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Professional Prestige

"A Christian's professional prestige does not necessarily involve success. The prestige that draws souls to God comes from the Christian virtues enlivened by charity." A new article in the series on sanctifying work.

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"The Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate."[1] As with the first disciples, Christ has called us to follow him and to bring him souls:

follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.[2]

Basing himself on this comparison of our Lord's, St. Josemaría teaches that professional standing has a part to play in God's plan for those who have been called to help sanctify others with their work. It is an important means of apostolate, "your 'bait' as a 'fisher of men'."[3] Therefore he encourages us: "You too have a professional vocation which 'spurs' you on. Well, that 'spur' is the hook to fish for men. Rectify your intention, then, and be sure you acquire all the professional prestige you can for the service of God and of souls. The Lord counts on *this* too."[4]

Prestige and humility

God created all things "to show forth and communicate his glory."[5] By making our work a participation in his creative power, he wanted it to reflect his glory. *Let your light so*

shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.[6] The sanctification of our professional work requires that we carry it out as perfectly as possible, for love of God, so that it becomes a light that draws those around us to him.

We should not seek our own glory, but the glory of God, as the Psalm prays: *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam;*[7] not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name give glory. How many opportunities we have to repeat these words! "*Deo omnis gloria. All glory to God' . . . Our vainglory would be just that: vain glory; it would be sacrilegious robbery. There should be no room for that 'I' anywhere.*"[8]

We will often need to rectify our intention. But we cannot be shy in seeking professional prestige because of a fear of vainglory or

pride, since it is a quality required by the apostolic mission proper to lay people. The Church's Magisterium reminds us that lay people "will keep the laws proper to each discipline, and labor to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields."[9] "The lay faithful must accomplish their work with professional competence, with human honesty, and with a Christian spirit, and especially as a way of their own sanctification."[10]

It is worthwhile meditating on St. Josemaría's words: "As our sanctity hinges on our work, we will need to achieve prestige in our profession, and each will attain, in their own job and social sphere, the dignity and good name they have won by their merits, gained in honest competition with their professional colleagues.

"Our humility doesn't entail being timid and shy, or lacking in daring in

the noble field of human endeavor. With a supernatural spirit and a desire to serve—with a Christian spirit of service—we must strive to be among the first among our peers.

"Some people without a genuine lay outlook on life understand humility as a lack of confidence, a kind of indecision that impedes action, a waiving of rights (sometimes even the rights of truth and justice) in order to avoid friction and disagreements and to be nice to everyone. Thus there will be some who won't understand our way of living a deep—and genuine—humility; they may even call it pride. The Christian concept of this virtue has been much deformed, possibly because of attempting to live it within secular society in ways more suited to convents than to Christians called to be at the crossroads of the world."[11]

Out of love for God and souls

A Christian's professional prestige does not necessarily involve success. Certainly, human triumph is like a light that attracts people. But if on drawing close to a person who has triumphed people fail to find an authentic Christian, a humble person in love with God, but rather someone filled with presumption and conceit, then what *The Way* depicts may happen: "From afar, you attract; you have light. From near by, you repel; you lack warmth. What a pity!"[12]

The prestige that draws souls to God comes from the Christian virtues enlivened by charity. It is the prestige of a person who is hard-working and competent, just, cheerful, noble and loyal, honest, friendly, sincere, ready to serve.... These are virtues that can be accompanied both by success as well as human failure. It is the prestige of a person who develops

these qualities day after day out of love for God and others.

St. Josemaría wrote: "Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love."[13] The same can be said of the prestige attained in work. It is "born of love," because this must be the reason for seeking it, and not vanity or self-adulation. It is "a manifestation of love," because a Christian with professional prestige needs to stand out for a spirit of service. And it is "directed toward love," because prestige must not be made the goal of work, but rather a means to draw souls to God, in specific and daily ways.

Professional achievement that bears no apostolic fruit is a sterile achievement, a light that does not cast light. Our prestige, St. Josemaría insisted, must be a fisherman's hook, and could someone be called a

fisherman if he doesn't fish? It is not a jewel to be admired and carefully preserved, like a miser gloating over his treasure, but rather a jewel to be invested fearlessly in God's service.

We are not unaware of the risks. We know that some people may approach us drawn by our professional prestige, but draw back if we speak to them about God, and from then on fail to appreciate us as before. And we also know that certain clubs, groups or influential societies may open their doors to prestigious professionals, offering personal contacts and mutual support, on the condition of not revealing one's own faith. Thus they implicitly accept the viewpoint that religion ought to be confined to the private sphere. These people may try to justify this attitude by appealing to respect for freedom. But by excluding the possibility of truth in religious matters they undermine

both truth and freedom, and deny in practice our Lord's words: *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*[14] These aggressively secularist organizations, where it is *prohibited* (the choice of this word reflects the reality of the situation) to speak about God and therefore to do apostolate, seem to be trying to make it impossible for Christians to be present, by obliging them to leave their faith at the door like their hat.

Our reaction can't be to isolate ourselves from others. Rather we need to launch out in a more daring apostolate, with the eagerness and joy of God's children, who have received this world as an inheritance, in order to take possession and restore order to it. We need to undertake a deep apostolate of friendship and trust, capable of creating open and free environments, far removed from fanatical aversion to the faith, where

it is possible to dialogue and work in cooperation with all people of good will who are seeking to build a society in accord with the human person's transcendent dignity. Although the goal is a demanding one, it cannot be renounced. We need to use the professional prestige we gain to leaven society with a Christian spirit.

In all ambits of work

During his years in Nazareth, *Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.*^[15] The Gospel also tells us that he was known as *the carpenter.*^[16] So we can easily deduce that our Lord enjoyed great prestige in his work.

In his daily work as a carpenter, without any extraordinary signs, his fellow citizens saw him grow not only in age, but also in wisdom and in favor. How many small deeds of service these words reflect! In his

manner of attending to people, of receiving their requests and carrying them out with professional skill, practicing justice together with charity, working with order and intensity, resting and trying to see that others rested. People perceived, in his serenity, his peace, his cheerfulness, and in all his deeds, something that attracted them, that led them to want to speak with him, to confide in him, to follow his example: the example of someone who was so human and so divine, who radiated love for God and love for men, who made them feel they were both in heaven and on earth, and who encouraged them to be better. How different the world would be, many of them would think, if we tried to be like Jesus in our work! How different life would be in the city or in the fields!

The growth of Jesus in age, wisdom and favor, the progressive

manifestation of the fullness of divine life that imbued his human nature from the moment of the Incarnation, took place in work as ordinary as that of a carpenter.

"Before God, no occupation is in itself great or small. Everything gains the value of the Love with which it is done."[17] Professional prestige, in the end, comes from making manifest the love with which work is carried out. It is a quality of the person, not of the job that is done. It does not consist in having a "prestigious" profession in the eyes of men, but in carrying out any profession, whether outstanding or not, in a prestigious way.

From a human perspective, certainly some jobs are viewed as more outstanding than others, such as those that involve exercising authority in society, or that have a more direct influence on the culture, or greater repercussion in the media,

in the world of sports, etc. Precisely for this reason (because these jobs enjoy greater esteem and have more influence on society), those who carry them out have a greater need for a prestige that is not only "technical" but also moral: a Christian professional prestige. It is of vital importance that the children of God attain this prestige when carrying out these activities, on which in great measure the tone of society depends.

Since normally it is "intellectuals" who carry out these types of jobs, "we have to try to ensure that in all fields of intellectual activity there are upright people, people with a true Christian conscience, who are consistent in their lives, who can use the weapons of knowledge in the service of humanity and of the Church."[18] St. Josemaría had this very much in mind when he wrote, explaining the apostolic work of

Opus Dei: "Christ himself has chosen us, so that in the middle of the world (in which he has placed us and from which he hasn't wanted to separate us) each of us may strive for sanctity in our own state. And so that (showing with the testimony of our life and words that the calling to sanctity is universal) we may foster among people of every social condition, and especially among intellectuals, Christian perfection within the very heart of civil society."[19]

Our Lady carried out a marvelous work of service to Jesus, doing so with such great humility, wisdom and love that we invoke her as Handmaid of the Lord, Seat of Wisdom, Mother of Fair Love.

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- [1] Vatican Council II, Decr. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.
- [2] *Mk* 1:17.
- [3] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 372.
- [4] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 491.
- [5] Cf. Vatican Council I, Dogm. Const. *Dei Filius*, canon 5.
- [6] *Mt* 5:16.
- [7] *Ps* 115 (113 b), 1.
- [8] *The Way*, no. 780.
- [9] Vatican Council II, Past. const. *Gaudium et spes*, no. 43.
- [10] John Paul II, Apost. Ex. *Christifideles laici*, December 30, 1988, no. 43.
- [11] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, May 6, 1945, nos. 30-31.
- [12] *The Way*, no. 459.

[13] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 48.

[14] *Jn* 8:32.

[15] *Lk* 2:52.

[16] *Mk* 6:3.

[17] *Furrow*, no. 487.

[18] *The Forge*, no. 636.

[19] St. Josemaría, *Letter*, February 14, 1944, no. 1.