laity in the Church. In order to perceive how this doctrine can help the African laity to overcome the evils linked with secularization and false modern ideologies, it is useful to expose briefly what the magisterium teaches about the active involvement of the lay faithful in Christ's prophetic, governing and priestly functions in the Church. The recent magisterial teaching on this issue can be presented as follows: the position of the lay faithful in the Church "comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character"⁴². It is

⁴⁰ CCC, 531.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 533.

⁴² JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 15.

within this doctrinal background that the magisterial doctrine on the laity's participation in the priestly, teaching and governing offices in the Church has to be understood.

With regard to the manner of such participation the lay faithful share in Christ's priestly office by being incorporated in the risen Lord, whereby they become vitally joined to Him and to His sacrifice on the cross. They are also united to Him by offering themselves, their daily sufferings and activities to Him. According to Vatican II, the prayers, work and apostolic endeavours of the laity, "their ordinary married and family life, their daily labour, their mental and physical relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (cfr. 1Pt. 2:5) During the celebration of the Eucharist these sacrifices are most lovingly offered to the Father along with the Lord's body. Thus as worshippers whose every deed is holy, the lay faithful consecrate the world itself to God"⁴³.

Thanks to their participation in Christ's teaching office the laity are established as witnesses of the Gospel message and are provided with "the appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) and the grace of the word (cfr. Acts 2:17-18; Rev. 19:10)"⁴⁴. They fulfill this prophetic mission by proclaiming Christ through words and the testimony of Christian life, "without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil"⁴⁵. In fact, capable and trained people "may also collaborate in catechetical formation, in teaching the sacred science and in the use of communications media"⁴⁶. And although the lay faithful "are bound to show Christian obedience to what the sacred pastors, who represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith and prescribe as rulers of the Church", they have nevertheless the right and sometimes the duty to manifest to their pastors and to the rest of the faithful their own opinion on matters pertaining to the good of the Church, although "with due regard to the integrity of faith and morals and reverence towards their pastors"⁴⁷. Likewise, in the family, the Christian couples "are the first to pass on the faith to their children and to educate them with it by word and example"⁴⁸.

Through their membership in Christ's Body the laity partake in the governing office of Christ, who is King and Lord of the universe and are thereby called to spread His kingdom in the world. They fulfill this office by self-abnegation in

⁴³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Cost., *Lumen Gentium*, 34.

⁴⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Cost., *Ibidem*, 35. See also JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 14.

⁴⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 14.

⁴⁶ CCC, 906.

⁴⁷ CIC, can. 212; CCC, 907.

⁴⁸ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decr. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

order to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (Rom. 6:12)⁴⁹. “But in particular the lay faithful are called to restore to creation all of its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to Himself and subjects them along with Himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone (cfr. 1Cor. 15:28; Jn. 12:32)”⁵⁰. In order to allow the laity to exercise their power of governance in the Church, the present ecclesiastical regulation prescribes their active participation at parish councils, diocesan synods, and in the pastoral care of the parish, in finance committees or ecclesiastical tribunals, etc.⁵¹

Briefly therefore, when the teaching of Blessed Josemaría on the spirituality of the laity together with the doctrine of the present magisterium on the active involvement of the lay faithful in the Church and the world at large are duly taken into account, the African laity will be particularly equipped to cope effectively with today’s modern secularization and erroneous ideologies that are gradually entering into the African continent.

- 6) In traditional Africa the family is one of the cultural items that are highly valued. The sense of the family is evidenced by the attachment to the nuclear and extended forms of family and to the bond of ancestors. This joins the African sense of community expressed by participation in the life of the community into which the individual is introduced by various initiation rites⁵². Together with this attachment traditional Africans are well known for their love of having many children in the family. This is always valued as a great gift of God, and is accompanied by abhorrence of the evils of sterility, the use of contraceptives and abortion.

In such context, the teachings of Blessed Josemaría on the special value of the Christian family and the love of fruitful Christian marriage blessed with children are totally in keeping with the African traditional attitude towards the family. Even though, sometimes it demands from parents a great sacrifice, African traditional values have always placed the human above the economic. Nowadays, many are pushing the Africans to place the economic above the human realities. Moreover, selfish and unchristian considerations have made some to fall into what in modern society has been termed as a contraceptive mentality that ruins the future of the family, the transmission of Christian values and the future of

⁴⁹ Cfr. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const., *Lumen Gentium*, 36; Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 14.

⁵⁰ Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici*, 14.

⁵¹ Cfr. CCC, 911.

⁵² Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 5.

nations. Therefore the teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei is perfectly appropriate and in harmony with the Church's official teaching. According to the Second Vatican Council, "by its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory"⁵³. The Catechism of the Catholic Church echoes the same teaching in the following words: "Fecundity is a gift and an end in marriage, for conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful... So the Church, which 'is on the side of life' teaches that 'each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life'"⁵⁴. That is why "married couples should regard it as their proper mission to transmit human life, and to educate their children; they should realize that they are thereby cooperating with the love of God the Creator and are, in a certain sense, its interpreters. They fulfill this duty with a sense of human and Christian responsibility"⁵⁵.

4. CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this paper to show briefly how the teachings of Blessed Josemaría can be inculturated in sub-Saharan Africa, where a considerable number of faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei already live and are already actively engaged in living their Christian faith conscientiously, therefore causing around themselves new fruits of conversions and serious Christian living in the middle of the world.

Reflections on the teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei in the light of the African traditional and contemporary socio-cultural contexts have shown that such teachings are particularly appropriate for inculturation in Black Africa. Indeed, the investigation carried out has brought to light a variety of "preparatory roads" for effective inculturation. Accordingly, although the paper does not offer an African inculturation of the spirituality of Blessed Josemaría, it is nevertheless presented as a modest contribution paving the way for suitable inculturation that can, obviously, be brought about only by the faithful of the Prelature who are, at the same time, faithful and incarnating in their lives the spirit they received from the Founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaría.

⁵³ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const., *Gadium et Spes*, 48, 50.

⁵⁴ CCC, 2366; see also PAUL VI, Enc. *Humanae Vitae*, 11-12.

⁵⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogm. Const., *Gaudium et Spes*, 50. See also CCC, 1652-1654, 2249, 2367, 2398-9, JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, 14, 21, 28-31, ID., *Letter to Families* (February, 2, 1994), 10-14.