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The Caring Professions in Saint Josemaria's Teachings on Work

Some excerpts from a Study by
María Pía Chirinos that will
appear in the next issue of
"Romana," the bulletin of the
Prelature of Opus Dei.

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The author of this Study, María Pía Chirinos, has a doctorate in philosophy and is a specialist in the anthropology of work. Currently she

is director of the department of Institutional Relationships and Strategic Projects at the University of Piura in Peru. Below are some excerpts from this Study for Romana 70, which will soon be available in English both in published format and online.

In the message on the sanctification of work spread by St. Josemaría, the caring professions occupy a privileged position and provide access to the core themes of Opus Dei's spirituality. His teachings have a prophetic character, shedding light on the current challenges facing the caring professions and the value of the service they provide...

The caring professions, especially domestic work and nursing, offer deeply human values that challenge today's highly technological society. The recent health care crisis due to COVID-19 makes clear that many of

us can intone a *mea culpa* for the scant interest shown in these professions and the lack of recognition of the role they play in making our lives more human. Not so St. Josemaría, for as we shall see many people working in these *caring professions* have benefited from the founder of Opus Dei's teachings and direct support in confronting the challenges presented there. Escrivá's contributions will be seen as even more relevant after considering and contextualizing the current prominence given to the need to care for others...

St. Josemaría frequently refers to the goodness of creation and Adam's task in the Garden of Eden, where God placed him with the mandate to "dominate it" (*Gen 1:28*) and to "till and care for it" (*Gen2:15*). We see here a first and original reference to the care of nature as a task entrusted by the Creator to the human being.

“Caring,” Francis affirmed in his first homily as Pontiff, “also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone. It means protecting all creation.”...

Voices such as those of Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard Sennett seek to reclaim the value of manual work and to recover what they call the spirit of the craftsman. This is exemplified in the medieval artisan who, besides growing personally through carrying out his trade, puts great effort and care into the material that is worked, and thus is inserted in a tradition and a community on which he depends. Personal fulfillment, cooperation with others and care for the material and vulnerable through manual and daily work: these are values that can also be applied to intellectual work...

As regards domestic work, we see how St. Josemaría describes it as a

“true profession,” and how during his lifetime he encouraged the start of dozens of centers of professional formation for domestic workers throughout the world, also in countries where this training often wasn’t viewed as important. He pointed to the “great human and Christian role” of this work and its high dignity and social impact. The home “is a particularly propitious environment for the growth of one’s personality,” and the effort to create a healthy home environment is a way of caring for human life in its bodily dimension, with a strong impact on a person’s psychic life as well. work. All work should be understood as a trade or *craft*, carried out with a sense of craftsmanship and with a deeper human and social imprint and a less technological and individualistic one...

In the 1930s in Spain, nurses for the most part were nuns dedicated to the care of the sick, with the basic preparation provided in those times. St. Josemaría was well aware of this when he went to care for the sick in the hospitals of Madrid as a priest. Moreover, as he himself recounted, it was precisely the nurses who asked for this assistance and opened the way for the spiritual care of the sick who were far removed from the faith. This experience was fundamental for a pioneering initiative: the beginning of the School of Nursing at the University of Navarre in 1954...

Why call it “pioneering” if it was not the first school of nursing in Spain? But it may well deserve the label because of the vision with which it was launched, which also included the study of medicine. St. Josemaría advised that both careers should begin being offered at the same time:

not one first (medicine) and then the other (or vice versa). And this view was pioneering because he recognized the rich value of this academic and practical coexistence for doctors and nurses. I would venture to say that in the mind of the founder of the University of Navarre, not only was he very clear about the desirability of promoting from the outset a fundamental aspect of the health professions – collaborative practice between inter-professional teams – but above all the importance of doctors understanding in all its depth, value and effectiveness the care provided by nurses for the sick (not only care for their bodies but also, as we shall see, for their souls)...

Responding to a nurse during one of the large gatherings he held in Spain in the 1970s, St. Josemaría said the following: “Many Christian nurses are needed. Because your work is a priesthood, even more so than that of

doctors. I wanted to say more than, because of your great refinement (forgive me for being so ‘mushy’) and your nearness, because you are always so close to the sick... So being a nurse is a particular Christian vocation. But for this vocation to be perfected, you need to be nurses with an in-depth technical preparation, and then you need to have a very great refinement.” ...

The scenes we have all witnessed during these months of the pandemic, the loneliness of so many sick people when dying, help us to appreciate the timeliness of these words. Thanks to the human and Christian consolation of women – and, in recent years, also of professional and empathetic men – many COVID-19 patients have not died alone...

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