

FAMILY AND WORK: A SHARED TASK

*Maria Helena Guerra Pratas**

1. Work, Family and Welfare in Crisis? 2. Three Different Perspectives: Marxist Materialism, the Protestant Work Ethic and the Teachings of the Catholic Church. 3. Work and Family, a shared task in Saint Josemaría Escrivá

1. WORK, FAMILY AND WELFARE IN CRISIS?

The social situation in Europe has changed considerably since 2008, with the economic recession affecting work, family and welfare. Research shows that higher demands in terms of working hours and intensity of work have strong negative effects on personal lives¹. Unemployment and low levels of job security have damaging consequences not only on the individual but also on the family², affecting the work-family balance and accounting for much of the inter-country variation in work-life conflict³. McGinnity and Calvert (2009) underline the importance of longer working hours and greater working pressure for the higher levels of work-life conflict⁴. Empirical studies and the literature acknowledge that

* Sociedade Científica da Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

¹ Cfr. AA.VV., *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on the situation of women and men and on gender equality Policies*, European Commission, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2013, p. 93.

² Cfr. AA.VV., *European Social Survey*, 2011. Cf. Hans-Peter BLOSSFELD – Erik KLIJZING – Melinda MILLS – Karin KURZ, *Globalization, Uncertainty and Youth in Society*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, New York 2006, 452 pp.

³ Cfr. Duncan GALLIE – Helen RUSSELL, *Work-Family Conflict and Working Conditions in Western Europe*, in «Social Indicators Research» (2009) 93, 3, 445-467; Jeffrey Greenhaus – Tammy ALLEN, *Work-Family Balance. A review and Extension of the Literature*, in James QUICK – Lois TETRICK (ed.), *Handbook of Occupational Health Psychology*, 2nd, APA, Washington 2011, pp. 165-183.

⁴ Cfr. Frances MCGINNITY – Emma CALVERT, *Work-Life Conflict and Social Inequality in Western Europe*, in «Social Indicators Research» 93, 3 (2009) 489-508.

labour force participation, employment and childcare have a continuous interplay throughout the life course⁵.

The Third *European Quality of Life Survey*, when introducing the impacts of the crisis in Europe, highlighted some words of then President Durão Barroso: «The last two years have left millions unemployed. It has brought us a burden of debt that will last for many years. It has brought new pressures on our social cohesion. The financial and economic crisis has led to deterioration in living and working conditions, with significant negative impacts on the everyday lives of some citizens»⁶. Countries that report a better quality of life are those in the northern and western parts of the European Union, while those expressing more disadvantages are mainly from southern and eastern Europe⁷: lower incomes, problems with work-life balance⁸, debt, reduced life satisfaction, declining trust in public institutions, little job security and youth unemployment, especially in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal⁹. Young adults from Eastern and Southern European countries are expected to have a harder time making the transition to the labour market compared with their peers from Western European countries¹⁰. New responsibilities for supporting unemployed young adults may similarly place major new strains on families¹¹.

According to the Survey about the Quality of Life in Europe, family plays «a major role in all countries as the basis of social contacts and it is the main source of support in meeting daily or urgent needs. Involvement in unpaid work, notably childcare and care of the elderly remains

⁵ Cfr. AA.VV., (M. MILLS ed.), *Gender equality in the workforce: Reconciling work, private and family life in Europe*, European Commission, Brussels 2014, p. 1.

⁶ EUROFOUND, *Third European Quality of Life Survey – Quality of life in Europe: Impacts of the crisis*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2012, p. 7.

⁷ Cfr. *ibid.*.

⁸ Cfr. Heather S. McMILLAN – Michael Lane MORRIS – E. Kate ATCHLEY, *Constructs of the Work/ Life Interface: A Synthesis of the Literature and Introduction of the Concept of Work/Life Harmony*, in «Human Resource Development Review» 2011 (10) 6–25; Andrés JIMÉNEZ FIGUEROA – Verónica GÓMEZ, *Conciliando trabajo-familia: análisis desde la perspectiva de género*, in «Diversitas – Perspectivas en Psicología» 11, 2 (2015) 289-302.

⁹ Cfr. EUROFOUND, *Third European Quality of Life Survey*, cit., pp. 7-8.

¹⁰ Cfr. Pamela QENDRAI, *School to Work Transition and Youth Unemployment in Europe*. PhD Thesis, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn 2016, p. 5.

¹¹ Cfr. Rowan ARUNDEL – Richard RONALD, *Parental co-residence, shared living and emerging adulthood in Europe: semi-dependent housing across welfare regime and housing system contexts*, in «Journal of youth Studies» 19 (2016) 7.

at a high level»¹². This unpaid contribution to society and to the economy should be given proper recognition and measures should be enacted to enable people to reconcile personal, social and professional responsibilities, as «the need to combine family care with economic activity commonly results in an exhausting workload for women»¹³. Women, work and family have been considered «a triangle in constant evolution»¹⁴.

Recent studies in different countries reveal that, over the past decades, men became more engaged in childrearing tasks, but not as much in general household tasks¹⁵. Nowadays, «women work alongside men all day long for contribution to the economic maintenance of the family and return each night to what sociologist Arlie Hochschild labelled a “second shift” in the home to take various domestic and childcare responsibilities [...] most women who are mothers today are faced with this challenge of performing what were considered a generation ago two full-time jobs in the space of each day. And to intensify the challenge, as corporate downsizing has occurred, working hours on the first shift have increased for everyone. For a great proportion of women, and men as well, it seems that there are not enough hours in the day to satisfactorily fulfil both workplace and familial obligations because of “the time bind”»¹⁶.

All the above mentioned factors contribute to people’s decisions on forming a family and raising children¹⁷. The relationship between

¹² EUROFOUND, *Third European Quality of Life Survey*, cit., p.7.

¹³ COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *A new partnership between women and men: equal sharing and participation*, Brussels, 29 May 1995, p. 7; Nicole BUSBY, *A Right to Care? Unpaid Work in European Employment Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford-New York 2011.

¹⁴ Nuria CHINCHILLA – Consuelo LEÓN, *Female Ambition: How to Reconcile Work and Family*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005, p. 18.

¹⁵ Cfr. AA.VV., (K. WALL, ed.), *Livro Branco. Homens e Igualdade de Género em Portugal*, ICS-UL/CITE, Lisboa 2016; Kim PARKER – Wendy WANG, *Modern Parenthood Roles of Moms and Dads Converge as They Balance Work and Family*, Pew Research Center, 14.3.2013, in <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family> (2-10-2017).

¹⁶ Irena Egle LAUMENSKAITE, *The Uniqueness of the Work of the Woman in the Society for its Humanization*, Conference at the World Meeting of Families, Milan 2012, p. 2; Arlie HOCHSCHILD, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*, Metropolitan Books, New York 1997, pp. 6, 268-9.

¹⁷ Cfr. EUROSTAT, *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*, Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg 2009.

work and having children has evolved over time. It is necessary to study work-life balance to avoid tensions within individuals and families. As it is well known, the age at marriage has increased to record highs in western countries and youth unemployment or precarious work has a lot to do with this situation¹⁸.

Recent surveys all over the world consider that «work/family balance is one of the toughest challenges for working women worldwide»¹⁹. Once more, it is necessary to consider that both work and family are shared tasks for men and women; nevertheless, the achievement of a new partnership, entailing equal sharing of responsibility in the public and private domains is not yet a reality in some European countries. Most of the household duties are done by women—this means and includes housework, childcare, and care for other dependents. For example, Slovenia, Croatia, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, and Portugal stand out as countries where mothers are working outside the home more than 40 hours per week²⁰. In eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria (2%), Poland (9%) and Romania (9%), and southern European countries, such as Portugal (9%), rates of part-time work are very low, with a negligible difference in the labour market participation of mothers versus non-mothers²¹. In these countries, it is a financial necessity for women to work full-time, something that has to do with low salaries, but probably also with «a unique history of women’s full employment from the legacy of socialism»²².

¹⁸ Cfr. Tomáš SOBOTKA –Vegard SKIRBEKK – Dimiter PHILIPPOV, *Economic recession and fertility in the developed world. A literature review*, European Commission, Vienna 2010, pp. 5ss.

¹⁹ INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION-GALLUP, *Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men*, Washington, Geneva 2017, p. 39, in http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_546256.pdf (05.4.2018).

²⁰ Cfr. Celine MIANI – Stijn HOORENS, *Parents at work: men and women participating in the labour force*, Short Statistical Report n. 2 RR-348-EC May, 2014, European Commission, pp.14-15.

²¹ Cfr. AA.Vv., (M. MILLS ed.), *Gender equality in the workforce*, cit., p. 30; Isabel TAVORA, *The southern European social model: familialism and the high rates of female employment in Portugal*, in «Journal of European Social Policy» 22, 1 (2012) 63-76.

²² AA.Vv., (M. MILLS ed.), *Gender equality in the workforce*, cit., p. 30.

2. THREE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES: MARXIST MATERIALISM, THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC AND THE TEACHINGS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

As it is well known, Marx and Engels' materialistic concepts gave great importance to work and criticized capitalism for alienating human existence. Karl Marx (1818-1883) considered that the development of capitalism led the proletariat to sell their work as a condition to survive. In Marx's sense, a proletarian is one who lives by selling his labour. This materialistic conception focused attention on the danger of alienation and incited to class struggle. In traditional societies, the sphere of work and of family life was usually not separated in space. Male and female members of the household worked and educated their children side-by-side. Before the industrial revolution, the family was the basis of the economic production, but thereafter, the sphere of work as a public activity and the private family life became separate²³. Marxism also fostered a genderless approach to man-woman relations and considered that the traditional family was already a thing of the past²⁴. When Soviet communism was created, it proclaimed the intent to equalize the classes and to achieve the liberation of women as well, giving them new career opportunities. In 1918, laws were created to weaken marriage and the family and to create a unified society focused on the country, not the family. The ability to perform marriages was taken away from the church and given solely to the state. They believed that under socialism the family would "wither-away" and envisioned a society in which communal dining halls, day care centres, and public laundries would replace the labour of women in the home²⁵. Yet, by 1936, new legislation aimed at strengthening traditional family ties²⁶.

²³ Cfr. Irena Egle LAUMENSKAITE, *The uniqueness of the work of the woman in the society for its humanization*, cit., pp. 1-2.

²⁴ Karl MARX – Friedrich ENGELS, *A ideologia Alemã*, Presença, Lisboa 1980, vol. I, p. 223; Virgínia FERREIRA, *Mulheres, Família e Trabalho doméstico no capitalismo*, in «Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais» 6 (1981) 50-51.

²⁵ Cfr. Wendy GOLDMAN, *Women, the state, and revolution: Soviet family policy and social life, 1917-1936*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993, pp. 5-12.

²⁶ Cfr. *ibid.*

Another event celebrated this year is the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century. Five hundred years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther (1483-1546) posted on the door of the church of Wittenberg castle his 95 theses on indulgences. This event contributed to the subsequent emergence of Protestantism.

Some centuries later, the sociologist Max Weber, in the first edition (1905) of his book *"The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"*²⁷, opposed the materialist Marxist conception relating the rise of capitalism to the Calvinist belief in the moral value of hard work and the fulfilment of one's worldly duties. After defining what he meant by the "spirit of capitalism"²⁸, Weber argued that there are many reasons to find capitalism's origins in the religious ideas of the Reformation, as certain branches of Protestantism had supported worldly activities dedicated to economic gain, seeing them as endowed with moral and spiritual significance, as a call (*Beruf*) from God. Weber traced the origins of the Protestant ethic to the Reformation, though he acknowledged that a positive valuation of secular everyday labour as a divine calling had already existed in the Middle Ages²⁹. He considered that the Roman Catholic Church assured salvation to individuals who accepted the church's sacraments and submitted to religious authority. However, the Reformation had effectively removed such assurances. In the absence of such assurances, Weber argued, Protestants began to look for other signs that they were saved. Worldly success became one of those signs: «earthly success could be a providential sign of God's favour, of election, of a heavenly destiny»³⁰. Many authors consider that Weber's essay can be interpreted as a criticism of Karl Marx and his theories. While Marx's historical materialism held that all human institutions—including religion—were based on economic foundations, many have seen *The Protestant Ethic* as turning this theory on its head by implying that a religious movement fostered capitalism, not the other

²⁷ Cfr. Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge, London-New York 2005.

²⁸ Cfr. *ibid.*, pp. 13-38.

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁰ Scott HAHN, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace: My Spiritual Journey in Opus Dei*, Doubleday, New York 2006, p. 33.

way around³¹. However, Weber's Protestant work ethic isn't exactly a Christian doctrine, but rather a social phenomenon, although with very deep roots. It is not a work of theology³². Obviously, Webber's theory must not be confused with the Reformation itself. As Scott Hahn explains, in the Reformation tradition there is a «deep devotion to Jesus, a spontaneous life of prayer, zeal to transform the culture, and of course, a burning love for Scripture»³³. In some way, there was already a deep sense of being called by God to sanctify ordinary duties, but the protestant idea that success was a sign of divine predilection in nothing matches the Catholic doctrine³⁴. Christ Himself lived an obscure life for thirty years in an occupation that was not at all prestigious or powerful³⁵.

The Catholic vision considers that, even if the concept of alienation of the Marxist analysis and its foundation are false, nevertheless alienation, and the loss of the authentic meaning of life, is a reality in our Western societies: «alienation is found also in work, when it is organized so as to ensure maximum returns and profits with no concern whether the worker, through his own labour, grows or diminishes as a person [. . .] in which he is considered only a means and not an end. The concept of alienation needs to be led back to the Christian vision of reality, by recognizing in alienation a reversal of means and ends. When man does not recognize in himself and in others the value and grandeur of the human person, he effectively deprives himself of the possibility of benefitting from his humanity and of entering into that relationship of solidarity and communion with others for which God created him. Indeed, it is through the free gift of self that man truly finds himself.

³¹ Cfr. Gianfranco POGGI, *Calvinism and the Capitalist Spirit: Max Weber's Protestant Ethic*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst 1983.

³² Cfr. Scott HAHN, *Trabalho com Qualidade, Graça em Quantidade*, Diel, Lisboa 2008, pp. 41-42.

³³ Scott HAHN, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace*, cit., pp. 3-5.

³⁴ Cfr. Scott HAHN, *Trabalho com Qualidade, Graça em Quantidade*, cit., p. 42; Pierpaolo DONATI, *Senso e valore della vita quotidiana*, in AA.VV. (LL. CLAVELL, ed.), *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, vol. I: *Vocazione e missione del cristiano in mezzo al mondo*, Edizioni Università della Santa Croce, Roma 2002, p. 241.

³⁵ Cf. Janne Haaland MATLARY, *Work, a Path to Holiness*, in AA.VV. (LL. CLAVELL, ed.), *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, vol. I, cit., p. 161.

This gift is made possible by the human person's essential "capacity for transcendence»³⁶.

For many years, the Church in her Social Teachings defended the rights of workers to be paid wages that allow them to support themselves and their families, and to fulfil their family obligations in a honourable manner³⁷. A deepening concern for other dimensions of work appeared in the Second Vatican Council, with Paul VI, and John Paul II, who used the expression "Gospel of Work" in his encyclical "*Laborem Exercens*" (1981). The understanding that the dignity of work stems from its subjective dimension emerged from pondering the anthropological question³⁸. As the key to the social question is the unconditional primacy of the human person, human work acquires a fundamental and decisive importance, to be judged by the measure of the dignity of the person who carries it out³⁹. Pope Francis considers the world of work a human and a Christian priority: «it comes from that first command that God gave to Adam: 'Go, till the earth, work the earth, tame it' [...] starting with a working Jesus»⁴⁰.

The deepest value and the most authentic meaning of work eliminates, at its roots, any possible discrimination between the different occupations⁴¹ and helps to overcome the mentality that the honourability of any person derives from the tasks performed away from home, more than from those pursued within the family home. This mentality has not yet been overcome/transcended, in many cases, because of the individualistic and materialistic spirit that pervade our society. The rejection of service matches, in practice, the exaltation of selfishness, which is, really, the greatest threat to personal achievement, because any person cannot «fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself»⁴². The woman,

³⁶ SAINT JOHN PAUL II, enc. *Centesimus Annus*, 01 May 1991, n. 41.

³⁷ Cfr. LEO XII, enc. *Rerum Novarum*, 01 May 1891, n. 46; Saint JOHN XXIII, enc. *Mater et Magistra*, 15 May 1961, n. 71.

³⁸ Cfr. Maria Pía CHIRINOS, *A Philosophical Proposal for the Sanctification of Work*, in «Romana» 2 (2007) 342-257.

³⁹ Cfr. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Laborem Exercens*, 14 September 1981, nn. 3 and 6.

⁴⁰ POPE FRANCIS, *Encounter with World of Work*, Genova 27.5.2017, in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2017/may/documents/papa-francesco_20170527_lavoratori-genova.html (5.4.2018).

⁴¹ Cfr. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, *Apost. Exh. Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November 1981, n. 22.

⁴² VATICAN II, *past. const. Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24; cfr. Jutta BURGGRAF, *Por un feminismo*

due to motherhood, is the first to bear witness to the meaning of gift of the self and of acceptance of others⁴³. Women first learn, and then teach others, that human relations are authentic only if they are open to accept the other person: A person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity, which comes from being a person and not from any other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health. This is the indispensable prerequisite for an authentic cultural change⁴⁴. The true “genius of women” or “feminine genius”—by which John Paul II meant the unique capacity women have to uphold the primacy of the person and of love⁴⁵—gradually manifests itself in developing relational approaches to human activities⁴⁶. Pope Francis expressed the same idea more recently: «the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, the presence of women must also be guaranteed in the workplace and in the various other settings where important decisions are made, both in the Church and in social structures»⁴⁷. Pope Francis also encourages the need to a greater sharing of responsibility within the family: «It is possible, for example, that a husband’s way of being masculine can be flexibly adapted to the wife’s work schedule. Taking on domestic chores or some aspects of raising children does not make him any less masculine or imply failure, irresponsibility or cause for shame. Children have to be helped to accept as normal such healthy ‘exchanges’ which do not diminish the dignity of the father figure»⁴⁸.

3. WORK AND FAMILY, A SHARED TASK IN SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

A sharing task procedure is described in the first chapter of the book of Genesis where God entrusted both man and woman with family

cristiano, in in «Romana. Boletín de la Prelatura de la Santa Cruz y Opus Dei. Estudios 1985-1996», Roma 1997, pp. 103-119.

⁴³ Cfr. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 99.

⁴⁴ Cfr. Irena Egle LAUMENSKAITE, *The Uniqueness of the Work of the Woman in the Society*, cit., p. 6.

⁴⁵ Cfr. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, 15.08.1988, n. 30; ID., *Letter to Women*, 29.06.1995, n. 12.

⁴⁶ Cfr. SAINT JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Evangelium Vitae*, n. 99.

⁴⁷ POPE FRANCIS, Apost. Exh. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 103.

⁴⁸ POPE FRANCIS, Apost. Exh. *Amoris Laetitia*, n. 286.

and world domination through their work (Gen 1, 28). They together received family and work as a mandate from God: to multiply, fill the earth and conquer it (cf. Gen 1,28). This mandate reveals that both family and work are a common task. Both are called to holiness through work and through the fulfilment of their family and social duties. As Saint Josemaría Escrivá used to say, for a Christian, «work is a participation in the creative work of God. When he created man and blessed him, he said: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and conquer it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth (Gen 1,28)”. And, moreover, since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man’s life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies»⁴⁹.

According to the plans of God, man and woman, together, are called to continue the work of the Creator and the redemptive work of Christ, placing Him at the top of all human activity. By design and divine gift, any activity can be the work of God, God’s work: «Work is part and parcel of man’s life on earth. It involves effort, weariness, exhaustion: signs of the suffering and struggle which accompany human existence and which point to the reality of sin and the need for redemption. But in itself work is not a penalty or a curse or a punishment: those who speak of it that way have not understood sacred Scripture properly. It is time for us Christians to shout from the rooftops that work is a gift from God and that it makes no sense to classify men differently, according to their occupation, as if some jobs were nobler than others. Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man, to his dominion over creation. It is an opportunity to develop one’s personality. It is a bond of union with others, the way to support one’s family, a means of aiding in the improvement of the society in which we live and in the progress of all humanity»⁵⁰.

Human beings were created to work (Gen 2,15) and work and family are closely linked in the divine plan. St. Josemaría, inspired by the creative design of God, considered that both family and work are common tasks of men and women, called to contribute jointly to build

⁴⁹ Josemaría ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Christ is Passing By*, Scepter, New York 1974, n. 47.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

a culture that respects the dignity of the human person. At the basis of this spirituality, there is an anthropology that contains a surprisingly innovative design (for the time), which considers men and women as equal⁵¹. The essential equality between men and women requires that both should feel as protagonists of the history of the world and of the history of salvation⁵². Saint Josemaría developed a new theology of work, and brought the world a powerful light that allows a deeper understanding of the meaning of work in the life of the human person. He explained: «Our Lord gave rise to Opus Dei in 1928 to remind Christians that, as we read in the book of Genesis, God created man to work [. . .]. The spirit of Opus Dei reflects the marvellous reality (forgotten for centuries by many Christians) that any honest and worthwhile work may be converted into a divine occupation. In God's service there are no second-class jobs; all of them are important»⁵³.

Professional work is the axis of the holiness of Christians, according to the spirituality of Opus Dei. It is based on the original divine plan and in the example of Christ, who worked as a carpenter in the workshop of Joseph. This was a novelty in the history of Christian spirituality, retrieving the example of Jesus, of the Holy family and of the lives of the first Christians: «We have come to call attention once again to the example of Jesus, who spent thirty years in Nazareth, working as a carpenter. In his hands, a professional occupation, similar to that carried out by millions of people all over the world, was turned into a divine task»⁵⁴. This light illuminates not only the hidden life of Christ, but of all men, and under this light all paths on the Earth become divine. Each person can identify with Christ, through work, family life and social relationships.

St Josemaría Escrivá did not ignore the realities of stress, tension, sometimes of great demand, and the difficulties in reconciling family and work. He never attributed solely to the woman the care of home

⁵¹ Cfr. Blanca CASTILLA, *Consideraciones sobre la antropología " varón-mujer" en las enseñanzas del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*, in «Romana. Boletín de la Prelatura de la Santa Cruz y Opus Dei. Estudios 1985-1996», Roma 1997, pp. 366-382.

⁵² Cfr. Josemaría ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Ecclesia Press, Dublin 1972, n. 14.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, *Conversations*, n. 55.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; cfr. ID., *Christ is Passing By*, nn. 22ss.

and children, although at that time it was customary to do so. Therefore, he advised fathers to be more present in the family, without avoiding/withdrawing from their duties at home with the excuse of work: «the children are the most important; more important than the business, than work, than the rest»⁵⁵, he told them. Also the man, not only the woman, should feel the “tension” between work at home and work outside. For the woman to be able to “get out” of the home and make it compatible with other professional jobs, it is necessary that the husband partake and share responsibilities, so that the woman did not suffer in solitude this concern, because men do not accomplish their family duties. Bishop Javier Echevarría (who lived with Saint Josemaría for many years, and succeeded him) explained: «it is necessary to add the man’s obligation to be active in the home. He, too, should feel the tension between his job at home and his outside work. Only if he shares that experience with his wife, and the two of them work it out together, will the man be able to acquire that sensitivity which the family needs in our day. And that requires clarity, self-denial, and refinement on his part»⁵⁶. The children must also collaborate at home, as St. Josemaría Escrivá explained: «besides, it is natural for the children to help with the household chores; and a mother who knows how to bring up her children well can manage this»⁵⁷.

The dedication to family tasks has a huge human and social impact. Precisely because the family is the foundational cell of society, this dedication has a transcendence that is the greatest possible service to humanity. Against the error, so widespread, to counteract the dedication to family and the possibility of social projection, he taught that social projection is nothing but to give oneself to others with a sense of service and to contribute effectively to the common good. In this way, the work in the family is not only a social function, but the most important. The irreplaceable contributions of both men and women as parents and educators are often ignored, or minimized, by economic or occupational considerations, without due regard for their important social role. St. Josemaría, beyond his appreciation for all human work,

⁵⁵ ID., *Christ is Passing By*, n. 27.

⁵⁶ Cfr. JAVIER ECHEVARRÍA, *Entrevista* in «El Mercurio», 21-1-1996.

⁵⁷ JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversations*, cit., n. 89.

valued it especially for its spiritual transcendence. There are no big or small tasks; all are great when done for love and with love. Those, which are regarded as extremely important tasks, are reduced in value when you lose sight of the Christian meaning for life⁵⁸.

This was truly the “secret” that God had asked St. Josemaría to proclaim in a loud voice in all the paths of the Earth: the value of work is not measured by materialistic criteria, but by the love—to God and to others—with which it is performed. And all work, all honest occupations are service: service is the job of a teacher, of a farmer, of a mother, or of a minister. To *serve* means several things: it means acquiring a solid professional prestige, founded not on appearances, but on the ability to respond to the real needs of the people. It means taking responsibility for being exemplary in one’s own work, with a serious commitment to exercise virtues in that work: virtues or good habits at all levels—technical, intellectual and moral levels. To *serve* implies a perfect knowledge about certain tasks, but also knowing how to plan the work with order and effectiveness, distributing the various tasks throughout the hours of the day, the days of the week, and the months of the year. It is also necessary to accomplish it with the desire to serve, to make life pleasant to other people, with a smile, a kind word, or even to guess someone’s needs. To serve means loving with work: a love that prefers actions. This is the meaning of true solidarity with the human person⁵⁹. The rejection of service coincides, in practice, with the glorification of selfishness, which is, in reality, the greatest threat to personal achievement, to both women and men, who cannot fully be realized without a sincere offering of their lives. The spirit of service radically changes the hierarchy of values. Devaluing the service to others demonstrates a lack of maturity. The human person perfects itself only through the gift of self. Discovering the love hidden in a service detail demonstrates profound wisdom. Indeed, there may be boredom in all kinds of tasks: from the factory to the lab or computer, there is a cold grey repetition, because all jobs require technical knowledge for their

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, *Conversations*, n. 109. Cfr. Javier LÓPEZ DÍAZ, *Trabajar bien, trabajar por amor. Sobre la santificación del trabajo en las enseñanzas de san Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Edizione Università della Santa Croce, Roma 2016.

⁵⁹ Cfr. Javier ECHEVARRÍA, in «L’Osservatore Romano», 9-1-2002.

performance. But there will be no monotony, if the work is not just mechanically done, but gives way to thinking, to contemplation, to the serene thoughts that redeem daily work⁶⁰.

St. Josemaría encouraged us to transform the daily prose into heroic verse, to discover that “something” divine that exists in every human activity: «The lines of a Castilian poet are especially appropriate here: “Write slowly and with a careful hand, for doing things well is more important than doing them”. [...] when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God. That is why I have told you repeatedly, and hammered away once and again on the idea that the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives»⁶¹. What gives value to a job is the love put into it, discovering the transcendence of every moment and of every human activity. That way, it can become a wonderful heroic poem made of the prose of each day. St. Josemaría used to say that the only model for the Christian is Jesus Christ. However, sometimes, he added: «if in anything I can put me as an example, is of a man that knows how to love»⁶². Love is the real secret to a delicate sensitivity to the needs and requirements of other people, the ability to understand their potential conflicts and to help them. It is not so much the fact of being a woman or a man, but the response to grace that develops the ability to love, the attention to others, and the capacity for self-denial. That was certainly the case of St. Josemaría⁶³. To understand this reality, it is absolutely necessary to understand the many conflicts and anguishes that arise in society, the world, in families and in the life of the entire human family. This is the key to happiness and to the construction of the true “civilization of love” of which Pope Paul VI spoke. In a world that seems to have lost hope, where work is so often source of unjust treatment, harassment, exhaustion, «there can hardly be

⁶⁰ Cfr. Ana SASTRE, *Verdad de la mujer*, Palabra, Madrid 1968, p. 100.

⁶¹ Josemaría ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversations*, cit., n. 116. Cfr. Antonio MACHADO, *Poesías Completas*. CLXI – *Proverbios y cantares XXIV*, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid 1940.

⁶² Pilar URBANO, *El hombre de Villa Tevere*, Plaza & Janés, Barcelona 1995, p. 230.

⁶³ Cfr. Jutta BURGGRAF, *El poder de la confianza: el Beato Josemaría y las mujeres*, Promesa, San José Costa Rica 2001, pp. 33-35.

better news. So many millions of people—Catholics, non-Catholics and non-Christians, are desperately unhappy because they are looking for meaning in their own daily lives. They neither know nor see that right here, in the middle of their boring, hard, monotonous days, there is the hidden pearl [...]. “This is the greatest of all discoveries [...] that brings joy, serenity, and closeness to Christ everywhere, in every situation”»⁶⁴.

⁶⁴ Janne Haaland MATLARY, *Work, a Path to Holiness*, cit., p. 162.