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"In Spirit and Truth": Creating Unity of Life (I)

Unity of life is an essential feature of the spirit of Opus Dei. This article by Guillaume Derville, in 2 parts, explains what this means in practical terms.

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God wants worshippers *in spirit and truth* (Jn 4:24), Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in their dialogue at the well at Sychar. The whole of

Christian existence is a call to adore God the Father (cf. *Jn* 4:23), so that God's light may reach every corner of our life. This is the spiritual worship (cf. *Rom* 12:1) by which we become living temples of God, living stones in his temple (cf. *1 Pet* 2:5).

“Make an altar of your heart,”^[1] says Saint Peter Chrysologus. In order for our heart to become an altar, we need to do more than just give things; we need to give ourselves.

Everything in our life has to be purified, in deep union with the gift that is truly pleasing to God: the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, little by little, unity of life is built up, and the split that sin has opened between faith and life is overcome. Without becoming discouraged by the difficulties that arise, we discover the marvelous reality that if we take refuge in the eternal love of our triune God, whose presence

illuminates our entire life, everything contributes to our good.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light (Mt 6:22). If we have a right intention, directed towards God and other people in him, then all our actions will be ordered towards the good, in “a unity of life that is simple and strong.”^[2] For “everything can and should lead to God.”^[3] But often we may forget this truth. Therefore in the area of spiritual development, the formation given to the faithful of the Work tries to develop unity of life, which is an essential characteristic of the spirit of Opus Dei. This growing unity progressively strengthens our identity as children of God in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who vivifies everything through the gift of charity and spurs us to seek holiness and apostolate in our daily endeavors.

Jesus' unity of life

Our unity of life is “built on the presence of God our Father.”[4] Through the action of the Holy Spirit, it is “a participation in the supreme unity of the divine and the human that was made a reality in the Incarnation of the Son of God.”[5] Christ is the “source of unity and peace.”[6] He is always united to his Father, and prays that he will sanctify us in truth (cf. *Jn* 17:19). His food is to do the will of the Father (cf. *Jn* 4:34). Everything in his life is directed to this mission, right from his Incarnation (cf. *Heb* 10:5-7) to when he goes up to Jerusalem to suffer, walking ahead of his disciples with the haste of love (cf. *Lk* 19:28). His miracles confirm his words, and the crowds acclaim loudly: *he has done all things well* (*Mk* 7:37).

Saint Josemaria often saw in this exclamation of popular acclaim, *bene*

omnia fecit, not only Christ's miracles that amazed so many people, but also the fact that he "finished everything well, he did nothing that wasn't good."[7] In our Lord's life, consecration and mission form a single perfect unity.

"You cannot separate the fact that Christ is God from his role as Redeemer. The Word became flesh and came into the world to save all men" (1 Tim 2:4).[8] Thus the words from Isaiah that Jesus proclaimed in the synagogue at Nazareth can be perfectly applied to himself: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me...* (Lk 4:18, cf. Is 61:1). Jesus is perfect God and perfect Man, who during his earthly life possessed perfect unity of life and who "by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear."[9]

He makes clear to each person their calling to be reconciled with God, and to joyfully spread this message of reconciliation to the portion of the world that God has entrusted to them (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-19).

The split between faith and daily life

Even though already achieved once and for all in the Person of our Lord, this personal and social reconciliation is still progressing towards its fullness, towards Christ. As in the times of the Second Vatican Council, “the split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. Long since, the Prophets of the Old Testament fought vehemently against this scandal and even more so did Jesus Christ himself in the New Testament threaten it with grave punishments.”^[10] *No one can serve*

two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other (Mt 6:24).

The fragmented life that many people fall into, both believers and non-believers alike, leads to a lack of harmony and peace that undermines a person's equilibrium. This is hardly surprising, given that "ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action and morals."[11]

Unity of life is crucial for everyone, and in a special way for lay people, for as Saint John Paul II teaches in *Christifideles laici*, everything in their life should be an opportunity for union with God and service to others. [12] The professional work of Christians should be consistent with their faith. "Nonsectarianism.

Neutrality. Old myths that always try to seem new. Have you ever stopped to think how absurd it is to leave one's Catholicism aside upon entering a university, a professional association, a cultural society, or Parliament, like a man leaving his hat at the door?"[13]

These words have particular relevance today. God cannot be left to one side by the secularism that sets itself up as a sort of religion without God. Pope Francis invites us "to look at our cities with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares. God's presence accompanies the sincere efforts of individuals and groups to find encouragement and meaning in their lives. He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity, and the desire for goodness, truth and justice. This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered. God

does not hide himself from those who seek him with a sincere heart.”[14]

Joyful amid the storm

Sealed by the Cross in their Baptism, Christians have always been acquainted with persecution.

“Christ’s whole life was lived under the sign of persecution. His own share it with him (cf. *Jn* 15:20).”[15]

Faced with the possibility of exile, Saint John Chrysostom, the great preacher from the East, didn’t lose hope: “Many are the waves, and threatening are the storms, which surround me; but I fear them not; for I am standing on the Rock. Let the sea roar, it cannot wash me away from the Rock. Let the billows mount as they will; they cannot sink the Barque of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And tell me, what would you have me fear? Death? *To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil 1:21)*. Exile?

The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Ps 23:1). Confiscation of my goods? We brought nothing into this world, and certainly we can carry nothing out (1 Tim 6:7). No, the evils of this world are contemptible, and its goods deserve but to be laughed at. I fear not poverty, I desire not riches; I neither fear to die, nor wish to live, save for your advantage. Your interest alone induces me to speak of these things, and to ask you, by the love you bear me, to take courage.”[16]

The dangers of dispersion that the world presents should never discourage us. Saint Augustine, a contemporary of St John Chrysostom, urged Christians to rejoice rather than lament: “How then can you think that the past ages were better than your own? From the time of that first Adam to the time of his descendants today, man's lot has been labor and sweat, thorns and

thistles. Have we forgotten the flood and the calamitous times of famine and war whose history has been recorded precisely in order to keep us from complaining to God on account of our own times? Just think what those past ages were like! Is there one of us who does not shudder to hear or read of them? Far from justifying complaints about our own time, they teach us how much we have to be thankful for.”[17]

There may be wars, epidemics, new forms of poverty, and persecution (both the crudest kind coming from fundamentalism that claims religious inspiration, and more subtle forms from secularism that can become just as fundamentalist—for example, in the obstacles constructed in some Western countries against conscientious objection). But our trust in God can overcome all difficulties, with a hope that does not disappoint us because it is born of

Love (cf. *Rom* 5:5). We are called to glorify God in the depth of our heart, where he unifies everything with the overpowering force of his Love, enabling us to give a reason for our hope (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15): Christ lives in us.

“Omnia in bonum”

Sixteen centuries after Saints John Chrysostom and Augustine, Saint Josemaria said with great optimism: “You should always hear in your hearts this cry that is engraved on my heart: *omnia in bonum!*

Everything is for the good! Saint Paul gives us this lesson of serenity, joy, peace, and filiation towards God: because God loves us as a most wise and all-powerful Father: *omnia in bonum!* (cf. *Rom* 8:28).”[18]

And Don Alvaro commented: “When the Father [Saint Josemaria] wrote this *Instruction* in 1941, the great tragedy of the Spanish Civil War had

just ended, and the Second World War had begun. The situation was truly apocalyptic. And in the Church as well, the behavior of some people was producing great gashes and wounds. Spain, which had come out of the civil war bloodied and destroyed, now faced the danger of getting involved in a much worse war. And the Father faced the possibility of once again being alone—as he had been in the Spanish conflict—with all his sons spread out on different battlefronts or in prisons.”[19]

Part of our unity of life is to love the place and time in which God has put us. It is a marvelous challenge to be able to work in and improve this world, while having our heads in heaven. Creation and redemption are dynamically being realized right here, today and now, when we strive to understand and love our world with creative optimism. Saint

Josemaria warned us against “vain and childish dreams”[20] and “mystical wishful thinking.”[21] Whatever our surroundings, we try to show ourselves as we really are. “In presenting ourselves as we are, as ordinary citizens—each shouldering our own family, professional, social and political responsibilities—we are not feigning anything. This way of acting is not a strategy or tactic. It is just the opposite: it is naturalness, sincerity; it is showing the truth of our life and our vocation. We are ordinary people.”[22]

God wants us to be in this world

In the present day and age we are witnesses to grave disorders that show the action of the devil in this world. “Every age of history contains critical elements,” the Pope said, “but in the last four centuries, we have never seen the fundamental

certainties that make up human life so shaken as in our time . . . It is a change that concerns the very way in which humanity keeps its existence in the world going.”[23]

Similarly Saint Josemaria, upon seeing this decadence coming, proclaimed prophetically: “One hears a resounding *non serviam* (*Jer 2:20*), ‘I will not serve,’ in people’s personal life, in the family, in the workplace, and in public life. The three concupiscences (cf. *1 Jn 2:16*) act as three gigantic forces unleashing a powerful whirlwind of lust, the vain pride of the creature in its own strength, and the craving for riches. An entire civilization is tottering, helpless and morally bankrupt.”[24]

Our love for the world does not prevent us from seeing what is not going well, what needs purification, what needs transformation. We must accept reality just as it is, with its

lights and shadows. This means being in tune with what is going on, knowing the problems people have today, being in contact with many people, reading and listening. There is no better place for us to love God than the world in which he has called us to live. We put our trust in the prayer Jesus made to his Father: *I do not pray that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one (Jn 17:15).*

Since we love this world, which is *the right one*, just as it is, for our sanctification and our friendship with others, we appeal to Jesus to make it better, to transform it, through our own conversion day after day. Our Lady brought up Jesus amid their ordinary life in the home in Nazareth; and now Mary, dedicated entirely to her mission to be our Mother, helps Jesus grow in our ordinary life. She helps us to ponder every event in our heart (cf.

Lk 2:51), so as to discover the presence of God who calls us each day. “My children, I repeat, we are ordinary people. And when we work in temporal realities, we do so because that is our place; it is the place where we find Christ, right where our vocation has put us.”^[25] It is there that the light in our soul shines forth, reflecting God’s eternal goodness. And, with this light, God illuminates the whole world.

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[1] Saint Peter Chrysologus, Sermon 108: PL 52, 499-500.

[2] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 10. Cf. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Mt 6:22).

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 11.

[5] I. de Celaya, “Unidad de Vida,” in *Diccionario de San Josemaria*, Monte Carmelo & Instituto Historico San Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, Burgos 2013, p. 1222.

[6] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), no. 9.

[7] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 16.

[8] *Christ is Passing By*, no. 106.

[9] Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), no. 22.

[10] *Ibid.*, no. 43.

[11] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 407.

[12] Cf. Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988) nos. 17 and 59.

[13]*The Way*, no. 353.

[14] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 September 2013), no. 71.

[15]*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 530.

[16] Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily of the Liturgical Year*, Vol. III, pp. 421-3 (Dom Prosper Gueranger).

[17] Saint Augustine, *Homily, Sermo Caillau-Saint Yves 2*, 92:PLS 2, 441-552. In *Office of Readings for Wednesday of the 20th Week of Ordinary Time*.

[18]*Instruccion*, 8 December 1941, no. 34.

[19] Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, note 48 to the *Instruccion*, 8 December 1941, no. 34.

[20]*Friends of God*, no. 8.

[21]*Conversations*, no. 88. Also cf. S. Sanz, “L’ottimismo creazionale di san Josemaria,” in J. Lopez (ed.) *San Josemaria el il pensiero teologico, Atti del Convegno Teologico*, vol. 1, Edusc, Rome 2014, p. 230. Also “Epílogo. Unidad de vida,” in E. Burkhart & J. López, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría: estudio de teología espiritual*, vol. 3, Rialp, Madrid 2013, pp. 617-653.

[22]*Letter*, 19 March 1954, no. 27.

[23] Pope Francis, Speech, 22 September 2013.

[24]*Letter*, 14 February 1974, no. 10.

[25]*Letter*, 19 March 1954, no. 29.