

# FROM ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS TO ST. JOSEMARÍA'S DIVINE COMEDY: PRACTICE AND NARRATIVE AS CONSTITUTIVE COMPONENTS OF HUMAN WORK

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While Aristotle's ethics and Escrivá's spirituality of divine comedy are two disparate accounts of human agency, nonetheless, they can illuminate one another and find common ground for a deeper appreciation of the anthropology of work in light of a narrative theory of ethics. Although St. Josemaría never intended to propose a systematic philosophy or theology, his proposal for a new understanding of work is permeated by his multiple references to the tropes of narrative and divine comedy<sup>1</sup>. Recent developments in neo-Aristotelian ethics and in cognitive psychology can help elucidate the strength and the promise of St. Josemaría's vision for work as a significant component of the child of God's dramatic performance of a divine comedy.

In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously distinguishes between activity performed for its own sake, *praxis* (πρᾶξις), and activity performed for the sake of some other end, *poiesis* (ποίησις). While addressing the role of the virtues of prudence and wisdom in deliberating about means and ordering choices towards ends, he wrote: "doing and making are generically different, since making aims at an

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<sup>1</sup> St. Josemaría ESCRIVÁ used the language of divine comedy to describe the life of Christian ascetical struggle in his published works and in meditations and informal gatherings. Towards the end of this essay, I offer a few examples of his published uses. Others include: *The Way*, n. 837, 882; *Friends of God*, n. 152; *Forge*, n. 485.

end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing the end cannot be other than the act itself.”<sup>2</sup> As in the translation I just quoted, Aristotle’s *poiesis* is often rendered in English as “making” and *praxis* as “doing”. While *poiesis* is only performed for the sake of a further end extrinsic to itself, that is, the product; *praxis* entails an interior or immanent end to the activity. While being done for its own sake, *praxis* may, however, also and at once, be some form of productive making. That is, *praxis* may be done both for its own sake and done for another.

Many scholars read Aristotle as despising work, like Benedetta Giovanola with her “*Lavoro, persona e bene comune: un confronto tra il materialismo marxista e l’umanesimo cristiano*”<sup>3</sup> and Ana Marta González in her “*Perspectivas cristianas sobre el trabajo, antes y después de Marx*.” Such authors take on a critical view of Aristotle’s appreciation for work because of his considering it to be an activity proper to slaves, on account of it not being done for its own sake, and therefore inapt for the leisured class and their dedication to a life of wisdom rather than production. Consequently, Aristotle considered the worker in some passages of the *Politics* to be a mere instrument, used for the ends of his master. Nonetheless, there are also insinuations if not suggestions within Aristotle’s writings for a deeper appreciation of work understood as a productive craft that also entails an interior excellence desired for its own sake and an opportunity to practice the virtues of *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI (1140b2–3), trans. H. Rackham, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1934.

<sup>3</sup> See Benedetta GIOVANOLA’s “*Lavoro, persona e bene comune: un confronto tra il materialismo marxista e l’umanesimo cristiano*”, pp. 31–48 and footnote 1 (in this same vol. II) and Ana Marta GONZÁLEZ’s “*Perspectivas cristianas sobre el trabajo, antes y después de Marx*”, pp. 49–73. Giovanola and González both rely upon disparaging remarks made by Aristotle about labor such as those in *Politics* VII 1328–9.

<sup>4</sup> Kelvin KNIGHT offers a fascinating analysis and political critique of the supposedly hard distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* in Aristotle. In his *Aristotelian Philosophy. Ethics and Politics from Aristotle to MacIntyre*, Polity, 2007, Knight contends that Aristotle intentionally presents these often overlapping kinds of activities as separate on account of his political aims to defend the position of the leisured class. In support of my effort here to breach the gap between production and action (for its own sake), see Knight’s affirmation that throughout his works “Aristotle fails to maintain . . . consistent semantic distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*” (p. 19). Moreover, Knight refers to David Charles for additional support in contending that *poiesis* and *praxis* can be united. In his “*Aristotle*:

What is more, when Aristotle's account of the ordering of means to ends within deliberative action is also considered in the light of his account of friendship, in Books VIII and IX, then, the productive making proper to much of human work may also be understood as ordered towards a good not just in the material result of one's labor but within oneself and within others for whom one cares. Consequently, the labor inherent to *poiesis* once transformed into *praxis* becomes a labor of love for the sake of a common good. By acting for the sake of a common good one works not just for the material result but for the good of one's friend. Because of the friendship, my friend's good also becomes my own.

In Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, while analyzing different forms of friendship, Aristotle brings up the example of love for wine and comments that "it would be ridiculous to wish well to a bottle of wine"<sup>5</sup> and yet genuine friendship consists in the mutual well wishing of benevolence.<sup>6</sup> Expressed, for instance, in the desire to enjoy a good bottle of wine together. Love must be always ordered towards persons. Wine is to be savored in festive friendship, and never simply hoarded.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the entire productive process of cultivating grapes, harvesting, pressing, fermenting, aging, and storing, all of these activities form part of a complex craft that is at once an opportunity for the love of friendship and not just in the instrumental outcome of producing benefit but in the very beneficent performance of all of the elements of the craft. Are all those elements merely productive *poiesis* or might an Aristotelian

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*Ontology and Moral Reasoning*", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986, pp. 119–44. Charles holds that while making and doing are distinct and irreducible, they can "co-occur" in the same "basic action". Additionally, in *Techne in Aristotle's Ethics: Crafting the Moral Life*, Continuum, London 2010, Tom Angier suggests that "rather than picking out two mutually exclusive classes of activity in the world ... Aristotle's distinction points towards ... two mutually exclusive modes of evaluation" (p. 44) as productive craft or as virtuous action.

<sup>5</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII (1155b 23), trans. H. Rackham, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1934.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII (1155b), trans. H. Rackham, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1934.

<sup>7</sup> For AQUINAS' analysis of love for wine and love for persons, which closely follows Aristotle and develops his thought further in the context of Christian charity, see, for example: *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 1.

call them a labor of love and thus *praxis* for its own sake? I propose that a generous reading of Aristotle allows to conclude that what from one perspective may look like the mere toil of a slave insofar as his activity is productive making, that activity may now become a much richer and friendly activity of inherent and imminent excellence wherein one is loving one's friends, no matter the material result of the action. In sum, on account of the friendship built upon the common good, one's productive activity has now also become an act chosen for itself, a *praxis*.

In multiple ways that anticipate Escrivá's emphasis on the unity of life<sup>8</sup>, Aristotle's account of action is infused and informed by intentional unity. When writing in the *Poetics* about the playwright's work of crafting dramatic tragedy, he makes the case that "the end is everywhere the chief thing".<sup>9</sup> Given that the end of an action is a form that offers intentional unity, for Aristotle, the end is everywhere in the story, just as the soul is everywhere in the body.<sup>10</sup> He uses the word *mythos* (μῦθος), from which we get "myth", to explain that the plot gives structure and coherence to every action and every choice effected by the protagonist in his heroic quest for the end. Likewise, in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle examines the moral life as the rational construction of choices, singly and collectively aimed at ends that give unity to the whole of one's life. For Aristotle, the moral life is much more than the virtuous living according to the mean, because the mean, regarding the contingent reality specific to potential choices, must be determined according to one's understood aim.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, although a topic often neglected, while setting the stage for his development of the virtue of prudence, Aristotle, addresses the metaphysics of temporality within human action in a way that

<sup>8</sup> On the unity of life according to St. Josemaría, see Ignacio CELAYA, "Unidad de vida", in *Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá*, ed. José Luis ILLANES, Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2013, pp. 1217-1223.

<sup>9</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*, 1450a 23. (*The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*. Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ 1984).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, towards the end of *Poetics*, 1450a.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, at 1131b: "the mean is prescribed by the right principle . . . there is a certain mark to aim at, on which the man who knows the principle involved fixes his gaze, and increases or relaxes the tension accordingly. . .", in ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 19, Harvard University Press, London 1934.

marvelously anticipates St. Augustine's masterpiece on the subject in Book XI of the *Confessions*. Aristotle quotes the Athenian tragic poet Agathon while considering the relationship between past, present, and future in human agency. "Not even God can make an event of the past to not have been".<sup>12</sup> Obviously, Aristotle's aim here is not to address the contradictions and irrationality of Hollywood productions like *Back to the Future* (or, more controversially, *Inception*), but rather to focus our attention on how the rationality of moral action is the configuring of the present in view of the future by gathering memory of the past and ordering it according to an intelligible view towards one's good, that is held in common with others. Perhaps in accord with suggestions about aspiring to divine beatitude, Aristotle also aims here to propose the divine likeness of human intelligence.<sup>13</sup>

The human is open to understanding that which must be and, while living in time and amid temporal contingencies, like God cannot change the past, and like God, exercises responsibility throughout history. Of course, despite those similarities there are also radical differences between human nature and divine. Nonetheless, with Aristotle it can be observed that the master craftsman, trained in his trade through practice under the guidance of an expert mentor, even while deliberating about the technical means most apt to achieve the end envisioned by intellect, is thereby ordering his entire self along with an aggregation of actions, past, present, and probably future, to the aim of his life. All of these components, spread throughout time in their execution and yet (mindfully) focused here and now within the agent, whether actually or merely habitually, provide the panoply of elements of Aristotle's complex and robust moral psychology.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 1139b 10, my translation of: "μόνου γὰρ αὐτοῦ καὶ θεὸς στερίσεται, ἀγέννητα ποιεῖν ἄσος' ἂν ἢ πεπραγμένα.".

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, X, 1177a: "Whether it be reason or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper virtue will be perfect happiness." (Oxford University Press, trans. David Ross revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson, Oxford 1925).

<sup>14</sup> I use the term "mindfulness" without any of the Buddhist or anti-metaphysical implications of the work of most theorists like Jon KABAT-ZINN (see for instance: *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*, Hyperion books, New York 2006) while implying a potentially Aristotelian and even Christian application of

*Poiesis* therefore can become *praxis* when performed for an intrinsic finality, that is, when also done for its own sake, for instance, for love of friendship, regardless of the technical and productive outcome resultant upon the performance. Once again, a complete appreciation for Aristotle's genius requires bringing into view the full spectrum of his rich account, including the four causes. *Poiesis* can become *praxis* when the finality of the action is intrinsic to it. To speak analogically, when the action's very form is substantially an end in and for itself. Expanding upon Aristotle's action theory, Aquinas asserts that the form of the moral act is conceived by practical reason.<sup>15</sup> That mental word which determines the object of action is conceived by the intellect and specifies the kind of action one is performing. If its end is intrinsic to its form or object and thereby forms the very intelligibility of the good in performance, then the final cause becomes also formal and enters into the specification of the act. Now is not the time, but on other occasions, I have had the opportunity to further develop the causation of moral action by using the concept of "hylomorphic cascade", to indicate the various levels of matter – form composition for Aristotle's action theory fully developed by Aquinas.<sup>16</sup>

Alasdair MacIntyre has recovered Aristotle's understanding of *praxis* and expanded it with the term *practice* by emphasizing the social or com-

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the practice of attending to the present moment and to oneself as an integral composite of body and soul. Kabat-Zinn explicitly rejects the reality of an autobiographical performance of the moral life unified by a lived narrative and sees narrative self understanding as an obstacle to the practice of mindfulness. For an alternative approach to mindfulness, perhaps less exclusionary of Aristotelian moral psychology see: Mark Williams, for example: J.M.G. WILLIAMS et alia, *The Mindful Way Workbook*, The Guilford Press, Guilford 2013 and J. Mark G. WILLIAMS, "Mindfulness and Psychological Process", in *Emotion*, 2010, Vol. 10, N. 1, pp. 1–7 (American Psychological Association). And for an in-depth survey of the complementarity of cognitive psychology and narrative theory, see: Omowumi Omoyemi OGUNYEMI, *The Unity of Autobiographical Temporality of the Narrative Self*, in *Contemporary Psychology and Neuroscience: A Philosophical Study*, EDUSC, Roma 2017.

<sup>15</sup> AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 10: "*sicut species rerum naturalium constituuntur ex naturalibus formis, ita species moralium actuum constituuntur ex formis prout sunt a ratione conceptae*".

<sup>16</sup> See all of *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, but especially qq. 6–11, and in particular, in q. 7: "*voluntas enim, cuius proprium obiectum est finis, est universale motivum respectu omnium potentiarum animae, quarum propria obiecta sunt obiecta particularium actuum*".

munity based determination of excellence in the performance of any craft or other complex performance developed within a living tradition. MacIntyre's recovery of practice follows Aristotle regarding the inherent finality of practice and extends beyond Aristotle's proposal by developing the notion of the virtues of acknowledged dependence.<sup>17</sup> In their intrinsic relationality, these virtues are at least bilateral if not multidirectional and therefore always entail in the acquisition and in their exercise the opportunity for love of friendship towards those on whom one depends and who depend on oneself.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, once Aristotle's moral psychology and theory of action is appreciated in terms of a personal quest for happiness united by an aim that teleologically informs and transforms instrumental activity that would otherwise be simply productive, making it into *praxis* and, once practice is appreciated in its social dimension of friendship and loving concern for the others within one's community, then the virtues must be considered as socially constituted constituents of human flourishing.

Although surely relying more upon the works of the Spanish Golden Age of literature than Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, St Josemaría uses the terminology of literary theory, dramatic narrative, and divine comedy to describe the activity of the adopted child of God in striving for holiness by sanctifying ordinary life and especially performing productive work. Although St. Josemaría was probably not thinking of particular Aristotelian texts as he wrote and spoke these words of often high mysticism, nonetheless his words invite us to philosophical and theological reflection while taking into account theories of work that extend beyond those with which Escrivá was personally familiar. In fact, one way to take his teachings seriously is to study them in light of accounts of work that he did not have the opportunity to study directly.

For instance, Alasdair MacIntyre's development of his ethical theory in light of the Aristotelian Thomistic tradition with his emphasis on narrative, recently developed in more dialectical detail in his book *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and*

<sup>17</sup> See especially Alasdair MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals, Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court 1999.

<sup>18</sup> For my discussion of the network of relationality inherent to trustworthy communities, see: Robert GAHL, JR., "Trust: An Interpersonal Virtue", in: *Acta Philosophica*, 2015, vol. 24, n. 1, pp. 181–184.

*Narrative*<sup>19</sup> offers much philosophical analysis to understand the virtues required for truly human work and involved in the various forms of social hierarchy that organize human labor. True, some might object that looking at Escrivá's use of narrative terminology in light of MacIntyre's development of the Thomistic tradition towards a narrative ethics rooted in Aristotelian anthropology would be a confusing juxtaposition between two entirely different methodologies and schools of thought. However, Escrivá's explicit references to the autobiographical structure of human life and of the baptized Christian as the protagonist of a divine comedy invites us to pursue philosophical and theological research in this neglected area of his spirituality. I propose that to advance genuine appreciation for Escrivá's theology of work, one must take seriously his references to narrative and divine comedy and follow his challenge to develop a philosophical and theological analysis of his spiritual proposal of the call to holiness within ordinary life and within this world, by also including his narrative related counsels and proposals. Indeed, although time is limited, perhaps this is the best occasion to propose such a study of the narrative theology contained in the words and works of St. Josemaría and to show how they may be understood in light of the Aristotelian Thomistic tradition as described by MacIntyre.

A premise for my proposal requires an appreciation for Aristotelian Thomistic narrative theory, which may be summarized very briefly with the following synthesis of much of my recent research. Moral agency requires understanding oneself as protagonist and co-author of one's own story which is told on the stage of the world and before the principal spectator of God the Father who observes us with loving expectation and exigency.<sup>20</sup> Without any change in Him and from all eternity, he has high expectations for us and affords us with the graces of sanctification as his adopted children, so that we might tell a divine story by living according to his will, acting out the Book of Life, present from all eternity within the mind of God and made known by word and by writing, from all eternity, by the Father to his divine Son.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Alasdair MACINTYRE, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance: AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 89, a. 6 (c. and ad 3).

<sup>21</sup> See: *Ibidem*, I-II, q. 91. a. 4.



The life of human flourishing therefore consists in the unity, given to all of one's actions and to all of one's virtues by charity, the formal and final cause which informs all good deeds.<sup>22</sup> Love for God and neighbor, the double love commandment, which sums up the entire law, therefore requires intentionally uniting the whole of one's life around one end, the single hearted love of God and for neighbor in Him.<sup>23</sup> Despite our tragic flaws consisting in original sin and the disorder in our nature caused by it, every human can rely upon the grace of sanctification as sons in the Son after converting to Him whom we hold to be our due end, according to the knowledge obtained whether through positive divine revelation or principally through his self-manifestation in nature.

Through ascetical struggle and with divine grace, while fighting against our sinfulness, and the disorder resultant as medicinal punishment for original sin, that is, the *fomes peccati*, we can grow in likeness to the Eternal Word made Man in Jesus Christ. As *alter Christus* and even *ipse Christus*, Jesus operating within us through grace tells a divine story along with our human story so long as we persevere in obedience to God's will and maintain the unity of our lives around the end of charity.<sup>24</sup> Even the most instrumental and merely productive activity may take on intrinsic finality as *practice* insofar as it is shaped by friendship. God makes himself known most fully to us through the Person of the Son made Man who tells us the story, *ipse enarravit* (Jn 1,18), of the unfathomable Godhead and affords us the divine likeness needed to perform ourselves as other characters in the story of the Good News of salvation, in such a way that we too become protagonists of a divine story that, on account of salvific grace, is no longer of the tragic genre but, through plot reversal, becomes deeply comic.

Thus all men and women are called, through an intimate encounter with the Savior, to aspire to tell God's story and to live a divine comedy through the autobiographical dramatic narrative or theatrical performance according to the genre of divine comedy. On account of Christian hope and its confidence in divine grace, each one can overcome the

<sup>22</sup> See for example: AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 23, a. 8.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance: *Ibidem*, I-II, q. 100, a. 3, ad 1.

<sup>24</sup> For a theological study of *alter Christus*, *ipse Christus* in St. Josemaria, see: Antonio ARANDA, *El cristiano, Alter Christus, ipse Christus en el pensamiento del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, in *Scripta Theologica*, vol. 26, fasc. II, 1994, pp. 513-570.

otherwise inevitable failure of sin and achieve the joy of heaven. Thus, ordinary human life with its toil and drudgery, but also with its potential for joy and creativity, can become *Opus Dei*, Work of God, insofar as it is performed by a son or daughter of God. Such work, performed for love of God and informed by charity, is therefore an opportunity for human excellence and divine perfection through the loving contemplation of one's end, in which one already participates through the theological virtues and supernatural love of neighbor which inform every good deed performed by the Christian. Ordinary work becomes an occasion for divine encounter, personal sanctification, redemption, and effecting the Kingdom of Christ. Even just taking out the garbage, a job relegated to slaves in ancient Athens, then becomes *praxis*, practice, and an occasion for greater holiness.

Without the philosophical and theological erudition of an academic theory but with the precision and depth of mystical inspiration, St. Josemaría promoted such an exalted view of the most trivial and ordinary activities, including professional work. *Poiesis* becomes *praxis* on account of the contemplation, comically (in the sense of the deepest joy) made possible by the surprising entrance of God himself on the stage of the world, clothed in flesh and blood and born of a Virgin. Jesus invites us to become another character in the scene but to act out with him the role of divine filiation.

Such an embellished view of narrative found within the Aristotelian Thomistic tradition and poetically expressed in the literature of the Golden Age of Spain, by Calderón de la Barca, and by the doctors of the Church, Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross were consistent sources for St. Josemaría's meditation and preaching. Consequently he wrote that the sons and daughters of God must keep the end in the present, not think just of today, but to "see things with the eyes of eternity, 'keeping present' what has passed and what has yet to come. . . ." (*The Way*, n. 837). By maintaining such unity of life focused on God, he promised that we would experience: "Calmness. Peace. Intense life within you. Without that wild hurry, without that frenzy for change, you can work from your proper place in life. And, like a powerful generator of spiritual electricity, you will give light and energy to very many, without losing your own vigor and light." (*Ibidem*).

St. Josemaría also compared the life of a child of God, amidst his or her ordinary duties, as playing a theatrical role, acting out a divine comedy for the divine Spectator. "... Play acting? Wonderful! The Lord is playing with us as a father does with his children.'... So when we feel that we are just play acting, because we feel cold and uninspired; when we find it difficult to fulfill our duties and attain the spiritual objectives we had set ourselves, then the time has come for us to realize that God is playing with us, and that he wishes us to act out our play with style... I follow my plan, not because I like it, but because I've a duty to do so, for Love. 'But, Father', you ask me, 'can one put on an act for God? Wouldn't that be hypocritical?' Don't worry: for you the moment has arrived to play out a human comedy before a divine spectator. Persevere, for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are contemplating your act; do it all for love of God, to please him, although you find it hard..." (*Friends of God*, n. 152).

In the same meditation published in *Friends of God*, he continues to expound upon the theatrical elements of human life with reference to the comic character of our task. "... How beautiful it is to be God's jester! How beautiful to act out such a role for Love, with a spirit of sacrifice, not seeking any personal satisfaction, but just to please Our Father God who is playing with us! Turn to Our Lord with confidence and say to him: 'I don't feel like doing this at all, but I will offer it up for you.' And then put your heart into the job you are doing, even though you think you are just play acting. Blessed play acting! ... the spectators of our play, let me repeat, are the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Most Holy Virgin, St Joseph and all the Angels and Saints in Heaven. Our interior life involves no more show than this, it is Christ who is passing by *quasi in occulto*. [Jn 7, 10]." (*Ibidem*). Clearly, as illustrated in the conversation with Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz on the morning after our conference, in the discussion provoked by Susan Hanssen's question, the theatrical performance of the child of God before the Divine Spectator entails not an external vigilance or extrinsic play acting, but rather an internal intimacy with God the Father on account of divine adoption and one's incorporation into the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. As Msgr. Ocáriz remarked, the intimacy of the Christian with the Blessed Trinity also entails divine protagonism in the performance of the divine comedy

lived out by the child of God, such that St. Paul's words are made real: "For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's".<sup>25</sup>

Escrivá also referred to divine comedy and to autobiographical narrative in casual conversations and through practical, tangible signs, like the liturgical calendar that he would begin each year with the inscription *nulla dies sine Cruce, in laetitia!* to indicate that every day of the year, whatever the fatigue or disappointments, would be occasion to participate in a divine comedy, every day new but pre-ordained from all eternity.<sup>26</sup> Living a divine comedy is to act out the good news of the Gospel. Therefore he recommended "read the New Testament for some minutes every day, and to enter into each scene and take part in it, as one more of the characters. This is so that you incarnate the Gospel, so that it is "fulfilled" in your life. . . and "make others fulfill it". (*Furrow*, n. 672).

In my abstract I referred to new developments in psychology and how they too can assist the development of a neo-Aristotelian ethics complementary to and illuminated by the teachings of St. Josemaría, especially regarding work. Cognitive behavioral therapy, whether under the subspecies of mindfulness, ACT, or other specific versions of positive psychology, offer, along with neuroscience, empirical convalidation for Aristotelian virtue theory. What is more, these new discoveries in psychotherapy and related fields coincide with the pastoral recommendations made by St. Josemaría regarding attention to the present moment, purification of disorder in human passions, and sanctification. An especially representative counsel from Escrivá that seems to anticipate and coincide with recent developments in mindfulness is point n. 815 of *The Way*, where he writes: "Do you really want to be a saint? Carry out the little duty of each moment: do what you ought and put yourself into what you are doing." Or when he writes: "Don't waste your time and your energy—which belong to God—throwing stones at the dogs that

<sup>25</sup> See "Incontro sulla Santificazione del Lavoro con Mons. Fernando Ocariz", moderated by María Aparecida Ferrari, Oct. 21, 2017, in Javier LÓPEZ DÍAZ e Federico M. REQUENA, *Verso una spiritualità del lavoro professionale*, vol. III, Edusc, Roma 2018, pp. 557–572.

<sup>26</sup> See Gonzalo HERRANZ, "Sin miedo a la vida y sin miedo a la muerte", in AA.Vv., *San Josemaría y los enfermos*, ed. Miguel Angel Monge, Palabra, Madrid 2004, p. 81.

bark at you on your way. Ignore them." (*Ibidem*, n. 14). One of the leading authors in positive psychology today, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, writes "Repression is not the way to virtue. When people restrain themselves out of fear, their lives are by necessity diminished. Only through freely chosen discipline can life be enjoyed and still kept within the bounds of reason."<sup>27</sup> And Escrivá wrote with words that resonate in the specific area of holy purity to both Csikszentmihalyi's work and recent research on so called "ego depletion".<sup>28</sup> "Chastity is not a troublesome and humiliating burden, but a joyful affirmation. Will power, dominion, self-mastery . . . come from the will, especially if it is united to the Will of God. In order to be chaste (and not merely continent or decent) we must subject our passions to reason, but for a noble motive, namely, the promptings of Love." (*Friends of God*, n. 177). Although much of the developments in positive psychology are relevant to the topic of work and to the teachings of St. Josemaría and offer fascinating implications for the concept of unity of life in Christian spirituality, for character formation, and for the practice of virtue, I will leave further development of the topic for another occasion.

Allow me to conclude with a reference to Pope Francis who seems to have carefully read much of St. Josemaría and to have developed this narrative understanding of the moral challenge to perform, to act out a divine comedy, with our own stories. "It might be said that the Gospel, the living book of God's mercy that must be continually read and reread, still has many blank pages left. It remains an open book that we are called to write in the same style, by the works of mercy we practice. . . . What are the pages of your books like? Are they blank? May the Mother of God help us in this. May she. . . give us the grace to be living writers of the Gospel."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mihaly CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, New York 1990, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> Martin S. HAGGER; Chantelle WOOD; Chris STIFF; and Nikos L.D. CHATZISARANTIS, "Ego Depletion and the Strength Model of Self-Control: A Meta-Analysis", in *Psychological Bulletin. American Psychological Association*, 136 (4): 495-525.

<sup>29</sup> Pope FRANCIS, Homily July 30, 2016, Shrine of St. John Paul.