

opusdei.org

"Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaria" (Volume 1)

Scepter publishers has just made available in English the first volume in a three-part work about the teachings of St. Josemaría on the vocation to holiness in ordinary life.

01/30/2018

This first of a three-volume work of spiritual theology provides a deeper, enriched presentation of the teaching of St. Josemaría on the vocation to holiness in ordinary life, as lived out by lay faithful and secular clergy.

Indexed and with extensive new quotations from the unpublished writings of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the present work is the first attempt to gather together systematically the whole of St. Josemaría's message about the sanctification of professional work and daily life.

Ernst Burkhardt(born in Vienna, 1945) and **Javier López**(born in Madrid, 1949) are priests of the Prelature of Opus Dei. Both have been theology professors at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. Burkhardt is the former vicar of Opus Dei in Austria. Both knew St. Josemaría Escrivá and lived in Rome with him in the 1970s.

The book is available from Scepter Publishers [here](#).

**Below is a brief excerpt from
Volume 1:**

Personal freedom is a dominant theme in the thought of St. Josemaría. Encouraging the exercise of freedom among the lay faithful is not a tactical alternative to directing them from above. On the contrary, encouraging personal freedom in matters of the apostolate shows respect for what is due to them as children of God, and in keeping with their call to sanctify temporal affairs. In *Conversations*, Escrivá repeatedly refers to freedom in carrying out the mission of the laity. In his mind, it is not a matter of the laity reclaiming their rightful autonomy with respect to the hierarchy in order to carry out their apostolate. He goes much deeper than this, both on the human and on the ecclesial plane.

A layman responds to his vocation only if he freely takes on the work that God entrusts to him. He will attain holiness if he carries out the apostolic mission he has received from Christ, and his efforts require Christian freedom on two counts: one is common to all the faithful and the other specific to the laity. In the common case, freedom is a demand of the dignity of the children of God; in the specific one, it regards the ecclesial mission proper to the laity, who are called to sanctify temporal activities *from within*. By their very nature, these activities can be carried out in various ways, although they should always be ordered to God.[1]

Hence, the lay person needs to have the freedom *to take, in the light of principles given by the Church, all the concrete, theoretical or practical decisions which he considers most appropriate and most in agreement with his own personal convictions and*

aptitudes. For example, decisions referring to different philosophical or political views, to different artistic or cultural trends, or to the problems of professional and social life.[2]

It is understandable that given the real threat of secularization, some would want to draw the Christian faithful together, not only on the basis of doctrinal principles, but also with respect to the means that ought to be used to confront these problems. This united stance may not only be fitting, but, in some circumstances, even necessary and urgent. The ecclesiastical hierarchy can “give its moral judgment even on matters referring to the political order when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls so demands.”[3] However, outside of such situations, pluralism on the part of the faithful in temporal matters is paramount.[4] This does not in any way imply dispersion or a lack of

unity. *One of the greatest dangers threatening the Church today may well be precisely that of not recognizing the divine requirements of Christian freedom and of being led by false arguments in favor of greater effectiveness to try to impose uniformity on Christians.*[5]

Escrivá also emphasizes the need to recognize the freedom of the laity in the very heart of the Church in how they live their spiritual life and, in consequence, *the right to do apostolate, to found and direct associations, to give their opinion responsibly on matters which affect the common good of the Church.*[6]

The three points we have explained, frame the teaching of St. Josemaría in the context of this first period in the process of evolution of the laity, a period which was characterized by the hierarchy actively directing the apostolate of the laity with a top-

down approach.[7] To the historian François-Xavier Guerra, Escrivá's teaching can be summed up in the recognition of the primacy of the person vis-à-vis society (i.e., the anthropological view that includes issues such as man's personal vocation to holiness, divine filiation and the value of work), and in the sensitivity to the value of freedom (which includes the issue of the specific mission of the laity).[8]

Concurrent to the hierarchical efforts to promote the lay apostolate and interconnected to them, there is a development of a theology of the laity, though along somewhat different lines of reflection than the ones that characterize St. Josemaría's thought. He never mentions any of these theologians in his works, nor does he take part in the debate. Thus, our analysis cannot make use of explicit references regarding the topic. However, we can point out

similarities and dissimilarities, comparing the different ideas in order to contextualize St. Josemaría's thought from a theological point of view.

Developments in the Theology of the Laity up to Vatican Council II

The hierarchical efforts to promote the mission of the laity engendered a positive notion of the layperson as a member of the Church with his or her own proper and specific mission, and no longer simply viewed as a “non-priest” or “non-religious.” We will now consider only the most salient points that, in our judgment, further advanced these ideas.

The first point of considerable relevance was a debate on the so-called “mystical question” in the early part of the twentieth century. Although this point does not deal with the laity as such, it will have an influence over it. The key point here

was whether one could speak about a universal call to contemplation that characterizes mystical union with God. Auguste Saudreau, in his *Les degrés de la vie spirituelle* (1896), defends the universal call to the mystical life. His position is criticized by the Jesuit Augustin-François Poulain, who, in his *Des grâces d'oraison* (1901), argues that this position obscures the gratuitous nature of mystical experiences. Other authors who were experts on the topic of “asceticism and mysticism” entered into the discussion, including Juan Gonzalez-Arintero and Reginal Garrigou-Lagrange as well as Joseph De Guibert.^[9] The terms of the controversy were not always clear, and yet, overall, “[b]oth the scientific and practical aspects of these matters raised interest beyond [the context of] the consecrated life in which it had almost exclusively been placed up to that moment.”^[10] Weighing in

on whether everyone is called to contemplation, these authors spoke about the universal call to holiness, and, in a certain way, included the laity in their studies.

St. Josemaría does not refer directly to this debate, but he maintains that contemplation is a gift that God offers to all his children, precisely because it is part of the life of a son of God in Christ. In his message, the terms “sanctity,” “filiation,” and “contemplation” are essential aspects of the Christian life. In proclaiming the universal call to holiness, he describes sanctity as *the fullness of divine filiation*;[11] and in speaking about the ineffable gift received at Baptism, he asserts that this seed is destined to grow through contemplation. *Our being children of God, I insist, leads us to have a contemplative spirit in the midst of all human activities.*[12]

Another line of theological reflection that profoundly influences the understanding of the vocation of the laity is the common priesthood of the faithful. Beginning in the fifth century, the concept of the common priesthood of the faithful had weakened, even though it continued to be present in theological inquiries. [13] The Reformation had overly emphasized it at the expense of denying the ministerial priesthood. After this position was refuted by the Council of Trent, subsequent Catholic theology tended to reserve the term “priesthood” to refer to the ministerial priesthood.[14] The concept of the common priesthood of the faithful reappears in the nineteenth century in the works of Johann Adam Möhler and John Henry Newman. Later, in the context of the theological studies surrounding the pastoral phenomenon of Catholic Action and the teachings of Popes Pius XI and

Pius XII in the first half of the twentieth century, Paul Dabin stressed that the laity “also have their priesthood in a sense that must be clarified.”[15] The same author tried to elucidate this idea in a major work published in 1950.[16] This topic would be formulated more precisely and authentically some years later at the Second Vatican Council.[17]

In the teaching and writings of St. Josemaría, the common priesthood of the faithful is so important that we will often refer to it in these pages. For him it is a joyful truth that *all of us who are baptized share in Christ’s priesthood.*[18] The laity have to actualize this priesthood *in the sanctification of the world ab intra, from the very heart of civil society.*[19] In being configured to Christ at Baptism by the gift of the Holy Spirit, they have been made adopted children of God and sharers in the

priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, their whole life — but especially the charity infused in them by the same Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5) — should take on a deep filial and priestly meaning. Escrivá often speaks about the *priestly soul* that must be accompanied by a *lay mentality* (in the case of those called to sanctify themselves in the middle of the world), precisely because temporal affairs are the field where they exercise their priesthood.

[1] This theme is central in the article, “Las riquezas de la fe,” published in *ABC*, Madrid, November 2, 1969. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 36 refers to the “autonomy” proper to temporal realities, and *Lumen Gentium* recalls that “it must be admitted that the temporal sphere is governed by its own principles, since

it is rightly concerned with the interests of this world” (no. 36). The sanctification of temporal activities “not only does not deprive the temporal order of its independence [...] but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and worth” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 7). See Elisabeth Reinhardt, “*La legítima autonomía de las realidades temporales*,” *Romana* 15 (1992) 323-335.

[2] *Conversations*, no. 12.

[3] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 76.

[4] “If Christians must ‘recognize the legitimacy of differing points of view about the organization of worldly affairs’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 75), they are also called to reject, as injurious to democratic life, a conception of pluralism that reflects moral relativism. Democracy must be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical

principles, which are the underpinning of life in society” (*Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Public Life*, November 24, 2002, no. 3: AAS 96 (2004) 362).

[5] *Conversations*, no. 59.

[6] *Conversations*, no. 14.

[7] Besides M. Fazio’s article, *Pax Christi in regno Christi*, for studies on the historical context, see Jaume Aurell, “El ambiente intelectual de la España de comienzos de siglo y su influjo en Josemaría Escrivá,” in *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, Vol. 2, pp. 7-36; Gonzalo Redondo, “El 2 de octubre de 1928 y la crisis de la cultura de la Modernidad,” in *Trabajo y espíritu: Sobre el sentido del trabajo desde las enseñanzas de Josemaría Escrivá en el contexto del pensamiento contemporáneo* (Pamplona 2004), pp. 203-221; idem, “El 2 de octubre de 1928 en el

contexto de la historia cultural contemporánea,” in *Cuadernos del Centro de Documentación y Estudios Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer* 6 (2002) 149-191.

[8] See François-Xavier Guerra, “Josemaría Escrivá, le chrétien et la cité,” in *La grandezza della vita quotidiana*, Vol. 2, pp. 60-81. The article includes an interesting analysis of the language of Josemaría Escrivá by quantifying the terms he uses and studying their various meanings. It concludes that “by his insistence on the person and his rights, his vision of society as a relational network constantly modified by the action of all of its members, and his rejection of all clericalism that would limit the temporal action of Christians, the conception of Josemaría Escrivá is profoundly original for his day” (ibid., p. 90).

[9] See Manuel Belda and Javier Sesé, *La cuestión mística* (Pamplona 1998); Atanasio Matanic, *La spiritualità come scienza. Introduzione metodologica allo studio della vita spirituale* (Rome 1990). On this polemic in the theological environment of Spain, see Federico María Requena, *Espiritualidad en la España de los años veinte: Juan G. Arinterro y la revista “La vida sobrenatural,” 1921-1928* (Pamplona 1999).

[10] Javier Sesé, *Historia de la espiritualidad* (Pamplona 2005), p. 281.

[11] *Letter, February 2, 1945*, no. 8.

[12] *The Forge*, n. 740. Also see *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 65.

[13] See St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 20.10; St. Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.* III, q. 63, a. 3; q. 82, a. 1, ad 2.

[14] Council of Trent, *Session XXIII, Doctrine of the Sacrament of Holy Orders*, Chapter 4: DS 1767.

[15] Paul Dabin, *Le sacerdoce royal des fidèles dans la tradition ancienne et moderne* (Paris 1950), p. 8. The affirmation is prior to 1945. It also predates Pius XII's encyclical, *Mediator Dei* (November 20, 1947), which speaks about this teaching. See Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, “*El debate teológico sobre la secularidad cristiana (1930-1990)*,” in *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 13 (2004) 154. This article recalls that Dabin had published years earlier *Le sacerdoce royal des fidèles dans les Livres saints* (Paris 1941). Other authors dealing with this subject include Léonard Audet, “Notre participation au sacerdoce du Christ: étude sur le caractère sacramental,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 1/1 (1945) 9-46 and 1/2 (1945) 110-130; and Lucien Cerfaux, “Regale

sacerdotium,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 18 (1939) 5-39.

[16] See P. Dabin, *Le sacerdoce royal des fidèles dans la tradition ancienne et moderne*, pp. 51-52.

[17] See *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10.

[18] *The Forge*, no. 882.

[19] *Letter, February 14, 1950*, no. 20.

.....

pdf | document generated
automatically from [https://
dev.opusdei.org/en-ke/article/ordinary-
life-and-holiness-in-the-teaching-of-st-
josemaria/](https://dev.opusdei.org/en-ke/article/ordinary-life-and-holiness-in-the-teaching-of-st-josemaria/) (08/11/2025)