

Spain December 2007

"Attaining the Greatest 'Benefit'" an article published in Revista Antiguos Alumnos del IESE, Barcelona, on the school's fiftieth anniversary

My first reaction on learning that the fiftieth anniversary of the IESE School of Business Management was approaching, was one of deep gratitude to God for the graces that have been poured forth on many people through this university center.

Also very present to me was the supernatural and human enthusiasm of St. Josemaría Escrivá when he urged forward this initiative. He had a clear awareness of the good that IESE, inspired by the spirit of the Gospel, could bring to society. In fostering its start, he contemplated in advance the development that, over time, would come to an institution of great professional prestige, dedicated to the formation of business people and executives who, at the heart of their mission, would have a great eagerness to serve and a desire to give their work a fully Christian orientation, and therefore a truly human one.

From IESE's first steps—made possible by the interest of civil society—faithful of Opus Dei, cooperators and friends, together with many other people, have given their full backing to the project, aware

they were contributing to giving sound orientation to the work of directing businesses, and thus to the bettering of society. My prayer and gratitude go out to all these people—to those who are assisting this apostolic work here below, and also to those who are now doing so from heaven.

In addition to the foundational mission entrusted to IESE, this golden anniversary leads me to recall some of St. Josemaría's teachings on the sanctification of ordinary work. These teachings have a permanent value for all sectors of human activity, and therefore also for persons involved in tasks of management. They provide a point of reference for efforts to improve that professional field, which each day is more important for the human and social development of peoples.

Loving people

I have a very vivid memory of that October day back in 1972, when St. Josemaría held an affectionate dialogue at IESE with the directors of this educational center and other business people, during his unforgettable catechetical trip throughout the Iberian peninsula. One of those present asked him what the principle virtue of someone working in business should be. His answer centered on charity, "because justice alone is not enough," he emphasized. This was a constant teaching of the founder of Opus Dei, who said that "the best kind of charity is to go overboard in regard to justice."¹ He

1. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 83.

also said: "justice is to give each person what is his own; but I would add that this is not enough. No matter how much each deserves, we have to give more, because each soul is a masterpiece of God."²

Of course, charity should not be confused with a vague feeling of solidarity with needy persons or countries that are distant from us. This is not the same as true Christian solidarity, upon which John Paul II has left us teachings of great depth. It is very human to sympathize with the needs of others, but charity entails much more. "The charity of Christ is not merely a benevolent sentiment for our neighbor; it is not limited to a penchant for philanthropy. Poured out in our soul by God, charity transforms our mind and will from within. It provides the supernatural foundation for friendship and the joy of doing what is right...Christian charity cannot be limited to giving things or money to the needy. It seeks, above all, to respect and understand each person for what he is, in his intrinsic dignity as a man and child of God."³

Transcending ambitious plans and large profits, the most important thing in a business is to promote the good of those who work there or who are in contact with that enterprise. Despite the heightened demands of a competitive market, this primordial requirement of Christian morality can never be overlooked.. The core of Christian morality

comes down to following and imitating Jesus Christ, especially in his love.⁴ As the beloved Pope John Paul II taught: "Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life."⁵ In his deeds and words, always centered on the commandment of fraternal charity (cf. *Jn* 13:34-35), Jesus' love for his Father and for mankind is revealed in an unequivocal way. Benedict XVI has forcefully recalled that God is Love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:16). "Since God has first loved us (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10), love is now no longer a mere 'command'; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."⁶

St. Josemaría's great love for his fellow men and women led him to stress the perennial Christian teaching on the intrinsic value of each person, created in God's image and called to be his son or daughter. This requires not only respecting all men and women, and never manipulating them or using them for one's own self-interest; it also means truly loving each person, beginning with those closest to us, and manifesting that affection in specific deeds of service.

Professionalism, justice, and concern for all

A person with a right intention, with nobility of soul, knows how to seek justice and do good in the area of labor relations. A business that is properly oriented pursues the good of persons, and not merely material

2. Ibid.

3. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 71-72.

4. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, August 6, 1993, no. 19.

5. Ibid., no. 20.

6. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, no. 1

gain. The social doctrine of the Church stresses that economic activity should not be aimed only at producing more goods, solely for the purpose of augmenting profit or power; rather it should be ordained above all to the service of persons, of the whole person and the entire human community.⁷ Respecting the rights of workers, clients and consumers, is an inalienable demand of justice. But the effort to truly further the good of persons leads one to go beyond what is merely just, striving to make this world of ours more human.

Personal integrity and justice, since they are necessary in all human relations, also have to be put into practice in the sphere of business. We should never forget that someone who lacks the will to give to each person what is truly owed to them impoverishes himself and makes it difficult for people to live together. All injustice fosters divisions and tensions that can even provoke grave violence.

St. Josemaría referred frequently to the importance of always being truthful and just, in big things as well as small ones. In one of his homilies, he encouraged us to “resolve not to judge others, not to doubt their good will, to drown evil in an abundance of good, sowing loyal friendship, justice, and peace all around us.”⁸

In businesses, as in other spheres of life, circumstances can arise that make it difficult for people to live in

harmony. Envy, rancor, discord, personal insults or injuries, and even natural differences of character and legitimate points of view, can make it difficult to attain common objectives and, what is most important, to exercise Christian charity. St. Josemaría, well aware of these risks, encouraged people to exercise the virtue of charity and the virtues that accompany it—availability to assist others, understanding, patience, the ability to forgive, etc. All of this comes down to fostering a true spirit of service. As he once said: “How difficult it often seems to eliminate the barriers to human harmony! And yet we Christians are called to bring about that miracle of brotherhood. We must work so that everyone, with God’s grace, can live in a Christian way, ‘bearing one another’s burdens’ (cf. *Gal* 6:2), keeping the commandment of love which is the bond of perfection and the essence of the law (cf. *Col* 3:14; *Rom* 13:10).”⁹

Unity of Life

Another of St. Josemaría’s central teachings is the importance of “unity of life.” This refers to the effort to live with Christian integrity in all areas of life. In a homily preached before more than twenty thousand people on the campus of the University of Navarra in October of 1967, he summed up some essential features of this spirit, which he had been spreading since October 2, 1928, the date on which our Lord let him “see” Opus Dei. He recalled in his 1967 homily that, right from the beginning of his apostolic work, he would

7. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2426

8. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 72.

9. *Ibid.*, no. 157.

tell those coming to him 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.”¹⁰

In that homily of his, preached forty years ago, he encouraged those present to foster a strong unity between the faith they professed and their specific way of acting. He urged them to be consistent with their condition as Christians in their family, at work, and in social relations. And he added forcefully: “There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God: we discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.”¹¹

St. Josemaría was saddened by the fact that “many Christians are no longer convinced that the fullness of life that God rightly expects from his children means that they have to have a careful concern for the quality of their everyday work, because it is this work, even in its most minor aspects, which they have to sanctify....The work of each one of us, the activities that take up our time and energy, must be an offering worthy of our Creator. It must be *opera-*

tio Dei, a work of God that is done for God: in short, a task that is complete and faultless.”¹²

One would fail to live as a child of God if, while excelling in a professional activity, the spirit of the Gospel did not have access to one’s workday, or one failed to live up to fundamental ethical norms. A Christian can never stop being Christian: neither in business, nor in any other sphere of life. In addition to acquiring a sound knowledge of the moral law, especially as it relates to one’s specific profession, one has the duty of prudence to avoid decisions or strategies or organizational structures that could harm others unjustly or cause scandal.

St. Josemaría taught that a necessary consequence of love for personal freedom is pluralism.¹³ There is room for many different business models and styles of management, but a person with faith, a well-formed, responsible Christian with an upright conscience, will strive to ensure that these are always consistent with Christ’s faith and morality. This requires evaluating theories and proposals critically, filtering or adjusting them from a Christian viewpoint of the human person, in accord with the general principles of the Church’s social doctrine.¹⁴

The key is to grasp more deeply the meaning of one’s own work, an

10. Homily “Passionately Loving the World” in *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá*, no. 114.

11. *Ibid.*

12. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 55.

13. Cf. *Conversations*, no. 67.

14. These have recently been set out by the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Washington, D.C., USCCB Publishing, 2005.

instrument for contributing to the progress of society and a principal means for personal sanctity and apostolate. "Get accustomed to referring everything to God,"¹⁵ St. Josemaría advised. "When a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God."¹⁶

When someone in the business sector works in this way, besides financial and social success, that person will attain the greatest "benefit": encountering God, serving and loving him in their professional occupation and in daily life. In a word, their work truly becomes an instrument for their own sanctification and that of others.

15. St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 675.

16. *Conversations*, no. 116.