

time and reasons to talk, not complaining... These efforts, simple but sometimes heroic, will make it clear that we care about people, that we never want to consider them as “expired” or “defective” objects, to be “replaced” when we no longer need them. A family that doesn’t give up in the face of difficulties, in which parents and children seek God’s help to know and want the good of others, is a great support for the Church and for society.

*What does the Prelate of the Work expect from Italy?*

That all of us in Opus Dei, by being faithful to the charism of St. Josemaría, let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit in a renewed evangelizing impetus. Not only in Italy, but in every country. We need to bring Christ’s warmth to many friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors and acquaintances. This evangelizing impulse in Italy is not so much a question of starting new activities or institutions like those already in existence, which in themselves are something very good and positive, but rather of fostering personal friendship, openness to everyone and a spirit of service. These are deeply evangelical attitudes that are essential for the Christian apostolate, while also being compatible with the defects and weaknesses we all have.

## “Sanctifying Everyday Work,” in *Studi Cattolici*, Italy (no. 686)

*A round table moderated  
by Maria Aparecida Ferrari*

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome hosted on October 19-20 a conference entitled *Quale anima per il lavoro professionale?* Among the speakers were professors Brad S. Gregory, University of Notre Dame (Indiana, U.S.); Benedetta Giovagnola, University of Macerata (Italy); Jens Zimmermann, Trinity Western University (Vancouver, Canada); Ana Marta González, University of Navarra (Spain); Brian Griffiths, Goldman Sachs International; Maria Chiara Carrozza, Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna of Pisa; and from the University organizing the event, Javier López Díaz, Santiago Sanz, and Martin Schlag. On October 21, Msgr. Fernando Ocariz, Prelate of Opus Dei and Chancellor of the University of the Holy Cross, answered some questions that the professors and other participants asked him about the sanctification of work, a central aspect of the spirit of Opus Dei. The roundtable moderator was Professor Maria Aparecida Ferrari.

*Prof. Maria Aparecida Ferrari: I would like to start by inviting Msgr. Ocariz to offer some remarks on the*

short video “*The Heart of Work*,” which we have just watched.

I think that almost all the basic elements of St. Josemaría’s message on the sanctification of work are present in the video. In first place, work as something that can be offered to God, which requires the effort to do it well. Secondly, the fact that all work is important, because its importance depends on the love with which it is done. And finally, service to others through work.

All these elements of the relationship between holiness and work are part of a broader framework: the universal call to holiness, a key theme in St. Josemaría’s teaching, which is a Gospel teaching. He always stressed that his message, the spirit of Opus Dei, is “as old and as new as the Gospel.” In his thought, his teachings and his life, the universal call to holiness does not just refer to the subjective aspect, meaning the statement that everyone is called to be a saint. That is true, unquestionably, but there is also an objective aspect in that call, in the sense that all the circumstances of ordinary life are a means, path, instrument, opportunity and matter of sanctification. The video that has just been shown ends with St. Josemaría saying: “On the horizon, my children, heaven and earth seem to merge, but no: where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives” (*Conversations*, no. 116).

I recall Roland Joffe’s film about St. Josemaría during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) [*There Be Dragons*, 2011], and specifically the scene where St. Josemaría receives light from God to found Opus Dei. At that point the film shows him writing the words “everyone” and “everything.” *Everyone* is called to holiness and *all human realities*, any honest activity, can and should be a path to holiness, an opportunity for meeting Christ.

Work holds a very important place in the sanctification of ordinary life. Not only because of the time we spend working, which is a lot, but especially because of its repercussions for the person who does the work and for other people. Work is a central part of the universal call to holiness. This is revealed by God’s plan for mankind as narrated in Genesis, right at the beginning of the Bible. There we learn that the world is characterized by its relationship with God, and that the creation of the first man and woman was oriented to forming a family – “increase and multiply” (*Gen* 1:28) – and to working: “*ut operaretur*, to work” (*Gen* 2:15). Work and the family, together with the relationship with God, are, so to speak, the pillars that support God’s plan for mankind.

The sanctification of work can be explained in different ways. St. Josemaría wrote in one of the points in *The Way*, “Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary

work and you will have sanctified it” (no. 359). This does not just mean adding on to one’s work a sort of external devotional adornment. It goes to the heart of the very purpose of the work: the why and wherefore that determines the way it is done.

The philosophers call this “why and wherefore” the “final cause” of human actions. Aristotle, as St. Thomas quotes him in Latin, says that the final cause is “*causa causalitatis in omnibus causis*” (*In I Sent.*, d.45, q.1, a.3), which means that the intrinsic finality of human activity determines the efficiency of the efficient cause and, through that, the formality and materiality of what is done. Therefore, the “supernatural motive” determines the fact of working and the way of working: it leads one to work and to work well, to accomplish a task that is done well.

So what is the “supernatural motive” that the sanctification of work depends on? It cannot be anything except love for God and, as an inseparable part of that love, service to others. Sanctifying work is just that: doing it for love of God and in order to serve other people, and that demands doing it well, “professionally,” as St. Josemaría often said. We have to work well, as we have just heard in the video, because “God will not accept shoddy workmanship” (*Friends of God*, no. 55). We cannot offer him things deliberately done badly — failing to look after the little details

and not seeking the perfection of the job being done.

When work is sanctified it contributes to the sanctification of the person who does it, and is an instrument to help in the sanctification of others. St. Josemaría united these three aspects in the phrase “sanctifying their work, sanctifying themselves in it, and sanctifying others through it” (*Conversations*, no. 55). The three are inseparable, because in order to work for love of God and as a service to others, and to do it well, one has to bring the virtues into play. Thus we grow in our spiritual life, both in the human virtues raised up by God’s grace, and in the theological virtues, above all in charity. Indeed, St. Josemaría used to say that work “is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 48). This is the root that enables work to be something truly holy and sanctifying.

Sanctifying others with our work requires setting an example of working well, and also friendship. St. Josemaría laid a lot of stress on this aspect of Christian apostolate, on friendship, because where there is real friendship people share their own spiritual experience and their personal commitment to Christ spontaneously and effectively, since what matters to one friend matters to the other.

Well, there’s a lot more that could be said about these topics,

but maybe that's enough for now. Other facets that are worthwhile considering may come up in the other points you raise.

*Prof. Santiago Sanz: In a study published a few years ago you stated that sanctifying work does not just mean doing something holy while working, but making the work itself holy: the action of working. In that way the person doing the work becomes holy. Is it also true to say that the object of the work, the thing itself, becomes holy in some way?*

What is holiness? It's a broad question, but one could say that holiness means belonging to God. We become holy in the measure in which, by our free response to grace, we belong to God. So the more we belong to God through our free response to his grace, the holier we are. As regards things, they become holy in the measure in which they are offered to God. The things of this world already belong to God, because he created them, but through human freedom they acquire a new dimension. Because of our freedom, work itself, including its material aspect, can become holy, can belong *more* to God.

We also need to consider the Christological dimension, which is essential in Christianity. The offering of work to God is always done through Christ; it is an exercise of the common priesthood, which consists of sharing in Christ's priesthood and is always exercised in Christ. The very fact of being

adoptive children of God is a "being in Christ," and for that reason sanctified work is always work done "in Christ." Sometimes, when he began work, St. Josemaría would say to Jesus, aloud or silently, "Let's do this together, the two of us." For us the only way to be united to God is through Christ. He is the Way, the only Mediator, and we can be mediators by bringing the world to God, including through work, in the measure in which we are "in Christ" and Christ's instruments.

*Prof. Pilar del Rio: What is the connection between the dimension of worship in Christian life, and the sanctification of work?*

I would say that the worship dimension of work consists basically in the exercise of the common priesthood. We are speaking of spiritual worship: offering work to God is an act of spiritual worship. St. Josemaría always highlighted the connection between offering up work and the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is the center and root of the spiritual life, and therefore of the sanctification of work.

Another major feature of his teaching which comes into this relationship is the unity of one's life. Working and participating in the Eucharist are done at different times, but they should be united in a Christian's life. How can we unite the Eucharist to our work? The strength to sanctify our work

and other daily activities comes ultimately from the Eucharist. All spiritual strength to work “with Christ and in Christ” comes from the Eucharist, which is the Sacrifice of our Redemption.

*Prof. Philip Goyret: In the renewal of ecclesiology in the 20th century the Church's mission was presented as saving not just souls, but the whole person: soul, body, relationships with other people and with everything in creation. In the task of bringing creation back to the Creator, the sanctification of work has great importance. I would like to know how you see this question from the ecclesiological point of view.*

To talk about an ecclesiological dimension, we first need to have an adequate understanding of the Church. If we follow the thought of the then Professor of Theology Joseph Ratzinger, we can consider the Church under three aspects. First, as the “people of God,” a special kind of people, but one with a true unity. A second way of defining the Church is as the “Body of Christ.” And the third way is as the “universal sacrament of salvation.” These three aspects express everything that the Church is. Ratzinger said, quite rightly, that out of these three, the one that defines the Church best is the Body of Christ. And it's not a metaphor, because in Christ we really do form a body, with a shared life, which is the Communion of Saints.

The ecclesiological dimension of the sanctification of work lies in

the Communion of Saints because, in the measure in which we are living members of the Body of Christ, sanctified work has a positive repercussion on the whole Body of the Church. Building up our personal holiness by sanctifying our work means that we are sanctifying the whole Church. At the same time, we each receive the positive effect of everyone else's holiness. I think that this is the most radical ecclesiological dimension.

The Communion of Saints also includes the part of the Church that is in Heaven. At the end of time, however, there will be a glorification. The real goal of sanctification is the glorification not only of the spirit but also of the body. There will be “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13) – new, not just a continuation of this world – and our bodies will be glorified. St. Thomas says that the body will be so transformed by glory that our bodily eyes will see God in his bodily effects, principally the glorified body of Christ (cf. *In IV Sent.*, d.48, q.2, a.1, c).

*Prof. Amalia Quevedo: I'm especially happy that you referred to Aristotle, since I have dedicated a large part of my life to Aristotle. According to him, “being is said in many ways.” I would like to know what you think about this Aristotelian way of seeing things, open to a plurality of meanings, and also whether it may be connected with an ability to distinguish what is essential from what is accidental.*



The diversity of meanings and the lack of univocal terminology is clear, in many ways, but we also need to avoid the relativism that is so widespread in present-day culture, which aims to limit truth to what can be verified experimentally. In everything else, relativism claims that there is no such thing as truth and all we can talk about are sensations and personal opinions. To take another angle, we are under pressure from the tendency that in its most explicit form goes back to Hegel: the claim that truth does not precede action but is the result of action. That is taken to its extreme by Marxism. We need to be quite clear that objective truth exists, however many instances there may be where there is no univocal term for a concept.

As to the distinction between what is essential and accidental, it is true that sometimes it may not be that clear, among other reasons because what is essential is manifested through what is accidental. What's more, there are accidental realities that are necessary, despite being accidental. The fact is that "accidental" isn't always the same as "superfluous," something that can be done without. What is accidental is simply what exists in another being, and there are things that exist in another being, in the essence, and that cannot be separated from it.

*Prof. Susan Hanssen: Professor Martin Schlag said yesterday that many people don't only work for*

*money but because of a mission they have freely taken on, guided by their own conscience before God. From another angle, Prof. Robert Gahl, in his presentation, showed the theatrical, dramatic nature of work done in the sight of God, who is our spectator. Would it be fair to say that according to St. Josemaría's teaching God watches us as a spectator while we work?*

Is God a spectator? If "spectator" is understood in the external sense, I think God is much more than just a spectator. In the deepest sense he is always a protagonist, even when we don't know or don't want to know it, because we depend on him for everything, he maintains us in existence. Moreover, speaking of the sanctification of work, God's presence is not only the presence of someone outside, to whom we offer what we do. God is with us and within us. We work with Christ and in Christ. St. Paul says, "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord" (*Rom* 14:8). So that our relationship with God is never the sort of relationship we might have with someone who just watches us. But if a "spectator" is understood not just as someone who observes from the outside, but in the sense in which within the Blessed Trinity the Father sees the Son and those who are "sons in the Son" (Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22), then yes, it is legitimate to speak in those terms.

*Prof Jose Ignacio Murillo: St. Josemaría teaches people to be contemplatives in their work. However, contemplation has an essentially intellectual dimension. So my question is: Is it possible to be contemplatives in intellectual work, which takes up the whole of one's attention?*

Contemplation is not only an act of the intellect. For St. Thomas, it is a "*simplex intuitus veritatis*" (cf. *S. Th.* II-II, q.180, a.3, ad 1), "*ex caritate procedens*" (cf. *In III Sent.*, d.35, q.1, a.2, sol.1): an intuitive, not discursive, vision of the truth—a grace from God—which proceeds from love. If intellectual work is motivated by love, since love can also be present in the work of the mind, then contemplation is possible in that work.

As we saw in the short video we have just watched, St. Josemaría talks about turning work into prayer. He does not mean that we have to be reciting vocal prayers while we work. Even when we aren't thinking about anything except the work we are doing, if we have offered it to God as spiritual worship and if we are with God, we can contemplate him in that work, if it is work that stems from charity.

*Prof. Rosario Polo: What is the quid divinum that St. Josemaría speaks of, the "something holy, hidden, that it is up to each one to discover" in order to turn work into prayer?*

The *quid divinum* (cf. *Conversations*, no. 114) has, I think, different

connotations, many different aspects. From the existential, personal point of view, I would say that discovering the *quid divinum* is mainly about discovering an expression of God's love for us in everything: in people, in circumstances, in the actual physical tasks, in the difficulties. St. John says, in a sort of summary of the Apostles' experience of their relationship with Christ, "We know and believe the love God has for us" (*I Jn* 4:16). Discovering the *quid divinum* means seeing others and God's creatures whom he loves; and also seeing in difficulties the hidden love of God for us, even when we don't understand the reason for a setback, because we need to believe in God's love, believe in what is not seen.

*Prof. Jose Luis Illanes: Work is a human activity, so that sanctifying work does not mean sanctifying "this table that I am making," but sanctifying my activity of making the table, although both aspects go together. The table in itself is always the same, independently of whether I make it with love or without it. So I wonder whether the fact of working well is the same as Christianizing things.*

It's true that sanctifying work and sanctifying oneself in one's work are two aspects that go together. Work is sanctified as the activity of the person who does it, and at the same time the world is brought closer to God. Sometimes the result of the work – "this table," as you put it – can be materially the

same whether it is made with love for God or without it. But material things give God glory through us. In that sense, a table made with love for God is not the same as one made without it. Even though materially it may be the same, I think that in its relationship with the rest of the world and with God, it's different.

*Prof. Maria Raffaella Dalla Valle: When we work with people who are different from ourselves, including people of other religions, how can we try to bring them closer to the faith?*

It depends on the person you are talking to. I think the first step has to be friendship. Rather than talking on the theoretical level, it's preferable to share your own personal experience, to talk about who God is for you. If there is genuine friendship, you'll get to the point where you can share ideas that will help the other person reflect too. And in every case, you need to pray, because faith is not something we can bestow by means of rational argument.

*Prof. Jose Tomas Martin de Agar: Talking of turning work into prayer, which is not merely adding vocal prayer to work, I remember what Benedict XVI said about prayer, when he described it as the profound orientation of the heart or the soul to God, which we can achieve in whatever we do; and he recalled in that context the "prayer of the heart" practiced especially by our brothers*

*and sisters in the Eastern churches. I wonder whether sanctifying work might mean making our work into the prayer of the heart.*

There comes to mind something St. Augustine says, with reference to the Gospel phrase about "*oportet semper orare et non deficere*" (Lk 18:1): the need to pray always and not lose heart. How is it possible to pray always? St. Augustine writes: "When we exercise faith and hope and charity, we pray always with our continuous desire" (Ep. 130 ad Probam, 9.18). In the measure in which we do things for love of God, it is already prayer. For our work to be prayer we don't have to be thinking about God while we work. Transforming it into prayer means offering it to God, doing it for love of God, and doing our best to finish it well.

*Prof Luis Manuel Calleja: I'd be grateful for some suggestions on work-related themes where St. Josemaría's teaching is particularly significant or innovative.*

A very important field today is the link between ethics and work: the sanctification of work and ethics. Working well isn't simply a matter of technique, because all human work always has an ethical dimension. In today's world, unfortunately, the ethical dimension is neglected in many professional spheres.

*Prof. Massimo De Angelis: I think you said previously that by sanctifying our work we also sanctify*



*the product of our work. What I am wondering is whether that means that through our work we somehow become co-redeemers of things and of the world.*

We should understand co-redeeming not as adding something to the Redemption accomplished by Christ, but as being channels for the fruits of his Redemption to reach other people. It is mainly about co-redeeming people, helping them through our work and the way we live our lives to come closer to God and to the means by which the fruits of his Redemption reach us — especially the Word of God and the Sacraments. This is the immediate, specific meaning of co-redemption: helping people to go to the sources of the fruits of the Redemption. Additionally, one can also speak of co-redeeming the material world, in an analogical sense, in so far as the material, structural things of the world can be a greater or lesser help to people in reaching God.

*Prof. Fabiana Cristofari: The place where I work is orientated towards working hard and producing an ever-greater output. I would like to ask you, what should be the starting-point for attaining the sanctifica-*

*tion of work, where working hard and well does not necessarily mean sanctifying one's work?*

The central question is undoubtedly one's personal relationship with God. Without that, without the conviction that there is a relationship with God that we have to nurture and develop in our work, the concept of sanctifying work doesn't hold any meaning. The starting-point needs to be one's own relationship with God.

*Prof. Maria Aparecida Ferrari: It is time to close this session. I think we can best do so by thanking St. Josemaría in the first place. With God's grace and through the intercession of this "saint of ordinary life," as St. John Paul II called him, each of us too can sanctify our daily life in all its aspects. I am grateful to Pope Francis for the words of encouragement he sent us, together with his blessing. And I would also like to thank especially our Grand Chancellor, Msgr. Ocáriz, who had honored us by being present in this session. Thank you, likewise, to all the people —organizers, technicians, translators— who have made this encounter possible by their discreet and effective work.*