

The Importance of Professional Excellence in Developing Countries

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I first came into contact with the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá when I was studying to become a Magistrate. After having passed my final exams, I was appointed to be the Deputy Public Prosecutor for the court of first instance of Abijan, the capital of Ivory Coast. From the moment that I began my career as a prosecutor, I was struck by the fact that the courthouse lacked a proper library in which to carry out legal research, and that there were no structures in place to assure the continuing education of judges and lawyers. This meant that there were obstacles to acquiring and improving legal knowledge at the very heart of the legal system. I also realized that both the urban and rural populations of Ivory Coast did not have adequate access to legal information, and that they were regrettably ignorant about their most basic legal rights as a consequence.

The Founder of Opus Dei proposed above all, an ideal of doing one's work well. "Given this basis", he said, "there are thousands of places in the world which need a helping hand, which await someone who is willing to work personally with effort and sacrifice"¹. Inspired by such considerations, I aspired to be a good professional as a way of sanctifying myself, those around me and my society at the same time. I began to seek the appropriate setting in which to provide this legal and judicial education for my fellow lawyers and judges. I realized that it was necessary to have good judges, good lawyers, good notaries, and good bailiffs in order to have quality justice at the service of the country.

¹ *Conversations*, 75.

It is equally necessary to provide education for other professionals who take part in the vital sectors of social life, such as economics and health, in order to improve the well-being of the country. Blessed Josemaría has also taught that the integral development of the human being requires struggling against ignorance and material and spiritual poverty. I concluded that it was therefore necessary to provide adequate access to legal information to the people of Ivory Coast, especially to those who are most disadvantaged.

Blessed Josemaría also taught that each person needs to work to improve society from his or her place in society. “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”². As there was not as yet any institution in existence which corresponded to the objectives I had in mind, I set out with some friends to start a new association. The Ivorian Association for the Development of Law (AIDD) was thus created on March 23, 1993, with the mission of developing the law in Ivory Coast and making it accessible to all, through conferences and seminars, research committees, publications and other activities. Through AIDD, judges, law professors, and lawyers in public service and private practice would all work together for the service of society.

First of all, we wanted to help legal professionals to continue to improve their legal skills and knowledge, so that they would be better equipped to serve their clients and the public in their respective fields. We consequently began to hold seminars for lawyers who work for the State, lawyers in private practice, and lawyers who work as in-house counsel for private companies, on topics of special interest to each of these groups. In order to provide an adequate forum for dialogue and exchange among legal professionals, we created two professional journals. The *Revue Ivoirienne de Sciences Juridiques* is a law review that addresses issues related to family law, contract law, criminal law, and human rights law. In *ECODROIT*, we deal with labour and employment law issues, and various other legal matters of interest to those working in business, economics and accounting. Each of these journals has an academic advisory committee chaired by an associate law professor. Among other things, these publications enable us to review recent legal publications and help legal and business professionals keep track of recent developments in the law.

Being aware of serious problems in the health sector due to ignorance of the law and at times to the irresponsibility of some medical professionals, we

² *The Forge*, 717.

decided to organize activities for those who work in this field as well. We have organized seminars dealing with topics such as the professional responsibility of doctors and pharmacists, medical secrets, and the legal, ethical and medical aspects of human cloning. Our objective is to sensitize medical professionals to their responsibilities, with a view to helping them to serve their patients better. We also saw that it would be opportune to start a journal specializing in this area, *Droit et Santé*, which is currently the only review on medical and pharmaceutical law in Western Africa.

It is said that one is not supposed to be ignorant of the law. In Ivory Coast, a considerable portion of the population is ignorant of the law, due in large part to the difficulties involved in accessing legal information. In order to resolve this problem and to promote a legal culture among our urban citizens, we organized two types of activities: national law days and weekly radio programs on legal topics. We also publish a magazine for this audience on legal matters called *Actualités Juridiques*.

The rural population has not been forgotten in our activities to educate about the law. In addition to the general difficulties that exist in accessing legal information, rural populations also suffer from especially high illiteracy rates which leave them in almost complete ignorance of their rights. In order to deal with this situation, we started «Legal Clinics», wherein we explain the law to the people and respond to their questions and concerns about legal matters. We ordinarily offer these services in local languages, as this makes them accessible to more people. Faced with the success of these clinics and the continuing requests of the people that we continue to offer them this aid, we have started looking for financing in order to open a law office in one of these neighbourhoods. In this way we could assure that these people have continuing access to legal assistance.

The teachings of Blessed Josemaría have permitted me, in my professional environment, to develop and preside over the Association for the Development of Law. Therein I have been able to work towards furthering our goals of contributing to the education of legal, business and health professionals; creating continuing forums for study and dialogue on legal matters; and struggling against poverty by increasing the access of disadvantaged populations to the law. We believe that by improving the legal culture of Ivory Coast, we can help overcome arbitrariness, as this is necessary to guarantee the freedom and security of all.

I would like to end with one last quotation from the Founder of Opus Dei, in which he speaks specifically to students, but which I believe can be applied to all. “I myself measure the sincerity of concern for others in terms of works of service, and I know of thousands of cases of students in many countries who have refused to build their own little private worlds. They are giving themselves to others through their professional work, which they try to carry out with human per-

fection, through educational endeavours, through social and welfare activities, in a spirit of youth and cheerfulness”³.

³ *Conversations*, 75.