

# The Freedom Won by Christ on the Cross

## Theological Reflections on Freedom in Blessed Josemaria's Teaching

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*"Our sole goal is spiritual and apostolic, and bears a divine seal, love for the freedom that Christ won for us by dying on the Cross (cf. Gal 4:31)."*<sup>1</sup>

Freedom is so central to the life and teachings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva that he often used to tell those who shared his vocation: "I leave you as an inheritance, on the human level, love for freedom and good humor."<sup>2</sup>

His love of freedom stands out right from the start of the mission he received from God.<sup>3</sup> In the 1932 letter cited above, he called it a "divine seal on the Work."<sup>4</sup> And thus he viewed it all his life. In the spring of 1974, a year before God called him to himself, in a meeting with young people from many

1. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, *Letter January 9, 1932*, no. 42 (cited in A. Fuenmayor, V. Gomez-Iglesias, J. L. Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Scepter, Princeton 1994, p. 40).

2. *Romana Postulación de la causa de beatificación y canonización del Siervo de Dios Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, sacerdote, Fundador del Opus Dei, Artículos del Postulador*, Rome 1979, no. 483, p. 169.

3. In July, 1931, in a schematic enumeration of apostolic activities, he wrote: "a Catholic party, no: diversity of opinions" (*Apuntes íntimos*, no. 206). And a few months later, in 1932, he wrote: "We are citizens, the same as others: the same duties, equal rights. —The political freedom of the members. For this reason, in human things, a variety of opinions" (*Apuntes íntimos*, no. 158; both texts cited in Fuenmayor et al., *op. cit.*, p. 40).

4. The foundational charism is the decisive cause of his delving so deeply into freedom: "Ever since 1928 my preaching has been that sanctity is not reserved for the privileged few and that all the ways of the earth can be divine. The reason is that the spirituality of Opus Dei is based on the sanctification of ordinary work. The prejudice must be rejected that the ordinary faithful can do no more than limit themselves to helping the clergy in ecclesiastical apostolates. It should be remembered that to attain this supernatural end men need to be and to feel personally free with the freedom Christ won for us" (Blessed Josemaria Escriva, *Conversations*, no. 34). "Because the Work's aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of freedom, of love for the personal freedom of all men." (*Ibid.*, no. 67).

countries, he graphically expressed the same conviction: "In the past century, our grandparents (mine that is, your great grandparents) fought a marvelous fight for personal freedom. They had a romantic enthusiasm, and sacrificed and struggled to attain the democracy they dreamt of, one that combined personal freedom and responsibility. That's how our love for freedom must be: combined with personal responsibility. I go around like Diogenes with his lantern, seeking freedom, and I don't find it anywhere. I think I'm the last romantic, because I love the personal freedom of everyone—also that of non-Catholics."<sup>5</sup>

His teaching was imbued with the conviction that God's greatest gift, on the human level, is freedom, which is at the core of the human person. But Blessed Josemaria was a teacher of freedom not only on the theoretical level, but above all as someone who lived with a deep freedom himself and who heroically defended the freedom of others. Many people who knew him have borne witness to this reality,<sup>6</sup> particularly his successors at the head of Opus Dei, Bishops Álvaro del Portillo<sup>7</sup> and Javier Echevarría.<sup>8</sup> This love for freedom has also been stressed in the various sketches of his life published since 1975 and in the biography by Andrés Vázquez de Prada.<sup>9</sup>

Blessed Josemaria's writings present much more than an abstract theory of freedom; they contain a vision of freedom won in light of his own lived experience.<sup>10</sup> His style is existential and autobiographical rather than speculative, and reveals a

5. Notes taken at a get-together, Easter, 1974 (cited in Alejandro Llano, "La libertad radical," in *Acto de Homenaje al Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Fundador de la Universidad de Navarra*, Pamplona, June 26, 1992, p. 104).

6. Cf. the book *Así le vieron: testimonios sobre Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, 4th ed., Rialp, Madrid 1992, 219 pages, which contains a good number of testimonies of persons in the ecclesiastical world—bishops, priests, men and women religious—who knew Blessed Josemaria at different periods of his life. See also Pilar Urbano, *El hombre de Villa Tevere: los años romanos de Josemaría Escrivá*, Barcelona 1995, 549 p. The chapter "A Passion for Freedom" (pp. 267-291) gathers numerous stories from direct witnesses of the life of Blessed Josemaria during those years in Rome...

7. Cf. Álvaro del Portillo, *Immersed in God*, (an interview with Cesare Cavalleri), Princeton 1996, 252 pages, in which numerous instances of the defense of freedom by Blessed Josemaria are narrated.

8. Cf. Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría*, (an interview with Salvador Bernal), Madrid 2000, 357 pages, especially the section "Defender of Freedom" (pp. 146-157).

9. Andrés Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei: The Life of Josemaría Escrivá*, Princeton 2001, Vol. 1: *The Early Years*, 671 pages. The first volume covers the period 1902-1936.

10. All his works are permeated by a deep conception of freedom and marked by many references to it. Apart from the homily "Freedom, A Gift from God," which is completely devoted to this question, the subject is present in a special way in *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*, which contains interviews granted between 1966 and 1968. The questions raised by the journalists about Opus Dei and other contemporary concerns give the author an opportunity to express his thoughts about this fundamental dimension of human life. In addition, at the end of that volume, in the homily "Passionately Loving the World," the author explicitly discusses a lay mentality whose central features are freedom and responsibility. Other homilies also discuss the meaning of freedom, although not as extensively. For example, the one he gave on the feast of Christ the King in 1970, on November 22, which was published under the title "Christ the King" in the book *Christ Is Passing By*, or that of March 15, 1961, Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent, which was published in that same book under the title "Christian Respect for Persons and their Freedom." In the homily "Towards Holiness," from November 26, 1967, published in *Friends of God*, prayer is seen as liberating the soul. These are only a few examples, because, I repeat, the topic comes up continually in all of his works.

singular clarity of vision and depth of intellectual intuition. The Italian philosopher Cornelio Fabro, who called him "a teacher of Christian freedom,"<sup>11</sup> entitled his reflections on Blessed Josemaría's writings *Con el temple de los Padres* ["With the Spirit of the Fathers"].<sup>12</sup> In Blessed Josemaría's writings, as in those of the Fathers of the Church, life and doctrine are closely intertwined. Their reflections stem from their own Christian life, as they strive to faithfully transmit, in the particular circumstances of their own time, the revealed Truth of the Life of Christ that we are all called to share in.

It is perhaps precisely these characteristics of the founder of Opus Dei's teaching that has merited the attention of theologians, philosophers, jurists, professors of education, etc.<sup>13</sup> In the areas of philosophy and theology, the following authors come to mind, without trying to be exhaustive: the article by Cornelio Fabro already cited, as well as his reflections in *El primado existencial de la libertad*;<sup>14</sup> Monsignor Fernando Ocariz' works on divine filiation,<sup>15</sup> Professor Antonio Aranda's study;<sup>16</sup> Carlos Cardona's commentaries on Blessed Josemaría's works and his own works on freedom; Alejandro Llano;<sup>17</sup> Leonardo Polo;<sup>18</sup> Juan Bautista Torelló;<sup>19</sup> and others.<sup>20</sup>

### *Historical context*

Blessed Josemaría's defense of freedom often stemmed from specific events in the life of many countries. His Christian vision gave him a deep in-

11. Cornelio Fabro, "Nel secondo anniversario della morte. Un maestro di libertà cristiana: Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer," in *L'Osservatore Romano*, July 2, 1977. The Belgian jurist, W. Onclin, former dean of the School of Canon Law at the University of Louvain, coincides in this view: "One of the things that most moved me in speaking with Monsignor Escrivá, apart from his human warmth, his enthusiasm and his supernatural spirit, was his love for freedom, a word he never spoke without adding a second word: responsibility." (W. Onclin, in *La libre Belgique*, July 2, 1975).

12. Cf. C. Fabro, S. Garofalo and M. A. Raschini, *Santos en el mundo: estudios sobre los escritos del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Rialp, Madrid 1993, 220 pages.

13. In the legal field, Professor J.-L. Chabot, from the University of Grenoble, wrote "Responsabilidad frente al mundo y libertad," in the collection *Santidad y mundo* (Actas del Simposio Teológico de estudio en torno a las enseñanzas del beato Josemaría Escrivá, Rome October 12-14, 1993), edited by M. Belda, Euns, Pamplona 1996; another jurist, Professor G. Dalla Torre, took up the question "La animación cristiana del mundo," in the book just cited. In the field of education, Victor García Hoz published *Tras las huellas del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: ideas para la educación*, Rialp, Madrid 1997, 206 pages, with a chapter entitled "Conciencia, libertad, responsabilidad."

14. Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei: en el 50 aniversario de su fundación, (a work edited by Pedro Rodríguez, Pio G. Alves de Sousa, José Manuel Zumaquero), Pamplona 1982, 497 p. The study by Cornelio Fabro is found on pages 323-337.

15. Cf. Fernando Ocariz, *Naturaleza, gracia y gloria*, Euns, Pamplona 2000, 355 pages.

16. Cf. Antonio Aranda, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo. Estudio sobre el cristocentrismo del beato Josemaría Escrivá*, Rialp, Madrid 2000, 304 p.

17. Cf. A. Llano, "La libertad radical," published in *Acto de Homenaje...*, pp. 95-104.

18. Cf. L. Polo, "El concepto de vida en Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer," in *Anuario Filosófico* 18 (1985/2), pp. 9-32. Also found on pages 165-195 of the collective work, *La personalidad del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Pamplona 1994, 261 p.

19. Cf. Juan Bautista Torrello, "Il Beato Josemaría Escrivá, 'pazzo d'amore,'" in *Studi Cattolici* 389-390 (1993), pp. 420-428.

20. Some professors at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross—including Ramon García de Haro, Ángel Rodríguez Luño and Ignacio Carrasco—have also dealt with this question.

sight into changes in the culture in which he lived. Therefore we will briefly consider here the gradual strengthening of the value of freedom that can be seen in contemporary culture.

*Progressive appreciation of freedom*

One of the most important values in contemporary culture is undoubtedly freedom, combined with authenticity. This has been emphasized by Charles Taylor in his ongoing study of modernity, *Sources of the Self*.<sup>21</sup>

Recent centuries have given rise to a progressive discovery of the value of freedom. A growing awareness of the dignity of the person and of human rights has been consolidated, at the same time as the autonomy of earthly realities has been affirmed. This growing awareness is reflected in legal texts, in literature and in many other academic fields. On a deeper level, it can be seen as the end result of a long process of the maturing of certain Christian truths that have required centuries of development to produce their fruit.

This growing awareness of the value of freedom has, of course, not been untainted by the dregs of sin. On a speculative level, an anthropocentric outlook closed to the transcendent has led many philosophers to view freedom as an absolute self-standing value, rather than a gift freely bestowed by the Creator. This anthropocentric outlook entails a rejection of metaphysical realism, a deeply human outlook that is reinforced by Christian revelation. In a Christian realism, where being is communicated by God to creatures, the act of being is the font of a creature's activity. When of a spiritual order, this results in a person, who with free dynamism perfects himself and directs himself towards his full perfection. But when this perspective is lost, we get the strange paradox, so frequent in the contemporary world, of a strong perception of freedom that sadly becomes stunted in various ways. For freedom dies out when its metaphysical foundation is rejected. This can be seen in two important trends in modern thought.

In rationalism, which prefers the subjective clarity of simple essences to the richness of real being, freedom is swallowed up by the system. Reality is seen as an ensemble of essences related by a mathematical system perfectly graspable by human reason. Such a rigidly determined world leaves no place for freedom, which is what happens in the philosophy of Leibniz. Being with all its dynamism is replaced by clear and distinct essences, more easily manageable by man in his efforts to dominate the world.

The same loss of freedom occurs when reality is reduced, not to essences, but to bare existence, a loose collection of events and actions that lack a subject rooted in being. The world in the end is thus seen as devoid of a source of unity and

21. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 1996, 601 p.

meaning. Freedom is dissolved into the spontaneity of unconnected and meaningless acts. Having to make a decision, with its attached responsibility, becomes an unbearable weight, a condemnation (as in Sartre). The temporal ceases to be a participation in eternity, and becomes a play of isolated acts.<sup>22</sup> In this case also, the exaltation of freedom leads paradoxically to its loss.

### *One-party mentality*

Blessed Josemaria, while always eschewing any specific political stance, defended Christian freedom in the face of what he called a "one-party mentality," both in the apostolate as well as in the social and political arena.

In the political field, after liberalism's exaltation of personal freedom, the twentieth century has been deeply marked by ideologies and political systems that denied any personal freedom. These freedom-negating systems include both the strict totalitarianism of Communism and Nazism, as well as other political forms of excessive limitation of freedom dominated by a single party. With his Christian sense of freedom, Blessed Josemaria energetically rejected any violation of the human person's freedom and responsibility, echoing the declarations of the Church's magisterium.

### *Clericalism and fear of freedom*

Also in the life of the Church, Christian freedom was sometimes undervalued. For example, persons and groups with a one-party mentality in the apostolate and regarding Catholic activity in public life; those who saw themselves with the mission to offer the only Catholic solution to problems in the temporal order; a spiritual direction that was seen as replacing the Christian conscience of each faithful. Such fear of personal freedom and responsibility may at times have arisen as a reaction to the excesses of liberalism in recent centuries.

The founder of Opus Dei clearly perceived how such attitudes deformed the Christian message. Underlying them, he detected a clericalism that consists in the improper meddling of clerics in areas proper to the laity. This leads to a one-party mentality that arises when one tries to offer a single Catholic solution to problems that are contingent and open to differing opinions. His view of Christian life, which defended the freedom of each person, was radically opposed to the mentality of someone who saw himself as "stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church," or who said that "his solutions are 'the Catholic solutions' to the problems. That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism, 'official Catholicism,' or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things."<sup>23</sup>

22. Cf. Cardona, *Metafísica del bien y del mal*, Pamplona 1987, 232 p.

23. Blessed Josemaria Escrivá, *Conversations*, no. 117.

Opus Dei's founder had the firm conviction that people affected by such a mentality would be unable to understand the mission he had received from God to make manifest the divine greatness of ordinary life.

*Deepening Catholic appreciation of freedom in the twentieth century*

Throughout the twentieth century, many Catholic theologians and philosophers attained a deeper appreciation for the Christian meaning of freedom. These gains have borne fruit in the doctrinal developments of the Second Vatican Council, reflecting St. Paul's words, "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). Recent decades have also witnessed the rise of a radically secular liberalism, and its apparent opposite in the "theology of liberation" of a Marxist bent. I say "apparent opposite," because both share a common basis in centering themselves on man and this world rather than on God and eternity.

Also in the academic world one sees among Christian thinkers a higher valuation of freedom than was usual in the scholastic theology and philosophy of the first half of the twentieth century. The concept of freedom as a property only of the spiritual faculty of the will was seen to be unsatisfactory, and an attempt was made to situate it in the context of the whole human person. As Alejandro Llano writes, "a free decision existentially implicates the human being in a more profound and total way than does knowledge."<sup>24</sup> Or as Paul Ricoeur points out, when I make a decision, it is I who decide, putting my entire being into that decision.

In their discussions of freedom, many authors, for example, Joseph de Finance<sup>25</sup> and Karol Wojtyła,<sup>26</sup> have emphasized the notions of self-determination and self-transcendence towards perfection and plenitude that is manifested especially in self-giving, a point in which philosophers as diverse as Leonardo Polo, Carlos Cardona<sup>27</sup> and Robert Spaemann<sup>28</sup> all agree.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá is certainly one of the most influential "teachers of Christian life" in the twentieth century. The great importance he gave to "personal freedom," to the "freedom of the children of God," which is a "responsible freedom," was apparent in all he did and said.

Many factors contributed to his deep appreciation for freedom, including his family upbringing and his own human personality, and probably also his legal training. But I think it was due above all to the foundational light he received from God and to his own experience of Christian life. It certainly didn't stem from the

24. A. Llano, *Sueño y vigilia de la razón*, Eunsá, Pamplona 2001, p. 363.

25. Cf. Joseph de Finance, *Essai sur l'agir humain*, Rome 1962.

26. Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Person and community: selected essays*, (translated by Theresa Sandok), New York 1994, 370 pages.

27. Cf. Carlos Cardona, *Metafísica del bien y del mal*, Pamplona 1987, 232 p.

28. Cf. Robert Spaemann, *Glück und Wohlwollen: Versuch über Ethik*, Stuttgart 1990, 254 pages.

mentality that reigned in the ecclesiastical environment in which he was educated, since to a large extent he had to go against the current in his defense of freedom. And in the years following the Second Vatican Council, he defended personal Christian freedom in the face of a theology of liberation inspired by Marxism and the reduction of freedom to license, both of which try to detach freedom from the Truth of Christ.

As Cornelio Fabro wrote: "A new man for the new times of the Church of the future, Josemaria Escriva, moved by his own natural inclination and also undoubtedly by the light of grace, has restored the true concept of Christian freedom. Proclaiming the gospel message of freedom understood as liberation from the slavery of sin, he chose to trust the person who believes in Christ. After centuries of Christian spiritualities based on the priority of obedience, he taught that obedience was the consequence and fruit of freedom."<sup>29</sup>

### *The freedom of the children of God and the Cross*

A central element in Blessed Josemaria's teaching on freedom is its close tie to the Cross of Christ. This connection is brought out in many of his writings and recorded words. In the spring of 1974 he said in a get-together with his children: "I love others' freedom, both yours and that of the person now walking down the street outside, because if I didn't love it, I couldn't defend my own freedom. But that's not the main reason. The main reason is something else: Christ died on the Cross to give us freedom, so that we could enjoy 'the glorious freedom of the children of God' (*Rom 8:21*)"<sup>30</sup>

Blessed Josemaria liked to savor those words, "the freedom of the children of God." Thus he stressed the relationship between freedom and divine filiation, which God showed him to be the foundation of a Christian's spiritual life. "Each passing day increases my yearning to proclaim to the four winds this inexhaustible treasure that belongs to Christianity: 'the glorious freedom of the children of God' (*Rom 8:21*)."<sup>31</sup> But equally characteristic is his way of seeing freedom as a divine gift that reaches us by means of the Cross. Thus the divine seal of the Work is precisely "love for the freedom that Christ won for us by dying on the Cross (cf. *Gal 4:31*)."<sup>32</sup>

At times these two aspects are joined together: "My children, we are a large and diverse family that grows and develops *in libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei*

29. Fabro, *El primado existencial de la libertad*, cit., p. 332.

30. "Notes taken at a get-together," Easter 1974 (cited in Llano, *La libertad radical*, cit., p. 104).

31. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, *Friends of God*, no. 27. "I want you to be rebels, free and unfettered, because I want you—it is Christ who wants us!—to be children of God" (*Ibid.*, no. 38).

32. Cited in note 1. The introductory words of *The Way of the Cross* end by asking our Lady to help us "to relive those bitter hours which your Son wished to spend on earth, so that we, who were made from a handful of clay, may finally live *in libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei*, in the freedom and glory of the children of God."

(Rom 8:21), *qua libertate Christus nos liberavit* (Gal 4:31), in the glorious freedom Christ Jesus won for us, redeeming us from all slavery. Our spirit is based on personal freedom.”<sup>33</sup>

Underlying his conviction of the tie between freedom and the Cross are his personal prayer and meditation and powerful experiences in his own spiritual life, especially his sense of divine filiation. Thus some of his most incisive texts on this topic are found in writings that relate events in his own encounter with Christ, such as his commentaries on the stations of the Way of the Cross<sup>34</sup> and on the sorrowful mysteries of the Holy Rosary.<sup>35</sup>

*To be on the Cross is to be Christ and, therefore, a child of God.*

This reference to his own spiritual life is seen clearly in some words of Blessed Josemaria from a meditation given on April 28, 1963: “When our Lord dealt me those blows, around the year 1931, I didn’t understand it. And suddenly, in the midst of that great bitterness, came these words: you are my son (Ps 2:7), you are Christ. And I could only stammer: *Abba, Pater! Abba, Pater! Abba! Abba! Abba!* Now I see it with new light, like a new discovery, as one sees, as the years go by, the hand of God, of Divine Wisdom, of the All-Powerful. You, O Lord, have made me understand that to receive the Cross is to find happiness, joy. And the reason, I see it now more clearly than ever, is this: to have the Cross is to identify oneself with Christ, to be Christ, and, therefore, to be a son of God.”<sup>36</sup>

The founder of Opus Dei is referring here to a period of great interior and exterior trials. But it was precisely then that God granted him new light about the mission he had received. One of these occurred on August 7, 1931, with a direct reference to the Cross. During Holy Mass, at the moment of the elevation of the Sacred Host, God placed in his heart those words from the Gospel of St. John: “and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (Jn 12:32). “And I understood that it would be the men and women of God who will lift the cross, with the teachings of Christ, to the summit of all human activities. And I saw our Lord triumph, drawing all things to himself.”<sup>37</sup> Thus he saw vividly that we are called to collaborate through our work with Christ’s redemptive action on the Cross, who draws all men and women to himself and to the Father.<sup>38</sup>

33. Escrivá, *Letter May 31, 1954*, n. 24 (cited in Pedro Rodríguez, Fernando Ocariz, Jose Luis Illanes, *Opus Dei in the Church*, Scepter, Princeton 1994, p. 61).

34. Blessed Josemaria Escrivá, *The Way of the Cross*, Scepter, London-New York 1982, 133 pages.

35. *Holy Rosary*, Rialp, Madrid 1985, 89 p.

36. *Notes taken during a meditation*, April 28, 1963. Cited in Carlos Cardona, “Forage di dolor,” *Studi Cattolici* (1993), p. 779.

37. Blessed Josemaria Escrivá, *Apuntes íntimos*, nos. 217 and 218. Cited in Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder...*, cit., p. 381.

38. Cf. Pedro Rodríguez, “Omnia traham ad meipsum: El sentido de Jn 12:32 en la experiencia espiritual de Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer,” *Romana* 13 (1991/2), pp. 331-352.



A short time later, on October 16, 1931, the event took place to which he referred in his meditation on April 28, 1963: "I felt God acting, making spring forth in my heart and on my lips, with the force of something imperatively necessary, the tender invocation: *Abba! Pater!* I was out on the street, in a streetcar... Probably I made that prayer out loud.

"And I walked along the streets of Madrid for an hour, maybe two, I can't say; time passed without my being aware of it. People must have thought I was crazy. I was contemplating, with lights that weren't mine, that amazing truth. It was like an ember enkindled in my soul, never to be extinguished." <sup>39</sup>

The lights received from God were reinforced by the events in his life, leading him to the deep conviction that to be on the Cross is to be Christ and, therefore, a child of God.

This very concise formulation contains great theological depth. Divine filiation is linked closely to identification with Christ, to being *ipse Christus*. <sup>40</sup> By baptism and the other sacraments, through the action of the Holy Spirit, a Christian becomes Christ; he is conformed to Christ, becoming a member of Christ. The "new creature" <sup>41</sup> formed in Christ is called to grow and manifest himself in all our actions, acting as Christ did, or better, letting Christ act in us, through our freedom, together with the operative power of the Paraclete.

Therefore, just as the culminating moment of Christ's obedience to the will of the Father is his sacrifice on the Cross, so also each Christian is most closely identified with Christ when he takes up the Cross. This identification is strengthened each time that, moved by the Holy Spirit, we offer ourselves with Christ in the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which makes present once more in space and time the sacrifice of Calvary. There, sacramentally, a Christian becomes more fully a child of God the Father in the Son; we are sons in the Son, becoming one and the same with Christ.

God let the founder of Opus Dei see clearly the connection between the celebration of the Holy Mass and identification with Christ, making him feel in some way the exhaustion of the Son of God on the Cross: "After so many years, that priest made a marvelous discovery: he came to understand that the Holy Mass is real work: *operatio Dei*, God's work. That day, when he celebrated Mass, he experienced pain, joy and tiredness. He felt in his flesh the exhaustion of a divine task. For Christ too it cost a great effort to carry out the first Mass: the Cross." <sup>42</sup>

39. Escrivá, *Letter January 9, 1959*, no. 60. Cited in Vázquez de Prada, *The Founder...*, p. 295.

40. Cf. Aranda, *El bullir de la sangre de Cristo*, especially chapter 5 "Cristo presente en los cristianos," section 2 "Alter Christus, ipse Christus en el Beato Josemaría." Cf. also Ocariz, "Hijos de Dios por el Espíritu Santo," *Scripta Theologica* (1998), pp. 479-503.

41. Cf. 2 Cor 5:17.

42. *The Way of the Cross*, Station XI, point for meditation no. 4.

He relates in another place: "The celebration of the Holy Sacrifice never cost me so much as on that day, when I felt that the Mass too is *Opus Dei*. It made me very happy."<sup>43</sup> God wanted to make him understand with greater depth that identification with Christ, who exercised his freedom by fulfilling the will of his Father and letting himself be nailed to the Cross, takes place most radically in the Holy Mass.

Flowing from the Cross and therefore from the Holy Sacrifice of the Eucharist, our divine filiation is exercised in every act of daily life that is lived in loving obedience to the will of the Father. "You, O Lord, have made me understand that to have the Cross is to find happiness, joy." A Christian feels the joy of knowing that he is a child of God in Christ; he savors, even in the midst of suffering, the happiness of loving God and others, the joy of knowing that all of his actions, even the most material, are helping to raise the Cross of Christ that will draw everything to Him.

*The freedom of the Only-begotten Son on the Cross*

But where does freedom fit into all this? It is precisely in the happiness and joy found on the Cross, in knowing oneself a child of God and not a slave, that one finds the deepest meaning of freedom.

In the fourth Gospel, Christ speaks of his own freedom: "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."<sup>44</sup> As Blessed Josemaria said: "We will never fully understand Jesus' freedom. It is immense, infinite, as is his love."<sup>45</sup>

Blessed Josemaria liked to consider how all the mysteries of revelation raise up "a song to freedom." Creation is "a free squandering of love." And it is in God's gratuitous and freely offered love that the redemption is rooted.

His friendship with each of the Divine Persons led him to express his vision of the economy of salvation starting with the intra-Trinitarian life of wisdom and love, and ending in the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of the Incarnate Word. "God is Love."<sup>46</sup> "The abyss of malice which sin opens wide has been bridged by his infinite charity. God did not abandon men. His plans foresaw that the sacrifices of the old law would be insufficient to repair our faults and re-establish the unity which had been lost. A man who was God would have to offer himself up. To help us grasp in some measure this unfathomable mystery, we might imagine the Blessed Trinity taking counsel together in its unin-

43. *Articulos del Postulador*, no. 385, p. 135.

44. *Jn* 10:17-18.

45. *Friends of God*, nos. 25-26.

46. *1Jn* 4:8.

errupted intimate relationship of infinite love. As a result of its eternal decision the only-begotten Son of God the Father takes on our human condition and bears the burden of our wretchedness and sorrows, to end up sewn with nails to a piece of wood.”<sup>47</sup>

The reference to the loving freedom of the Trinitarian life, and to the visible and invisible missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit, is at the core of all his preaching: “The God of our faith is not a distant being who contemplates indifferently the fate of men—their desires, their struggles, their sufferings. He is a Father who loves his children so much that he sends the Word, the Second Person of the most Blessed Trinity, so that by taking on the nature of man he may die to redeem us. He is the loving Father who now leads us gently to himself, through the action of the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts.”<sup>48</sup>

The Eucharistic mystery, which makes present Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary where God’s infinite merciful love is revealed, is also viewed by Blessed Josemaria in light of the love and freedom proper to the Trinitarian life: “The Blessed Trinity’s love for man is made permanent in a sublime way through the Eucharist... I was talking to you about the love of the Blessed Trinity for man. And where can we see this more clearly than in the Mass? The three divine Persons act together in the holy sacrifice of the altar.... The three divine Persons are present in the sacrifice of the altar. By the will of the Father, with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the Son offers himself in a redemptive sacrifice.”<sup>49</sup>

In Blessed Josemaria’s preaching, Christ’s freedom can only be understood in the context of Trinitarian love. The Son has the same dominion, love and freedom as the Father, because he shares the same nature. His love for the Father leads him to exercise this lordship and dominion by fulfilling the will of the Father, converting his earthly existence into a service and self-giving that is seen right from his birth to his death on the Cross.

Christ’s birth makes manifest this logic of divine freedom. His self-giving and *kenosis* calls out to the freedom of every man and woman: “God humbled himself to allow us to get near him, so that we could give our love in exchange for his, so that our freedom might bow, not only at the sight of his power, but also before the wonder of his humility.”<sup>50</sup>

This free self-humiliation on the part of the Word contains the fundamental paradox of Christianity. It reaches its culmination on the Cross, where Jesus sublimely exercises his infinite love, submitting with full freedom to the will of the Father through his passion and death, which leads to the victory of the resurrection. The Trinitarian current of love reaches its summit in the passion.

47. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 95.

48. *Ibid.*, no. 84.

49. *Ibid.*, nos. 85-86.

50. *Ibid.*, no. 18.

"When God's appointed time comes to save mankind from the slavery of sin, we contemplate Jesus Christ in Gethsemani, suffering in agony to the point of sweating blood (cf. *Lk* 22:44). He spontaneously and unconditionally accepts the sacrifice which the Father is asking of him."<sup>51</sup> This acceptance represents the highest exercise of his freedom and lordship, which manifests itself in the desire to serve all mankind.

Blessed Josemaria's personal meditation on the passion leads to his deepest reflections on Christ's freedom as a complete self-giving, and on the revelation of Trinitarian love, which rises above all evil.

Thus in his commentary on the tenth station of the Way of the Cross, he stresses the paradox of Christ's freedom on the Cross. "When our Lord arrives at Calvary, he is given some wine to drink mixed with gall, as a narcotic to lessen in some way the pain of the crucifixion. But Jesus, after tasting it to show his gratitude for that kind service, has not wanted to drink (cf. *Mt* 27:34). He gives himself up to death with the full freedom of Love."

In the eleventh station, which contemplates the death of the God-Man on the Cross, Blessed Josemaria continues to focus on Christ's free self-giving: "It is Love that has brought Jesus to Calvary. And once on the Cross, all his gestures and all his words are of love, a love both calm and strong. With a gesture befitting an Eternal Priest, without father or mother, without lineage (cf. *Heb* 7:3), he opens his arms to the whole human race." At times he would say that it was love, more than nails, that bound Jesus to the Cross.

In his commentary on the fifth sorrowful mystery of the holy Rosary, the Cross appears as the place of triumph: "For Jesus of Nazareth, the throne of triumph is ready. You and I do not see him writhe on being nailed. Suffering all that can be suffered, he spreads his arms in the gesture of an eternal Priest." Blessed Josemaria seems to echo the presentation of Christ's passion in the fourth Gospel, where St. John stresses the freedom and dominion of Jesus' self-giving. He may also have drawn light from the divine illumination referred to earlier: Christ's exaltation on the Cross in order to draw all men to him, which reveals a new aspect of *Jn* 12:32. The ignominious cross becomes Christ's throne: "Through love, the Cross is to become the throne from which he reigns" (second station).

Blessed Josemaria invites us to discover in the loving freedom with which Christ accepted the Cross a model for attaining freedom ourselves. "Learn from him. Jesus carries the Cross for you: you... carry it for Jesus. But don't drag the Cross... carry it squarely on your shoulder, because your Cross, if you carry it so, will not be just any Cross... It will be the Holy Cross. Don't carry your cross with resignation: resignation is not a generous word. Love the Cross. When you really love it, your Cross will be... a Cross without a Cross" (fourth sorrowful

51. *Friends of God*, no. 25.

mystery of the Holy Rosary). A Christian grows in freedom to the extent that he loves the Cross. For then there takes place in each of us the liberation that Christ has won for us.

Christ's freedom shows itself in an absolute love—"a madness of love," the founder of Opus Dei often said—for the Father's will. This is the "full freedom of love" of the Beloved Son.

Other passages make clear this connection between Jesus' loving freedom and his filiation to the Father: "Jesus prays in the garden. *Pater mi* (Mt 26:39), *Abba Pater!* (Mk 14:36). God is my Father, even though he may send me suffering. He loves me tenderly, even while wounding me. Jesus suffers, to fulfill the Will of the Father... And I, who also wish to fulfill the most holy Will of God, following in the footsteps of the Master, can I complain if I too meet suffering as my traveling companion?

"It will be a sure sign of my sonship, because God is treating me as he treated his own Divine Son. Then I, just as He did, will be able to groan and weep alone in my Gethsemani; but, as I lie prostrate on the ground, acknowledging my nothingness, there will rise up to the Lord a cry from the depths of my soul: *Pater mi, Abba, Pater,... fiat!*"<sup>52</sup>

The prayer cited above from October 16, 1931 helped him to penetrate more deeply into Jesus' sorrowful dialogue with his Father in the Garden of Olives. The temptation presented by the repugnance of suffering was overcome by the freedom of love, embracing the will of God the Father in order to serve all mankind, teaching them the deepest meaning of their being free.

After praying in Gethsemani, Jesus freely surrendered himself: "The Arrest: *venit hora: ecce Filius hominis tradetur in manus peccatorum*; the hour has come: behold the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners (Mk 14:41). So, the sinful man has his hour? Yes, and God his eternity!... Chains binding Jesus! Chains, which He voluntarily allowed to be put on him, I ask you to bind me, to make me suffer with my Lord, so that this body of death may be humbled. For—there can be no half measures here—either I reduce it to nothing, or it will degrade me. Better to be a slave of my God than a slave of my flesh."<sup>53</sup> Once more we see the paradoxical link between chains and freedom. Without these chains, without a commitment of love and service, there is only the slavery to one's own self.

I have focused on the culminating moment of Christ's passion and death, inseparable from his resurrection and ascension and the later sending of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. But we should remember that Jesus' entire life is saturated with the loving freedom of the Son who has no other wish than to show forth the Father's merciful love.

52. *The Way of the Cross*, Station I, first point for meditation.

53. *Ibid.*, point no. 2.

Here I want to consider just one example, that of the hidden life of the Holy Family in Nazareth, so much loved by Blessed Josemaria. The light he received from God about holiness in ordinary life led him to discover the redemptive value of those long years, which were not just a preparation for the public life but were in themselves salvific. Jesus obeyed Mary and Joseph: “*erat subditus illis*, He was obedient to them (*Lk 2:31*). We must especially value obedience in the current environment of disobedience, rebellion and disunity. Freedom is very close to my heart—that is precisely why I so love the Christian virtue of obedience. We should all realize that we are children of God, and should want to fulfill the will of our Father.”<sup>54</sup>

Christ’s freedom shown in obedience to the Father during his whole life is the key to his earthly biography from Nazareth to the Cross, and illuminates the meaning of our own freedom as a loving response to divine freedom.

*The freedom of God’s children in self-giving*

The freedom of Trinitarian love shown in the life of Jesus has a double efficacy in our regard. On the one hand it reveals to us the most profound and radical meaning of our personal being and our freedom. The Second Vatican Council teaches that Christ fully clarifies the mystery of man,<sup>55</sup> including the meaning of our freedom: “Furthermore, the Lord Jesus, when praying to the Father ‘that they may all be one. . . even as we are one’ (*Jn 17:21-22*), has opened up new horizons closed to human reason by implying that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine persons and the union of the sons of God in truth and love. It follows, then, that if man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake, man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself.”<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, Christ won for us divine grace. Thus man, who because of sin had found his freedom to love curtailed, was able to recover that freedom thanks to Christ’s free self-giving, from which the love that overcomes all evil and slavery flows.

The freedom that Christ gained for us on the Cross is the great gift of being sons of the Father and of being able to love God, and through him, other persons. Hence we see that freedom is not opposed to dedication, but that it finds in it its *raison d’être*: “It is absolutely false to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom. Look, when a mother sacrifices herself for love of her children, she has made a choice, and the more she loves the

54. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 17.

55. Pastoral Const. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22: “In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come. Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.”

56. *Ibid.*, no. 24.

greater will be her freedom. If her love is great her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children's good derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom."<sup>57</sup>

We are at the core of the human person here. Freedom is ordered towards self-surrender; self-giving is the truest and fullest use of freedom, as Mary's response upon receiving the announcement of the angel reveals: "Our Mother listens, and asks a question to understand better what the Lord is asking of her. Then she gives her firm reply: *Fiat!* 'Be it done unto me according to thy word!' This is the fruit of the best freedom of all, the freedom of deciding in favor of God."<sup>58</sup> Once more the paradox: Mary, by declaring herself the slave of the Lord, acquires the maximum self-mastery and freedom.

All of this rests on knowing who we truly are. Knowing ourselves to be children of God allows us to be free. "It is the knowledge that we have come from the hands of God, that the Blessed Trinity looks upon us with predilection, that we are children of so wonderful a Father. I ask my Lord to help us decide to take this truth to heart, to dwell upon it day by day: only then will we be acting as free men. Do not forget: anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love our Lord above all else."<sup>59</sup>

Our divine filiation lies at the heart of our freedom. Incorporated into Christ, we somehow form one and the same reality with him. In him, we participate as adoptive children in the eternal intra-Trinitarian processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. "Sons and daughters in the Son," we share, in a finite manner, in his dominion, with the freedom of children. We are not slaves or servants, but children and friends who know the secrets of the Father that the Son has communicated to us, participating in the filiation of the Word incarnate. And we love God the Father and all men and women through our participation in the Holy Spirit, the reciprocal Love between the Father and the Son.

"Freedom finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God's infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery."<sup>60</sup>

But today's man or woman is likely to ask: "If I say 'yes' to this exclusive Love might I not lose my freedom?"<sup>61</sup> This question arises especially in the face of the suffering that any unconditional love brings with it. But it also arises because the emptying or loss of oneself seems so contrary to the contemporary ideals of freedom and authenticity.

57. *Friends of God*, no. 30.

58. *Ibid.*, no. 25.

59. *Ibid.*, no. 26.

60. *Ibid.*, no. 27.

61. *Ibid.*, no. 28.

To a certain extent, the answer can only come from the sincere decision to give oneself to that Love: "To love is to cherish one thought, to live for the person loved, not to belong to oneself, happily and freely with one's heart and soul to be subjected to another will... and at the same time to one's own."<sup>62</sup>

Only then does one truly understand and savor one's own freedom. "A soul in love knows however that when such suffering comes, it is only a fleeting impression; the soul soon finds that the yoke is easy and the burden light, because Jesus is carrying it upon his shoulders as he embraced the wood of the Cross when our eternal happiness was at stake (cf. *Mt* 11:30)."<sup>63</sup>

Freedom only reveals its full meaning and ceases to be a paradox when it is seen to be a divine gift, through which we can collaborate with God. This doesn't prevent us from at times feeling rebellious, failing to understand "that even when God's Will seems painful and its demands wounding, it coincides perfectly with our freedom, which is only to be found in God and in his plans."<sup>64</sup> Then is a good moment to recall that the demand of loving with our whole heart is totally in accord with our human nature.<sup>65</sup>

*The freedom of a child of God, work of the Three Divine Persons*

Blessed Josemaria often speaks about the freedom that comes to us from the redemption and from our elevation to the status of God's sons and daughters. This freedom is attained through the grace won by Christ on the Cross that is infused into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Thus we come to share in the very life of the Trinity.

In the New Testament the term "freedom" (*eleutheria*) does not signify merely a state or situation opposed to slavery, but the ontological reality of being children of God. This new way of being is the fruit of the action of the Most Blessed Trinity, manifested in the New Testament in reference to all three of the Divine Persons.

We have already seen some of Blessed Josemaria's numerous texts that discuss the freedom of the children of God primarily in reference to God the Father. However, one should keep in mind that chapter 8 of St. Paul's letter to the Romans (*in libertatem filiorum Dei*, cf. *Rom* 8:21)<sup>66</sup> presupposes the inseparable action of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

62. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, *Furrow*, no. 797.

63. *Friends of God*, no. 28.

64. *Ibid.*

65. Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 6. From a psychological point of view, the anthropology of the Jewish psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl confirms that human aspiration to a complete self-giving.

66. As can be seen, Blessed Josemaria often condenses the Pauline expression "the glorious freedom of the children of God" into "the freedom of the children of God."



The Christological dimension is stressed in texts that refer to *Galatians* 4:31: "the freedom that Christ won for us by dying on the Cross." And in the passage also cited above: "we are a large and diverse family that grows and develops in *libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei* (*Rom* 8:21), *qua libertate Christus nos liberavit* (*Gal* 4:31), in the glorious freedom Christ Jesus won for us, redeeming us from all slavery." God the Father is the source of our freedom through the incarnation of his Only-begotten Son and the sending of the consubstantial Love of the Father and the Son.

References also abound to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Blessed Josemaria often stresses that the Paraclete acts in a way suited to each soul: "Our diversity is not a problem for the Work. On the contrary, it is a manifestation of good spirit, of a clean corporative life, of respect for the legitimate freedom of each person. For *ubi autem Spiritus Domini, ibi libertas* (*II Cor* 3:17); where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."<sup>67</sup>

The perspective is always that of the divine revelation of the Tri-personal God, the incarnation of the Word who redeemed us and the sending of the Holy Spirit. In the terminology employed by St. Thomas Aquinas, the history of humanity is profoundly marked by original sin and by personal sins. But through the divine grace obtained by Christ in his death on the Cross and his resurrection, we pass from slavery to our own wretchedness to the freedom of sons and daughters. Man, healed and elevated by grace, is made a sharer in the Word and the Holy Spirit, so as to freely know God truly and love him rightly: *fit particeps divini Verbi et procedentis Amoris, ut possit libere Deum vere cognoscere et recte amare.*<sup>68</sup>

The gratuitous action that God carries out *ad extra* in divinizing human beings has a terminus *ad intra*, since it introduces each Christian into the Trinitarian life as "sons and daughters in the Son." This action is a new birth *ex Spiritu Sancto* that implies a newness of being, not as an act of the essence, but as an act that is founded on the relation between man and God: a Christian is related to God in the Son and through the Holy Spirit (*esse ad Patrem in Filio per Spiritum Sanctum*). These are not three distinct relations but rather a triple relation directed towards the three divine Persons.<sup>69</sup> A Christian becomes a child of God the Father in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

### *Freedom as God's gift in the order of creation*

This article has focused on Blessed Josemaria's theological teaching on "the freedom Christ won for us on the Cross." Nevertheless, his theological reflections

67. Josemaria Escrivá, *Letter March 24, 1930*, no. 2 (cited in *La personalidad del beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Pamplona 1994, p. 41).

68. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *S.Th.* I, 38, 1 c.

69. Cf. Ocariz, "Hijos de Dios por el Espíritu Santo," *Scripta Theologica* (1998), pp. 479-503.

always contains an implicit reference to the natural or “creaturely” dimension of freedom. The dual order of nature and of grace is never lost sight of, nor the deep union of these two planes in Christian life. This is also seen in the importance he places on a Christian’s attaining a “unity of life.”

*The union of nature and grace*

Blessed Josemaria’s unified theological vision, joining the orders of nature and grace, is apparent in the following quote: “This hymn to freedom is echoed in all the mysteries of our Catholic faith. The Blessed Trinity draws the world and man out of nothing, in a free outpouring of love. The Word comes down from heaven and takes on our flesh, an act which bears the splendid mark of freedom in submission: ‘Behold I have come to do thy Will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”<sup>70</sup>

This union of nature and grace confronts us with the mystery of human freedom. The reality of moral evil and man’s constant inclination towards it poses deep questions to every man and woman throughout history. Blessed Josemaria expresses the intelligibility proper to mysteries with the term *chiaroscuro* [“light and shade”]: “We are in a position to give him, or deny him, the glory that is his due as the Author of everything that exists. This possibility makes up the light and shade of human freedom.”<sup>71</sup>

The death of the incarnate Son of God on the Cross, his absolute and unlimited self-giving, is a clear manifestation of the merciful love of the Father, who bestows on us the freedom of being his children. But it also moves us to ask: “Why, my Lord, have you granted me this privilege which I can use to follow in your footsteps, but also to offend you?”<sup>72</sup> This radical question runs through the entire homily entitled “Freedom: a Gift from God.”

This is perhaps the root of Blessed Josemaria’s theology of freedom: freedom is a divine gift, and not something intrinsically opposed to God. Hence his attitude of deep gratitude to God for the gift of freedom: “It is only we men (I am not referring now to the angels) who can unite ourselves to the Creator by using our freedom. We are in a position to give him, or deny him, the glory that is his due as the Author of everything that exists.”<sup>73</sup>

God “takes a risk with our freedom.”<sup>74</sup> He doesn’t coerce us but rather invites us to turn towards the good: “See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and

70. *Friends of God*, no. 25; the Biblical text cited is *Heb 10:7*.

71. *Ibid.*, no. 24.

72. *Ibid.*, no. 26.

73. *Ibid.*, no. 24.

74. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 111.

by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live.... Therefore choose life, that you... may live.”<sup>75</sup> He frequently cited these and other texts in Scripture to explain the joyful reality of our freedom.

Thus he feels impelled to “raise my heart in thanksgiving to my God and Lord, because there was nothing to stop him from creating us impeccable, irresistibly drawn towards the good. Nevertheless, ‘he judged that his servants would be better if they served him freely.’”<sup>76</sup> How great is the love, the mercy of our Father! Whenever I think of his *divine extravagance* for us his children, I wish I had a thousand tongues, a thousand hearts and more, with which to be constantly praising God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Just think: the Almighty, who through his Providence rules the whole universe, does not want the forced service of slaves; he prefers to have children who are free.”<sup>77</sup> This is the answer to the burning question of why God made us free, with the risk of all the consequences of the permanent struggle between good and evil that flows from it.

Freedom, which for many modern philosophers is seen as an absolute right, an anthropocentric autonomy with no grounding in anything that transcends man, recovers in the teachings of Blessed Josemaria its original theological place, since self-dominion is a consequence of man’s being created in the image and likeness of God.

When speaking of the image of God in man, Thomas Aquinas highlights in several texts the gift of freedom, man’s “*dominium sui actus*” (for example in the prologue to his *Summa Theologica* I-II, where he cites St. John Damascus). Certainly the human creature is in the image of God by his intellect. But this ability to grasp the truth of reality is ordained to the dominion and self-determination proper to the transcendence of spiritual dynamism. The image of God in created persons is found above all in freedom. God through love created higher beings like himself: angelic and human persons endowed with a limited self-dynamism, as a participation in the fullness of Being that He is. It is the participation in the perfection of freedom that makes the created person similar to God in an especially clear way.

As the book of Genesis tells us, men and women share in God’s creativity, called to lovingly serve the world and others by means of their work, and with the mission of filling the world by their conjugal love in the family. As St. Thomas Aquinas teaches in regard to the gift of freedom: “This is the supreme degree of the dignity of men: that they are directed towards the good by themselves and not by others.”<sup>78</sup> “God made man in the beginning and he left him in the power of his own inclination (*Sir* 15:14). This would not have happened if there were no free will.”<sup>79</sup>

75. *Deut* 30:15-16, 19.

76. St. Augustine, *De vera religione*, 14, 27 (PL 34, 134).

77. *Friends of God*, no. 33.

78. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura. Ad Romanos*, cap. II, lect. III, no. 217 (ed. Marietti, Turin 1953); cited in *Friends of God*, no. 27.

79. Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae. De Malo*, q. VI, a. 1.

Alejandro Llano observed that this theological perspective, grounded in the Augustinian and Thomistic tradition, enabled Blessed Josemaria to grasp the deepest meaning of human freedom, and to confront the anthropocentric challenge of modernity, denouncing its insufficiencies precisely by developing its overlooked potentialities.<sup>80</sup>

*Man's freedom as a creature*

Within the theological context of the unity between the supernatural and natural orders, and always respecting their distinction, Blessed Josemaria frequently emphasizes the natural aspect of freedom as God's greatest gift on the human or "creaturely" plane. "You would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God, and which the Church freely recognizes. Personal freedom is essential to the Christian life."<sup>81</sup>

His great love for freedom led him to value every true affirmation of freedom no matter where it came from: "In 1939, when the Spanish Civil War had just ended, I gave a retreat near Valencia, in a university residence. It had been used during the war as a communist barracks. In one of the passageways, I came upon a large plaque written by some 'non-conformist' which read: *cada caminante siga su camino* ('let each traveler follow his own path'). They wanted to take it down, but I stopped them: 'Leave it,' I told them, 'I like it, it's some good advice from the enemy.' Since then, those words have often served me as a text for preaching. It is absurd and unjust to try to impose a single criterion on everyone in matters in which the doctrine of Christ does not impose any limits."<sup>82</sup>

But Opus Dei's founder always viewed this natural anthropological dimension in light of its essential ordination to God: "God made man in the beginning and he left him in the power of his own inclination (*Sir* 15:14). This could not be so unless man had freedom of choice."<sup>83</sup> "We are answerable to God for all the actions we freely perform. There is no room here for anonymity. Each one finds himself face to face with his Lord, and he can decide to live as God's friend or as his enemy."<sup>84</sup>

Hence Blessed Josemaria energetically opposed those who seemed disinclined to fully allow freedom and who tried to deprive man of the "space for service" in which a free person comes to maturity.<sup>85</sup> "On some occasions I have witnessed what could be called a general mobilization against those committed to

80. Cf. Llano, *La libertad radical*, p. 97.

81. *Conversations*, no. 117.

82. Josemaria Escriva, *Letter January 9, 1959*, no. 35 (cited in A. Sastre, *Tiempo de caminar*, Rialp, Madrid 1989).

83. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae. De Malo*, q. VI, a. 1.

84. *Friends of God*, no. 36.

85. I owe this expression to Prof. Paul O'Callaghan, who suggested it to me when reading these pages.

dedicating their whole lives to the service of God and souls. Some people think that our Lord ought to ask their permission before choosing others for his service. Apparently they believe that man is not free to say an unequivocal yes or no to this proposal of Love.”<sup>86</sup>

Blessed Josemaria strongly defends freedom as a natural gift presupposed by the order of grace: “God himself has wanted to be loved and served with freedom and he always respects our personal decisions. Scripture tells us when God ‘created man . . . he left him in the power of his own inclination’ (Sir 15:14).”<sup>87</sup>

“I have always defended the freedom of individual consciences. I do not understand violence; I do not consider it a proper way either to persuade or to win over. Error is overcome by prayer, by God’s grace, and by study; never by force; always with charity.”<sup>88</sup> He liked to write “freedom of consciences”<sup>89</sup> in the plural, to emphasize that he was referring to the conscience of each and every person and not to conscience as such, which is measured by divine wisdom and love.

In some of the texts referring to freedom, the author’s juridical mentality can be seen: “Both in the apostolic and in the temporal order limitations on the freedom of the children of God, on freedom of consciences or on legitimate initiatives, are arbitrary and unjust. They are limitations that proceed from abuse of authority, from ignorance, or from the error of those who think that they can allow themselves the abuse of discriminating where this is not reasonable at all.”<sup>90</sup>

“God in creating us has run the risk and the adventure of our freedom. He wanted a history that would be a true one, the product of genuine decisions, and not fiction or some sort of game. Each man has to experience his own personal autonomy with all that it implies: trial and error, guesswork and sometimes uncertainty.”<sup>91</sup>

Blessed Josemaria graphically illustrates the sterility and irrationality of refusing to commit oneself: “You and I have met such people. They let themselves be carried away by childish vanity, by selfish conceit, by sensuality. Their freedom turns out to be barren, or produces fruits which even humanly speaking are ridiculous. A person who does not choose, with complete freedom, an upright code of conduct, sooner or later ends up being manipulated by others. He will lead a lazy, parasitic existence, at the mercy of what others decide. He will let himself be

86. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 33.

87. *Conversations*, no. 104.

88. *Ibid.*, no. 44.

89. Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum*, June 20, 1888, ASS 20 (1888), 606.

90. Josemaria Escriva, *Letter March 11, 1940*, no. 65 (cited in Ángel Rodríguez Luño, “Forming One’s Conscience in Social and Political Matters as Seen in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva,” *Romana* 24 (1997) 162-181). “I do not act in politics. I do not wish to, and I cannot. But my outlook as a jurist and theologian, and my Christian faith, lead me always to stand up for the legitimate freedom of all men. No one has a right to impose non-existent dogmas in temporal matters” (*Conversations*, no. 77).

91. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, “The Riches of the Faith,” in *Life of Faith*, Scepter Booklet No. 5, New York, 1974 (translated from an article in the newspaper *ABC* of Madrid, November 2, 1969).

blown to and fro by any wind whatsoever, and it will always be others who make up his mind for him... 'No one is forcing me!' they obstinately repeat. No one? Everyone is coercing their make-believe freedom which will not run the risk of accepting responsibility for the consequences of its own free actions. Where there is no love of God, the individual and responsible use of personal freedom becomes impossible. There, despite appearances to the contrary, the individual is coerced at every turn. The indecisive and irresolute person is like putty at the mercy of circumstances. Anyone and anything can mold him according to its whim, and especially his passions and the worst tendencies of his own nature wounded by sin."<sup>92</sup> This description is quite applicable to our own era, in which so many people have fallen into the false freedom that Blessed Josemaria calls "license."

In the slavery that comes from saying no to God, one is also acting against reason, as St. Thomas Aquinas teaches: "Man is rational by nature. When he behaves in accordance with reason, he is acting by his own proper motion, as what he is: and this is proper to freedom. When he sins, he acts outside of reason, and lets himself be led by the impetus of another, subject to outside limitations; and therefore the one who opens himself to sin is a slave to sin (*Jn* 8:34)."<sup>93</sup>

The person who wants to be free, without self-commitment, is a slave of himself and will end up being a slave of others and of many external things that, as a child of God, he is called to exercise dominion over. This is the path that leads to unhappiness here below and afterwards forever. It is license and not freedom.

The capacity to choose has traditionally been called psychological freedom, while moral freedom is the name given to the higher operative capacity that stems from the right exercise of freedom resulting in the formation of good habits.

Contemporary philosophy has also tried to delineate a deeper freedom than the mere capacity for choice. Thus the distinction drawn by Isaiah Berlin between a negative freedom (*freedom from* coercion, interference, impositions) and a positive freedom (*freedom for* something, to develop and commit oneself) resulted in an enrichment of the dialogue among political philosophers.<sup>94</sup> Positive freedom is a higher conception that allows for the creativity proper to the human person, but it still falls far short of the fullness of freedom that Christ brought to the world.

Despite its great paradox, the Cross—with its dimensions of self-surrender, sacrifice, pardon, commitment, apparent failure—finds an intense resonance in the human heart. Even on the human plane the highest level of freedom is shown in a disinterested creative capacity, in a love for the good, regardless of whether it

92. *Friends of God*, no. 29.

93. Aquinas, *Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura*, ch. VIII, lect. IV, no. 1204 (ed. Marietti, Torino 1952).

94. In his well-known inaugural lecture as professor of political theory at Oxford University, dedicated to the concept of freedom and published in 1958, Isaiah Berlin revived the debate about this important topic by proposing this distinction.

is a good for me, in friendship and love for all men and women by reason of their innate goodness and dignity.

Employing the terminology of Robert Spaemann, man reaches his plenitude and with it his happiness (*Glück*), in good will (*Wohlwollen*) towards others, desiring that they attain the good. Carlos Cardona has made the relationship between being, freedom, and the love of benevolence the nucleus of his most fully developed work, *Metafísica del bien y del mal*. He argues there that freedom is a transcendental property of man's being. It is the nucleus of every truly human action and makes all of one's acts human. The first and most fundamental act of freedom consists in deciding, with a love of election, for the good in itself, overcoming the natural love for what is good for me. It entails, therefore, an ecstatic "going out of oneself."

Alejandro Llano, while appreciating the meaning of *freedom from* and *freedom for* proposed by Isaiah Berlin, thinks that these fail to go far enough. He argues that a third sense is needed, which he calls *freedom in itself*—an emptying of oneself (*kenosis*) and a loving opening up to others.<sup>95</sup>

### *The freedom won by Christ seen in relation to some aspects of contemporary life*

We have already noted that Blessed Josemaria did not shrink from the anthropocentric challenge of modernity, but, on the contrary, denounced its insufficiencies at the same time as he developed its overlooked potentialities. This last point can be illustrated by considering his teachings in the context of some aspects of today's world. I will try to be concise here, since there is already a considerable body of work on the applications of personal freedom according to Josemaria Escrivá.

Blessed Josemaria always kept in mind the cultural context in which his readers and hearers lived. Therefore in coming to terms with what one might call the modern discovery of freedom, besides pointing out its deficiencies, he also sought to bring out the Christian and human potentialities of this advance.

Freedom in its deepest sense, according to Opus Dei's founder, is freedom before God and for God. Therefore it is inseparably united to personal responsibility. In the anonymity proper to mass movements, personal responsibility is stifled. Only individuals remain, dispossessed of their fundamental character as persons. Blessed Josemaria tried to draw people out of the anonymous masses, composed of individuals in a state of loneliness and deprived of an authentically human rela-

95. With a wise psychological observation, he noted that the "key to authenticity of personal love is provided not only by the capacity of feeling a stable love for another person, but above all by being open to allowing oneself to be loved. One who allows himself to be loved is able to understand what it means to be freed from oneself, because he then knows that what he has is not his own, but belongs to the one who loves him" (A. Llano, "Hacia un humanismo de la autenticidad," in the book *Sueño y vigilia de la razón*, Eunsá, Pamplona 2001, p. 365). Besides its presence in the whole Christian tradition, in our times this idea of "freedom from oneself" comes from Schelling and has been brought up to date by Fernando Inciarte.

tionship with God and other persons. As a teacher of Christian life he wanted to form free persons, children of God who struggled to be with Christ on the Cross, who strove to respond to God's free self-giving and self-humiliation by the free surrender of themselves.

Among the applications of freedom to human and Christian life taught by Blessed Josemaria, there stands out his heroic defense of legitimate differences of opinion in professional life and in the world of political, social, economic, cultural and artistic ideas. A legitimate and healthy pluralism exists that is characteristic of a lay mentality, one of whose central elements is precisely love for freedom. In contrast, clericalism is marked by the failure to respect the autonomy proper to temporal realities, the laws placed by God in his creatures. "When the value of freedom is fully understood and the divine gift of freedom is passionately loved, the pluralism that freedom brings with it is also loved."<sup>96</sup>

This potential for pluralism exists even in the area of theology itself. Thus he affirmed that within the framework of Christ's divine revelation, guarded by the magisterium of the Church, there exists a plurality of possible positions, the manifestation of freedom and personal responsibility.<sup>97</sup> Even in the theological field, there is room for a legitimate variety of positions within a full faithfulness to the magisterium. Thus the indications of the Church's magisterium are followed faithfully by the Prelature of Opus Dei, but it has no theological school of its own.

His love for freedom led him to do everything possible to provide a very thorough formation, in the theological area also, for each of the Prelature's faithful, enabling each one to freely undertake the sanctification of their work and apostolic activity, without having to "wait for instructions." In this area also he was an "innovator," although without any pretense to originality.

Spiritual direction has as one of its aims that of helping souls to love, to exercise their freedom, seconding the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore Josemaria Escriva led people to prayer, to the sincere conversation of children with their Father. Decisions then came forth as a response to God's light, with the help of his grace. On many occasions, when asked a question, he would say: why don't you ask our Lord about that in your prayer?

Blessed Josemaria defended the gift of freedom for everyone. Like Christ who died on the Cross to win freedom for God's children, a Christian has to defend the freedom of others and then his own freedom. He loved the freedom of consciences, and used to say that with God's grace he would give his life to defend the freedom of those who were not Catholics. Hence the apostolic activities of Opus Dei never discriminate on religious grounds.

96. *Conversations*, no. 98.

97. Blessed Josemaria often recalled that under special circumstances the Church hierarchy might ask Catholics to take a common position in matters of opinion, although this would not be the normal situation.



In this context, education consists above all in teaching people to be free, giving them the criteria they need to move freely in any environment: an education in freedom and for freedom.

But this insistence on personal freedom should not be interpreted in an individualistic sense. He always encouraged people, as a manifestation of responsible freedom, to take part in a great variety of associations, striving to influence the human decisions on which the present and future of society depend. As he once expressed it: "Freely, according to your own interests and talents, you have to take an active, effective part in the wholesome public or private associations of your country, in a way that is full of the Christian spirit. Such organizations never fail to make some difference to people's temporal or eternal good."<sup>98</sup>

"We children of God, who are citizens with the same standing as any others, have to take part *fearlessly* in all honest human activities and organizations, so that Christ may be present in them. Our Lord will ask a strict account of each one of us if through neglect or love of comfort we do not freely strive to play a part in the human developments and decisions on which the present and future of society depend."<sup>99</sup>

### *Concluding synthesis*

To help summarize all that has been said, it could be useful here to distinguish some of the different meanings of freedom found in this article, at times without an explicit distinction.

### *The dimensions of freedom*

Philosophers distinguish many meanings and dimensions of freedom. Among the more classical ones are the following:<sup>100</sup>

a) Freedom from external coercion. This is the freedom to do, externally, whatever one wishes. It is a negative meaning of freedom. Some philosophers (for example, Locke, Hume, Voltaire) remain at this level, because they deny or are uncertain as to whether our decisions are truly free, that is to say, whether or not they proceed from an unknown internal need or conditioning. In many cases, what the law does is to protect a person from any external coercion, even psychological. This is the area of political freedoms, the consequence of the moral dignity of the person. For example: religious freedom; the right to life and the inviolability of the

98. Blessed Josemaria Escriva, *The Forge*, no. 717.

99. *Ibid.*, no. 715.

100. I have followed the classification of E. Colom — A. Rodríguez Luño, *Scelti in Cristo per essere santi. Elementi di Teologia Morale Fondamentale*, Apollinare Studi, Rome 1999, pp. 207ff, and A. Millan-Puelles, *El valor de la libertad*, Rialp, Madrid 1995.

person; the right to marriage and a family, to the education of one's own children, to the acquisition of what is necessary to sustain oneself, to property, to political asylum; the right to choose a profession, to develop one's personality, to freely express oneself by word, in writing or artistically; the right of association and of participation in the ordering of the social community.

b) Freedom of choice, also called psychological freedom or free will. This is the innate capacity of the person to make his own decisions without any secret interior necessity. These choices, although frequently referring to external realities, also imply a decision about one's own being (particularly in its moral dimension, but not only there). By these choices each person "makes" himself, deciding what he freely wants to be. The law usually presupposes this psychological freedom, when, for example, it determines the responsibility of a person who has committed an injustice. This freedom is based on the openness of the intellect to all that exists and of the will to all that is good. In their turn, the intellect and will as operative faculties proceed from a spiritual soul that has received its being directly from God. Thus human actions are free because they proceed from a spiritual act of a being that transcends the material and causal chains of the cosmos.

c) Freedom as an ethical task, also called moral freedom. This is the dominion and self-mastery that a person acquires through free acts that lead to the possession of the moral virtues. By the good exercise of psychological freedom, one attains moral freedom, the capacity to act without being impeded by passions or vices. The contrary, which results from the bad exercise of one's freedom, results in a slavery that is license and not freedom.

*The natural elements of freedom according to Blessed Josemaria*

These three dimensions of freedom are implicitly present in the teachings of Blessed Josemaria. In his Christian anthropology, elaborated by reason in vital union with faith, man is seen as a creature who receives all that he has from the Creator:

a) Freedom is seen by Blessed Josemaria as the greatest gift that a person receives "on the human level." In saying "on the human level," he is referring to the order of nature, leaving room for greater gifts in the supernatural order of grace.

b) Even on the level of human nature or "creaturehood," everything that man is endowed with is seen as being a "gift of God." Thus he calls work a "gift of God;"<sup>101</sup> the intellect "is like a spark of the divine intellect;"<sup>102</sup> conjugal love is "a divine gift which is chastely ordered to life, to love, to fruitfulness."<sup>103</sup>

101. *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 47.

102. *Ibid.*, no. 24.

103. *Ibid.*

c) Freedom as a capacity to choose (psychological freedom) is clearly present in his teaching. It is, to give one example, the central thread of his homily "Freedom, A Gift of God." At the same time his insistence on responsibility shows that he considered man truly free and that history is not a fiction.

d) This power of choice is exercised especially between good and evil, in reference to God. Freedom in the natural order cannot be separated from its subject, a creature ordered to God.

e) The dimension that some call "moral freedom" is also present, and is what gives meaning to the capacity to choose. Freedom is meant for love, for self-surrender, for service. Only thus is one truly free and not a slave of one's own passions—a being turned in on oneself.

f) His teachings on freedom underlie all that he says about education and formation. The goal should always be to educate in freedom (in a climate and environment of freedom) and for freedom (as a goal, helping to form free and responsible persons).

g) What is called "freedom from external coercion" finds many expressions in the writings of Blessed Josemaria, especially in his strong defense of personal freedom and the freedom of consciences.

### *Theological aspects of freedom*

Turning to the strictly supernatural level, to the redemption that frees us from sin and elevates us to the condition of being children of God, the following points stand out in Blessed Josemaria's teaching:

a) Freedom is seen as being closely tied to divine filiation. It is the freedom of the children of God. The natural freedom of created persons is based on the full openness of man's intellect and will to reality and to the good. This openness stems from the spiritual nature of these faculties, and ultimately from a soul that exists thanks to having received its being directly from God. On the supernatural level, the freedom of the children of God is based on man's new theological condition, sharing in the life of the Trinity. Becoming children of God means participating in the divine life and no longer being slaves to sin, the devil and death. Freedom is now the dynamism of the children of God, moved by and cooperating with divine grace. But it also means the ontological state itself of being free and not slaves.

b) Freedom is not only a gift of God, but more precisely a gift that Christ has won for us through his death on the Cross and his resurrection. It is based not only on creation, but also on the redemption of mankind that the Trinity carried out through the Incarnation.

c) The capacity of choice is still present in the children of God, but it has been strengthened by being raised to the self-determination of someone who is a child of God the Father in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Being children of God in the Only-begotten Son, the responsibility linked to freedom that we possess becomes a response to the merciful Love of the Father manifested in a sublime way on the Cross. All the actions of a Christian are a fruit of the grace that God freely grants and of our free correspondence, assisted by grace.

d) Christ's entire existence, especially his salvific sacrifice on the Cross, giving his life for others, is a model of free action that adheres to the will of the Father. Even on the natural plane, the psychological dimensions of freedom are ordered to the moral dimension and, therefore, to love and self-giving. On the supernatural plane, the measure of this self-giving is Christ's Love, made present in us thanks to the sending of the Holy Spirit. One confronts here the paradox of love without measure, of a "madness" of love, and of a joyful and complete forgiveness of one's enemies.

e) Blessed Josemaría's theological teaching on freedom attains a special depth thanks to the divine lights that showed him the connection between being on the Cross—being another Christ, or better, *ipse Christus*, Christ himself—and being a child of God.