



## UNITY OF LIFE ACCORDING TO SAINT JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ: A PROPOSAL FOR THE SECULARIZED WORLD, WITH SAINT JOSEPH AS A MODEL

### LA UNIDAD DE VIDA SEGÚN SAN JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ: UNA PROPUESTA PARA EL MUNDO SECULARIZADO, CON SAN JOSÉ COMO MODELO

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#### Abstract:

Saint Josemaría Escrivá emphasized that unity of life is essential for Christians, integrating faith, work, family, and social life into a single reality before God. This article examines the core of his spiritual proposal, grounded in the sanctification of ordinary life and the vocation of the laity. By drawing from Sacred Scripture, the Church's Magisterium (*Lumen Gentium*, *Christifideles Laici*, *Redemptoris Custos*), and the writings of Saint Josemaría (*Camino*, *Surco*, *Forja*), this study highlights the theological and pastoral depth of this vision. In the second part, the article explores how Saint Joseph can be seen as a living model of this unity of life, demonstrating through his silent fidelity and daily work that holiness is achievable in the ordinary. His example, as emphasized by Saint John Paul II in *Redemptoris Custos*, shows that every well-executed task can become an act of love for God. In an increasingly secularized world, both saints offer a coherent path of holiness rooted in everyday life. The article concludes by reaffirming unity of life as a response to modern fragmentation and as a call to Christian coherence.

**Keywords:** Unity of life, sanctification, work, Saint Joseph, laity.

#### Resumen:

San Josemaría Escrivá enfatizó que la unidad de vida es esencial para los cristianos, integrando la fe, el trabajo, la familia y la vida social en una sola realidad ante Dios. Este artículo examina el núcleo de su propuesta espiritual, basada en la santificación de la vida ordinaria y en la vocación del laico como protagonista de la vida de la Iglesia. A partir de la Sagrada Escritura, del Magisterio de la Iglesia (*Lumen Gentium*, *Christifideles Laici*, *Redemptoris Custos*) y de los escritos de san Josemaría (*Camino*, *Surco*, *Forja*), el estudio analiza la profundidad teológica y pastoral de esta visión. En una segunda parte, el artículo explora cómo san José puede ser comprendido como modelo viviente de esta unidad de vida, demostrando —mediante su fidelidad silenciosa y su trabajo cotidiano— que la santidad es alcanzable en lo ordinario. Su ejemplo, destacado por san Juan Pablo II en *Redemptoris Custos*, nos recuerda que toda tarea bien realizada puede convertirse en un acto de amor a Dios. En un mundo cada vez más secularizado, ambos santos ofrecen

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un camino coherente de santidad en la vida diaria. El artículo concluye reafirmando la unidad de vida como una respuesta a la fragmentación moderna y como un llamado a la coherencia cristiana.

**Palabras clave:** Unidad de vida, santificación, trabajo, San José, laicado.

## 1. Introduction

Throughout history, Christian spirituality has emphasized that faith cannot be confined to an isolated sphere in a believer's life, as if it were a separate dimension from ordinary existence. Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer expanded on this principle through his teaching on the unity of life, a central concept in the spirituality of Opus Dei. According to Saint Josemaría, the Christian life should not be divided into independent compartments but should instead be fully integrated into all aspects of daily activity. Well-executed work, family life, social relationships, and spiritual life must form a unified whole. As he stated: "We cannot lead a double life... There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit"<sup>2</sup>.

This perspective, rooted in the theology of the laity, responds to a contemporary challenge: the increasing tendency to separate faith from daily life<sup>3</sup>. Unity of life, in this sense, is an invitation to live out faith with coherence, without disconnecting it from the concrete realities of the world.

In this context, Saint Joseph emerges as an exemplary model of unity of life. As the adoptive father of Jesus and the husband of Mary, his life was a testimony of fidelity to the ordinary, integrating faith into his daily work, the care of his family, and every aspect of his existence. His witness makes him a reference for lay Christians, as he demonstrates that holiness is not reserved for extraordinary acts but is found in daily fidelity and commitment to God's will<sup>4</sup>.

The life of Saint Joseph aligns with Saint Josemaría Escrivá's teaching on the unity of life, where work and ordinary responsibilities are not obstacles to spiritual life but rather paths to sanctification<sup>5</sup>. Christian vocation is not exclusive to consecrated life; rather, it is fully realized in everyday circumstances, in faithfulness to small details and in the coherence between faith and action. This perspective was later reaffirmed by the Church's Magisterium after Escrivá's death, particularly in documents such as *Christifideles Laici* (1988) and *Redemptoris Custos* (1989), which echo and develop themes present in his teaching.

This article aims to analyze the relationship between unity of life, as proposed in Saint Josemaría Escrivá's teachings, and the figure of Saint Joseph as a model of sanctification in ordinary life. To achieve this, it will examine the theological foundations present in Sacred Scripture and the Magisterium of the Church, with particular reference to *Lumen Gentium*, *Christifideles Laici*, and *Redemptoris Custos*. Additionally, the article will study Saint Josemaría Escrivá's writings, particularly *Camino*, *Surco*, and *Forja*, to deepen the understanding of his teaching on unity of life.

Furthermore, it will explore the relevance of this principle in the contemporary world, where the fragmentation between faith and daily life is promoted as an ideal, disseminated by mass media and consumer culture as a new standard of life. This dissociation poses a constant challenge for many Christians, who must navigate the tension between authentic spirituality and cultural narratives that seek to confine faith

<sup>2</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, "Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer", *Online source for the works of Josemaría Escrivá* (1968), 114, <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/conversations.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución dogmática Lumen Gentium sobre la Iglesia*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1964, 31.

<sup>4</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica Redemptoris Custos sobre la figura y la misión de san José en la vida de Cristo y de la Iglesia*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1989, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Surco*, Rialp, Madrid 1950, 495.

to the private sphere<sup>6</sup>. This concern has been addressed in contemporary theology, which warns of the risk of reducing faith to an individual or emotional matter, detached from social and professional life<sup>7</sup>.

This work is structured as follows: (i) it will explain the concept of unity of life in the spirituality of Opus Dei, emphasizing its importance in the sanctification of work and family life; (ii) it will analyze Saint Joseph as a model of unity of life, deepening his role in the history of salvation; (iii) it will explore the application of unity of life in contemporary society, reflecting on its relevance in professional, family, and social spheres; and (iv) in conclusion, it will synthesize the importance of these teachings and highlight the relevance of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría as models for living the faith in daily life.

In an era marked by secularism and relativism, where many have lost their sense of transcendence, the figure of Saint Joseph offers an eloquent testimony of work, love, and faith. His life reminds us that holiness is not reserved for extraordinary moments or exceptional people but is found in faithfulness to God and in the sincere pursuit of following Jesus' footsteps. This perspective has also been highlighted by important voices in the Church, such as Cardinal Albino Luciani—later Pope John Paul I—who emphasized the simplicity and spiritual depth of Saint Josemaría's message in his article praising the founder of Opus Dei for proposing sanctity in ordinary life as a path open to all believers<sup>8</sup>.

In this sense, unity of life is not merely an abstract ideal but a fundamental principle for the Christian who seeks to integrate faith into every aspect of existence. The coherence between faith and daily life is a permanent challenge, but also a concrete response to cultural trends that attempt to fragment the believer's identity, reducing religion to a merely private or sentimental experience<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Unity of life in Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

Saint Josemaría Escrivá emphasized that Christian life should not be reduced to isolated moments of prayer or liturgy but should permeate every aspect of existence. For him, faith could not be a separate dimension from daily life; rather, it had to be its integrative core, giving it meaning and guiding the pursuit of excellence, truth, and goodness. This teaching, embodied in the concept of unity of life, is a central principle in the spirituality of Opus Dei and a key to understanding the vocation of the laity in the Church.

In this sense, Saint Josemaría's vision finds a deep resonance in Benedict XVI's teaching on the transformative nature of faith. As Benedict XVI explains in *Spe Salvi*:

“So now we can say: Christianity was not only “good news”—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative”. That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución pastoral Gaudium et Spes sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1965, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Y. CONGAR, *Lay People in the Church: A study for a theology of laity*, Westminster Press, Londres 1963.

<sup>8</sup> A. LUCIANI, “San Josemaría Escrivá: Un mensaje válido también para hoy”, *Gazzettino di Venezia* (1978), <https://opusdei.org/es-pe/articulo-del-cardenal-albino-luciani-2/>

<sup>9</sup> FRANCISCO, *Exhortación apostólica Evangelii Gaudium sobre el anuncio del Evangelio en el mundo actual*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2013, 255.

<sup>10</sup> BENEDICTO XVI, *Carta encíclica Spe Salvi sobre la esperanza cristiana*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2007, 2.

The unity of life proposed by Saint Josemaría is precisely this transformation: faith cannot be mere theoretical knowledge, or a practice limited to specific moments of devotion, but rather a reality that unifies and permeates every aspect of existence. The Christian who embraces this vision does not live a divided life; instead, they find a path to sanctification in their work, family, and daily relationships.

In a context where contemporary culture, especially through mass media, increasingly fosters a separation between the sacred and the secular, Saint Josemaría's vision gains even greater relevance. He strongly rejected the notion of a divided existence, where spirituality remains isolated and secondary while professional, family, and social responsibilities take precedence without reference to the divine. Instead, he emphasized that every aspect of life, including work, is part of one's vocation before God and should be lived with a sense of sanctification and unity.

Thus, work, family life, and interpersonal relationships are not separate from faith but rather concrete spaces for daily sanctification. This vision, deeply rooted in the Christian tradition<sup>11</sup>, breaks with the modern dichotomy that opposes the material and the spiritual and restores to Christians the mission of transforming the world from within<sup>12</sup>.

Unlike other spiritual authors or even magisterial documents that call for Christian coherence, Saint Josemaría introduces a specific and transformative vision: holiness is not only possible outside religious life—it is to be sought precisely in the midst of ordinary work, family life, and professional tasks. His spirituality does not demand extraordinary gestures but insists on love, excellence, and presence of God in every daily detail. This emphasis on the sanctification of the secular, without separating it from the divine, constitutes a notable contribution to 20th-century spiritual theology. While the Magisterium affirms the universal call to holiness, Saint Josemaría develops a lay-centered path that gives concrete form to that call.

## 2.1 Unity of life in the context of Opus Dei

Opus Dei, Founded by Saint Josemaría Escrivá in 1928, emphasizes that all Christians are called to holiness amid the world, integrating their faith into their ordinary lives without withdrawing from their daily tasks. This spirituality differs from other ascetic traditions that have traditionally viewed religious life as the primary path to holiness. Instead, Saint Josemaría taught that laypeople can encounter God in their daily work, family life, and social relationships, transforming these ordinary realities into opportunities for sanctification.

This teaching, rooted in Christian tradition<sup>13</sup> emphasizes that the call to holiness is not exclusive to priests or religious, but encompasses all the faithful, regardless of their state in life. As stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: "All the Christian faithful [...] are called to the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity." (CCC, 1997).

Thus, unity of life means integrating faith into all aspects of human life, without dichotomies between the secular and the sacred.

Saint Josemaría taught that professional work is a privileged means of sanctification. It does not matter what profession one has—whether a teacher in the classroom, a merchant in the market, or any honest occupation dedicated to the pursuit of truth and goodness—every Christian is called to live out their faith through the exercise of their vocation. As he wrote in *Forja*: "Sanctifying work is not a utopia, but the mission of every Christian: turning daily prose into heroic verse"<sup>14</sup>.

This idea also resonates with the teaching of Saint John Paul II, who emphasized that

<sup>11</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución dogmática Lumen Gentium...*, 31.

<sup>12</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica post sinodal Christifideles Laici sobre vocación y misión de los laicos en la Iglesia y en el mundo*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1988, 15.

<sup>13</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución dogmática Lumen Gentium...*, 31.

<sup>14</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Forja*, Rialp, Madrid 182010, 517.

work is part of God's divine plan and a means of participating in His creative work<sup>15</sup>. In this sense, Opus Dei provides a concrete path for laypeople to transform their daily lives into an encounter with God, striving for excellence in their ordinary duties. Thus, unity of life means that professional work, family responsibilities, and social life are not obstacles or distractions to holiness but rather the very means through which God calls each person to Christian fulfillment. For Saint Josemaría, holiness was not about performing extraordinary deeds but about doing ordinary things with extraordinary love and faithfulness. This teaching, which permeates his entire spirituality, reflects the Gospel's invitation to remain faithful in small things (Mt 25:21).

From this perspective, the division between the sacred and the secular becomes an artificial attitude. The Christian is called to live out their faith coherently in all aspects of life: there is no such thing as a "hermetic life of faith" that is separate from work life or family life. As the Magisterium reminds us in *Christifideles Laici*:

"There cannot be two parallel lives: on one side, the so-called 'spiritual life,' with its values and demands, and on the other, the so-called 'secular life,' that is, family life, work, social relationships, political engagement, and culture"<sup>16</sup>.

This statement confirms the teaching of Saint Josemaría, who saw the laity as active protagonists in evangelization—through explicit preaching and their testimony in ordinary life. The Christian vocation is to be the world's light (Mt 5:14-16), and one's example should speak louder than words since silent and faithful witness truly touches hearts and invites people to holiness.

Pope Paul VI reinforces this idea in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, emphasizing that the laity are called to permeate all human realities with the spirit of the Gospel:

"Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the kingdom of God"<sup>17</sup>.

The unity of life, then, is not only a spiritual proposal but also a model of evangelization based on coherence and on transforming the world from within. As *Christifideles Laici* affirms, 'the Church becomes at one and the same time an "evangelizing and evangelized" community, and for this very reason, she is made the servant of all. In her the lay faithful participate in the mission of service to the person and society'<sup>18</sup>. This underscores the profound responsibility of the laity: to bring the Gospel into every aspect of life, ensuring that faith and daily work are not separate, but united in a single horizon of sanctification and service. In doing so, they truly become the 'light of the world' (Mt 5:14-16), transforming society not only through words but through the silent yet powerful testimony of a life fully lived in Christ.

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<sup>15</sup> JUAN PABLO II, Carta encíclica *Laborem Exercens* sobre el trabajo humano en el 90 aniversario de la *Rerum Novarum*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Castelgandolfo 1981, 25.

<sup>16</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica post sinodal Christifideles Laici...*, 59.

<sup>17</sup> PABLO VI, *Exhortación apostólica Evangelii Nuntiandi sobre la evangelización en el mundo contemporáneo*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1975, 70.

<sup>18</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica post sinodal Christifideles Laici...*, 36.

## 2.2 Integration of faith, work and ordinary life in the sanctification of the Christian

The unity of life has a direct impact on how Christians should understand their work. For Saint Josemaría, work was not merely a means of subsistence or personal development but a privileged space for encountering God, an opportunity for spiritual growth, and an act of praise to the Creator. In this sense, he affirmed that every honest task carried out with love and right intention could be offered to God as a living prayer. As he expresses in *Friends of God*: “Human work, that work in which our days pass and to which we devote our energy, must become a means of sanctification, something to be lived with a sense of mission”<sup>19</sup>.

This vision profoundly transforms the way one perceives professional activity: work is no longer seen as a mere quantifiable effort, an activity aimed solely at earning an income to cover monthly expenses or achieving material goals. Instead, it becomes a vocation and, at the same time, a means of serving God and others. In this way, the Christian not only fulfills professional duties—the quantitative aspect—but assumes them as an act of love that, when carried out with sincerity and dedication, transcends any measure (Mt 22: 37-39).

Pedro Rodríguez, in *El Opus Dei en la Iglesia*, emphasizes that this perspective represents a true revolution in the spirituality of the laity, as it restores the secular world to its transcendent dimension. In this sense, Opus Dei does not propose a holiness reserved for extraordinary moments, but a holiness lived in the ordinary, in daily faithfulness to God amid professional, family, and social responsibilities.

This approach aligns with the teaching of *Laborem Exercens* by Saint John Paul II, who emphasizes that work not only transforms the material world but also shapes human dignity and associates the worker with God's creative work<sup>20</sup>. Likewise, *Gaudium et Spes* underscores that human labor should be understood as a cooperation with God in the building of the world<sup>21</sup>.

Alejandro Llano has reflected on the importance of unity of life in the university setting, emphasizing that academic and professional formation cannot be dissociated from ethical and spiritual principles. From this perspective, intellectual and moral coherence is a fundamental pillar: knowledge and faith must engage in harmonious dialogue, avoiding an artificial separation between reason and belief.

In this regard, Llano highlights how Saint Josemaría Escrivá embodied in his own life the full integration of faith and reason. Although he did not pursue a scholarly academic career in the conventional sense, Escrivá profoundly influenced university life through his vision of intellectual formation rooted in sanctity. As Llano observes:

“Josemaría Escrivá was not only an original thinker and a great academic. He was a holy priest, a man of God. But what is of most interest to our topic is that in him both dimensions, the intellectual and the spiritual, were not separated nor in the least opposed to each other. His own life was an heroic example of what he never ceased to proclaim: an existential unity imbued with refinement and consistency, in which the different anthropological parameters acquired unsuspected depth by being referred to our Father God”<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Friends of God”, *Online source for the works of Josemaría Escrivá* (1977), 57, [http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends\\_of\\_god.htm](http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/friends_of_god.htm).

<sup>20</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Carta encíclica Laborem Exercens...*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución pastoral Gaudium et Spes...*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> A. LLANO, “University and Life Unity According to Saint Josemaría Escrivá”, *Documentos del Instituto de Antropología y Ética* 24 (2002) 2.

This unity is also reflected in Escrivá's reflections on Saint Joseph, whom he describes as a man "strong in faith, faithful in fulfilling the will of God, simple and humble in his duties," and whose silent service offers a concrete model of holiness in ordinary life. In *Christ is Passing By*, Escrivá emphasizes that Joseph's fidelity in daily work and family life is an example of unity of life, in which divine and human tasks are intertwined<sup>23</sup>.

His statement resonates with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the need to integrate faith and culture. As *Gaudium et Spes* affirms, culture and faith should not be seen as separate realities but as elements that mutually enrich one another<sup>24</sup>. Thus, unity of life in the university context does not simply mean that an academic or student privately lives out their faith but rather that they strive to integrate their convictions into their intellectual work.

Llano warns of the crisis in contemporary universities, where relativism has led to a fragmentation of knowledge and a separation between learning and truth. In response to this crisis, Saint Josemaría's proposal restores the university's vocation as a space for the pursuit of truth, where love for God and love for knowledge not only coexist but also mutually reinforce one another. In Escrivá's own words:

"The University knows that the necessary scientific objectivity rightly rejects all ideological neutrality, all ambiguity, all conformism, all cowardice: the love for truth commits the scientist's entire life and work, and sustains his integrity when facing possible uncomfortable situations"<sup>25</sup>.

In this sense, unity of life is not merely a spiritual principle but an intellectual model that challenges the postmodern mindset of skeptical relativism. Llano highlights that the modern university, lacking an integrative vision, risks becoming empty of its own substance, reducing itself to a mere technical instrument without a true pursuit of truth. Saint John Paul II reaffirms this point in *Fides et Ratio*, stating that reason and faith should not be seen as opposed but as "two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth"<sup>26</sup>.

Unity of life, therefore, not only strengthens the Christian identity within academia but also proposes a model of the university in which knowledge is oriented toward truth and the common good. This approach is not only relevant to the personal life of students and professors but also has profound implications for the very mission of the university as an institution of integral formation.

### 2.3 Unity of life as a response to secularism and modern relativism

The crisis of secularism and modern relativism not only affects the individual dimension of the believer but also reshapes how society perceives faith and truth. Benedict XVI, in *Deus Caritas Est*, warns that Christian love and the search for truth cannot be reduced to mere sentimentalism without concrete commitments<sup>27</sup>. This warning resonates with Saint Josemaría's teaching, who saw life unity as the key to avoiding a fragmented faith—one that is confined to the private sphere and has no real impact on daily life.

Unity of life is not merely a theoretical principle but a necessity for the spiritual stability of the modern Christian. Just as faith is renewed daily in the Holy Mass, work

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, "Christ is Passing By", *Online source for the works of Josemaría Escrivá* (1973), 40, [http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ\\_is\\_passing\\_by.htm](http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/christ_is_passing_by.htm).

<sup>24</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución pastoral Gaudium et Spes*..., 57.

<sup>25</sup> Translated by the author. J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, "Discurso sobre la Universidad", en: <https://escriva.org/es/josemaria-escriva-de-balaguer-y-la-universidad/8/>

<sup>26</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Carta encíclica Fides et Ratio sobre las relaciones entre fe y razón*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1998, 1.

<sup>27</sup> BENEDICTO XVI, *Carta encíclica Deus Caritas Est sobre el amor cristiano*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2005, 25.

and ordinary duties become paths to balance between the material and the spiritual life. Without an integrated vision of existence, the believer risks living their faith superficially or inconsistently, adapting to dominant values in different contexts. As Llano points out, modernity has generated a fracture in which reason, knowledge, and interior life have been compartmentalized, weakening the individual's ability to achieve authentic unity<sup>28</sup>.

In this regard, Saint John Paul II, in *Fides et Ratio*, emphasizes that faith and reason are not opposed but complementary and that the search for truth must guide both intellectual life and daily living<sup>29</sup>. This assertion reinforces the need for a spirituality incarnated in daily activities, where Christians do not feel forced to choose between their faith and their professional or intellectual development. In fact, as Escrivá warns in *Furrow*, the great danger of the contemporary world is not only outright unbelief but also the Christian who “lives as if God did not exist”<sup>30</sup>.

Saint Josemaría's proposal, therefore, responds to an identity crisis that affects not only believers but modern culture as a whole. In the face of the loss of solid references, life unity emerges as an antidote to fragmentation and relativism, allowing faith to permeate all aspects of life without yielding to secularism. This is not about an imposed dogma but rather a deep human principle: only in the coherence between what one believes, thinks, and lives can a person find true fulfillment. As Alejandro Llano points out, the great danger of modernity lies in having built a university and a society where truth is relative and knowledge is disconnected from ethics and transcendence<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, unity of life is not only a principle of personal spirituality but also a cultural project that challenges modern fragmentation. As Saint Josemaría Escrivá explains, “The Christian must be, amid of the world, a witness of Christ and the Gospel; their life and words must reflect this vocation”<sup>32</sup>. Far from being an exclusively religious proposition, this message offers an anthropological perspective of great relevance: personal coherence as the foundation of a more stable, less fragmented society oriented towards the common good.

This teaching finds its foundation in the universal call to holiness, as expressed by the Second Vatican Council: “All the faithful, of whatever state or condition, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity”<sup>33</sup>. This fullness is realized in the integration of faith into daily life, in the unity between belief and action.

From this perspective, life unity is not merely a theoretical concept but a necessity for the Christian who wishes to authentically respond to their vocation. As *Caritas in Veritate* highlights, “charity is the main path of the Church's social doctrine. Every commitment to building a better world requires faith that works through love”<sup>34</sup>. Thus, unity of life not only shapes personal witness but also influences the construction of a more just society rooted in Christian values.

Saint Josemaría insisted that this coherence of life is manifested especially in well-done work, professional dedication, and fidelity to one's duties. He did not conceive of Christian life as a fragmented reality but as a unity in which every action, no matter how simple, can be transformed into an act of love for God. As he affirmed: “We must reject the false opposition between the spiritual and the material, because everything human, when lived rightly, can and should be elevated to God”<sup>35</sup>.

This statement highlights the importance of embracing ordinary tasks as a path to encountering God, elevating daily life to a supernatural dimension. This teaching translates into an invitation to put love and excellence into every task, regardless of its

<sup>28</sup> A. LLANO, “University and Life Unity...”

<sup>29</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Carta encíclica Fides et Ratio*..., 1.

<sup>30</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Furrow”, *Online source for the works of Josemaría Escrivá* (1986), 495, <http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/furrow.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> A. LLANO, “University and Life Unity...”

<sup>32</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Friends of God” ..., 272.

<sup>33</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución dogmática Lumen Gentium*..., 40.

<sup>34</sup> BENEDICTO XVI, *Carta encíclica Caritas in Veritate sobre el desarrollo humano integral en la caridad y en la verdad*, Librería Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2007, 2.

<sup>35</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 10.

nature, for the greatness of Christian life is not measured by external recognition but by the faithfulness with which one lives out the small duties of each day. In this sense, unity of life is not only a spiritual principle but also a practical criterion that allows faith to be integrated into all dimensions of existence, ensuring that no one remains outside the call to holiness.

Benedict XVI, in *Caritas in Veritate*, reinforces this idea by stating that Christian life is not exhausted in religious practice but must permeate all dimensions of existence: “Charity in truth is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity”<sup>36</sup>. This vision underscores that life unity not only benefits the Christian’s interior life but is also a force for change in society, promoting an integral human development based on truth and love.

The testimony of laypeople committed to their ordinary life thus acquires an evangelizing value. As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* affirms, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, or if he listens to teachers, it is because they are witnesses”<sup>37</sup>. The coherence between faith and daily life is, therefore, the most eloquent testimony a Christian can offer to the world.

In this context, Saint Joseph emerges as the perfect model of unity of life, integrating faith, work, and family life into a single horizon of holiness. The following section will analyze how his example illuminates lay spirituality and provides a concrete reference for living out faith in everyday life.

### 3. Saint Joseph: A model of unity of life

Saint Joseph is one of the most silent yet eloquent figures in Sacred Scripture. It is commonly noted in Josephine literature that the Gospels do not record a single word spoken by him, yet his life reveals a profound testimony of obedience, labor, and fidelity to God. His entire existence was a harmonious integration of faith and daily life, embodying the very principle of unity of life that Saint Josemaría Escrivá so insistently preached.

Saint John Paul II, in *Redemptoris Custos*, affirms that “Joseph was called by God to serve directly the person and mission of Jesus through the exercise of his fatherhood: in this way, he cooperates in the fullness of time in the great mystery of Redemption and is truly ‘a minister of salvation’”<sup>38</sup>. This affirmation points to a crucial truth: Joseph’s mission was not incidental, but a constitutive part of God’s redemptive plan.

In his homily *In Joseph’s Workshop*, Escrivá describes Saint Joseph as “an ordinary sort of man on whom God relied to do great things. He did exactly what the Lord wanted him to do, in each and every event that went to make up his life”<sup>39</sup>. Scripture praises him as a “just man”—a designation that, as Escrivá explains, indicates “a good and faithful servant of God, someone who fulfills the divine will”<sup>40</sup>.

Joseph’s sanctity did not lie in extraordinary acts but in his quiet, consistent fulfillment of God’s plan through his humble labor and family life. In this, he offers an enduring example of how ordinary circumstances can become a space of divine encounter. His silent strength was rooted in a living faith, “full, confident, complete,” expressed in “an effective dedication to the will of God and an intelligent obedience”<sup>41</sup>.

Saint Josemaría highlights that Joseph was not a passive figure, but a man of initiative, capable of discerning and acting decisively. “He entrusted himself unreservedly to the care of God, but he always reflected on events and so was able to

<sup>36</sup> BENEDICTO XVI, *Carta encíclica Caritas in Veritate*..., 1.

<sup>37</sup> PABLO VI, *Exhortación apostólica Evangelii Nuntiandi*..., 41.

<sup>38</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica Redemptoris Custos*..., 8.

<sup>39</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 40.

<sup>40</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 40.

<sup>41</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 42.

reach that level of understanding of the works of God which is true wisdom”<sup>42</sup>. This insight contributes to a broader understanding of the relationship between human responsibility and divine providence.

Escrivá also underlines the sanctifying value of Joseph’s labor, noting that he was a manual worker who supported his family through years of effort and toil. “Work is not a penalty or a curse or a punishment. Work, all work, bears witness to the dignity of man [...] and becomes for us a redeemed and redemptive reality”<sup>43</sup>. This conception of work challenges modern utilitarian views and aligns with Escrivá’s spirituality and teaching on unity of life.

Moreover, Saint Joseph is presented as a master of the interior life, someone who teaches us how to live in the presence of God through the ordinary: “Get to know Joseph and you will find Jesus. Talk to Joseph and you will find Mary”<sup>44</sup>. His example invites reflection on the contemplative dimension of daily life, particularly in the midst of labor and family commitment.

His influence on Jesus himself is a powerful image of how ordinary fidelity shapes divine missions. “Jesus must have resembled Joseph: in his way of working, in the features of his character, in his way of speaking. Jesus’ realism, his eye for detail, his preference for using everyday situations to give doctrine—all this reflects his childhood and the influence of Joseph”<sup>45</sup>. This connection emphasizes the formative power of hidden virtue—a theme central to both the Gospels and the spirituality of Escrivá.

In light of all this, we affirm that Saint Joseph does not merely illustrate unity of life through an abstract ideal, but through a lived example. His biography is not composed of grand episodes, but of meaningful fidelity, a “living parable” of holiness forged in the workshop, in paternal care, and in silent communion with God. Escrivá’s invitation resounds: *Ite ad Ioseph*—go to Joseph—not just to admire him, but to learn from him how to sanctify every moment of ordinary life.

### 3.1 Saint Joseph in Sacred Scripture: a model of faith in action

Saint Joseph appears in the Gospels as a just man, a silent worker, and a loving father. His role in salvation history unfolds in three key moments:

1. His acceptance of the mystery of the Incarnation: Upon discovering that Mary was pregnant, Joseph planned to leave her secretly so as not to expose her to the Mosaic law (Mt 1: 19). However, after receiving the angel’s message, he fully trusts in God and changes his plan without hesitation (Mt 1: 24). Here we find a powerful example from Saint Joseph: faith is not merely intellectual assent but a total act of love that manifests in concrete decisions.
2. His role in protecting and raising Jesus: Saint Joseph does not merely accept his mission—he acts decisively to care for his family. He flees to Egypt (Mt 2: 13-15), returns to Nazareth only when it is safe (Mt 2: 19-23), and raises Jesus in a home filled with love and work, in the normality of an ordinary household. This illustrates that holiness is not limited to extraordinary events but is rooted in faithfulness to daily responsibilities—through well-done work, upright character, and a balanced spiritual life.
3. His hidden and laborious life in Nazareth: The years in which Joseph teaches Jesus his trade and cares for his family are not described in detail in the Gospels, but his silence speaks volumes. Saint Joseph does not seek prominence, perform miracles, or deliver speeches; he simply works, protects, and loves. In Christian

<sup>42</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 42.

<sup>43</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 47.

<sup>44</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 56.

<sup>45</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “Christ is Passing By” ..., 55.

tradition, his carpenter's workshop is understood as a space where daily labor, offered to God, becomes an act of love and sanctification, as Saint Paul reminds us: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col 3: 23).

Through these episodes, it becomes evident that Joseph integrates his faith into every aspect of his life, never separating his relationship with God from his daily tasks. This is why Saint John Paul II describes him as a man who lived the "obedience of faith", accepting as truth what was revealed to him by God<sup>46</sup>. His life is a concrete and humble response to the divine call, showing that unity of life is not just an ideal but a practical path for all Christians.

Joseph's example resonates deeply with the teaching of Saint Josemaría Escrivá on sanctification in ordinary life. San Josemaría emphasized that holiness is found in faithfulness to daily work and responsibilities, seeing them as paths to encounter God. His mission was of great significance, yet his holiness was built through faithfulness in small things, in daily work, and in silent self-giving.

Thus, Saint Joseph is not only the guardian of Jesus and Mary but also an enduring model of unity of life for every Christian who seeks to live their faith with coherence in the midst of the world.

### 3.2 Sanctification in daily life: the testimony of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría

The example of Saint Joseph strongly resonates with Saint Josemaría Escrivá's on unity of life. Both saints shared a similar vision of sanctifying work and remaining faithful to God's will in everyday life.

Saint Josemaría often emphasized that well-done work can become a form of prayer, an idea perfectly reflected in the life of Saint Joseph. Both understood that holiness is not reserved for explicit moments of prayer but must permeate all daily actions. This vision is reinforced by the words of Saint John Paul II in *Redemptoris Custos*:

"Work was the daily expression of love in the life of the Family of Nazareth. [...] At the workbench where he plied his trade together with Jesus, Joseph brought human work closer to the mystery of the Redemption"<sup>47</sup>.

This perspective is also deepened by Pope Francis in his apostolic letter *Patris corde*, where he presents Saint Joseph as a "creatively courageous father" who teaches us "the importance of ordinary people who do not appear in the headlines but write today's history through daily acts of love"<sup>48</sup>. This view complements that of Saint Josemaría by reaffirming that holiness is not reserved for heroic deeds but is found in the quiet fidelity of everyday life.

According to Christian tradition, Saint Joseph did not merely provide for his family; his workshop became a space of silent formation and sanctification. There, Jesus not only learned a trade but also discovered, through his father's example, the value of effort, patience, and responsibility. This understanding aligns with the idea that daily work, when done with love and dedication, becomes a path to holiness.

Both Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría were men of discretion. They did not seek recognition or prominence but faithfully lived out their mission in the place where God had set them—Joseph in his workshop, and Josemaría in the ordinary life of the laity. This point is essential because today's world tends to value visible success and social

<sup>46</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica Redemptoris Custos...*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Exhortación apostólica Redemptoris Custos...*, 22.

<sup>48</sup> FRANCISCO, *Carta apostólica Patris Corde con motivo del 150º aniversario de la declaración de San José como Patrono de la Iglesia Universal*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2020, 1.

recognition, while true holiness is forged in hidden places, in faithfulness to small things. As Saint Josemaría said: “Do everything for Love. Thus there will be no little things: everything will be big. Perseverance in little things for Love is heroism”<sup>49</sup>.

The Gospels portray Saint Joseph as a man of absolute trust in God’s plans. Even without fully understanding what was happening, he entrusted himself completely into God’s hands. This quiet trust embodies the foundation of unity of life: never separating God’s will from our daily actions. His attitude remains a model of confidence in divine providence and fidelity in the ordinary.

Saint Josemaría promoted this same attitude among the laity, emphasizing the importance of trusting in divine providence and living faith in everyday life. He taught that holiness is not reserved for a few but is accessible to everyone through the ordinary circumstances of life. The call to sanctity is realized in small, daily acts of love and dedication, transforming work, family, and social life into opportunities for encountering God.

For him, the Christian must learn to say “yes” to God in every circumstance, just as Joseph did without hesitation. The key to unity of life is recognizing that each daily task, carried out with love and the right intention, is an opportunity for sanctification.

### 3.3 Saint Joseph as a model for today’s Christian

Today, the figure of Saint Joseph remains an essential reference for those seeking to live an authentic and coherent faith:

1. For workers: His example shows that work is not merely a means of sustenance but can become a path to sanctification. In an era where productivity and professional success often take precedence over personal and spiritual life, Joseph reminds us that the value of work does not lie in external recognition but in the intention with which it is performed. The true meaning of work is found in doing it well, using one’s talents in pursuit of goodness and truth, and offering it as an act of love to God. As Saint John Paul II states in *Laborem Exercens*:

“Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfilment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more a human being’”<sup>50</sup>.

This perspective transforms the way we view work, inviting us to see it not as a burden or mere obligation but as a means of spiritual growth and contribution to the common good.

2. For fathers: In a society where fatherhood is often weakened, minimized, or even discouraged, Saint Joseph represents a discreet and powerful witness to fatherhood marked by love, protection, and moral formation. His example highlights the importance of fathers being the primary educators of their children—not only in material aspects but also in spiritual formation. His life reminds us that fatherhood is not merely a biological responsibility but a mission of guidance and formation.
3. For Christians in general: In times of uncertainty, polarization, and fragmentation across all aspects of life, the figure of Saint Joseph reminds us that true greatness lies in faithfulness to one’s mission, in the coherence between faith and daily life, and absolute trust in God.

Saint Joseph is not merely a historical figure; his life remains a model for today.

<sup>49</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, “The Way”, *Online source for the works of Josemaría Escrivá* (1939), 813, [http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the\\_way.htm](http://www.escrivaworks.org/book/the_way.htm).

<sup>50</sup> JUAN PABLO II, *Carta encíclica Laborem Exercens...*, 9.

Although he is not remembered for miracles or great sermons, his silent and faithful witness to God's will in the ordinary reveals the depth of his holiness. Holiness is not found in extraordinary gestures but in embracing our daily responsibilities with love and faithfulness.

In an age where faith is often compartmentalized and separated from everyday life, his example is more relevant than ever. The challenge of living with unity of life—integrating faith into work, family, and society—remains a pressing issue for modern Christians. In the next section, we will explore how this principle applies to today's world and why it is essential for a truly coherent Christian life.

#### 4. Unity of life in the contemporary world

The contemporary world is marked by an increasing fragmentation of human experience. The extreme specialization of knowledge, the accelerated pace of modern life, and secularization have contributed to a growing disconnection between the different spheres of existence. Professional life, family life, and spiritual life often appear as separate realms, making it difficult to integrate faith into daily living. In response to this reality, the concept of life unity, as proposed by Saint Josemaría Escrivá and exemplified in the figure of Saint Joseph, offers a concrete answer to the modern identity crisis by promoting a balanced integration of faith and daily realities.

Secularism has led to the progressive marginalization of the transcendent dimension in social and professional life. In many environments, religion is seen as an exclusively private matter, with no influence on decision-making or public life. This fragmented mentality not only affects the perception of faith but also contributes to an identity crisis: many people feel compelled to act differently depending on the context, adopting distinct behaviors in professional, family, and religious settings. This lack of coherence can lead to an existential void and a sense of alienation.

In this context, the Christian understanding of work, as emphasized by Saint John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens*, offers a profound response. He stresses that work is not merely an economic necessity but a fundamental aspect of human dignity and self-fulfillment. Through work, individuals do not only transform the world around them but also shape themselves, growing in their humanity and vocation. This perspective aligns with the witness of Saint Joseph, who exemplifies how labor, when carried out with faith and dedication, becomes a path to holiness rather than just a means of survival.

For Saint Josemaría, faith was not meant to be compartmentalized or confined to specific moments; rather, it should permeate every aspect of life. He strongly rejected the idea of separating one's Christian identity from professional, social, and family responsibilities. True faith is not something that can be set aside when convenient but is a call to live with integrity and coherence in all circumstances.

Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría exemplify this unity of life. Saint Joseph lived his faith through work and silence, integrating every aspect of his existence into the mission entrusted to him by God. His testimony reminds us that holiness is not measured by public recognition but by faithfulness in the ordinary.

Similarly, Saint Josemaría emphasized that Christian life is not confined to specific moments of prayer or isolated religious practices but must permeate every aspect of daily life. His teaching on the sanctification of work remains especially relevant in today's world. Any task, no matter how simple, can become an opportunity for encountering God when carried out with the right intention and a spirit of excellence.

This call to coherence is more urgent than ever. In a world where relativism and secularization create division between faith and daily life, unity of life stands as a clear and transformative response. The vocation of the laity is not limited to religious activities but extends to transforming society from within by living faith authentically in every sphere of life.

Saint Joseph's life reminds us that holiness is not achieved through extraordinary actions but through faithfulness to daily responsibilities. This idea resonates deeply with Saint Josemaría's vision: every honest task, no matter how small, can be a means of drawing closer to God. By embracing this perspective, work ceases to be merely a duty and becomes a path to sanctification.

At a time when the separation between faith and secular life remains a widespread challenge, unity of life is not just an ideal—it is essential for building a coherent and authentic society. Contemporary culture often promotes a division between personal beliefs and public life, reducing religion to the private sphere and minimizing its role in shaping values and decision-making. This fragmentation does not only affect individual faith but also leads to an identity crisis, leaving many believers uncertain about how to integrate their convictions into their daily interactions.

Both Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría offer concrete models for living faith in all dimensions of life. Their examples show that holiness is not reserved for extraordinary moments but is found in the consistency of small, everyday acts. In Saint Joseph, we see a man whose silent dedication to his work and family embodies the essence of faith lived out in the ordinary. His life teaches that true greatness is not about external recognition but about total self-giving to the mission entrusted by God.

For his part, Saint Josemaría insisted that unity of life is the key to integrating faith into every aspect of existence, bridging the gap between the material and the spiritual. Living with coherence between belief and action not only strengthens personal identity but also serves as a powerful testimony in a world increasingly marked by relativism and religious indifference. A Christian's life should be free from contradiction, reflecting a natural and sincere commitment to faith in all circumstances.

Unity of life, therefore, is not just an abstract concept but a fundamental principle for transforming the world from within. In a society where ethics and spirituality are often sidelined, the witness of those who live with integrity becomes a guiding light that influences culture, work, and family life. Faith is not meant to remain hidden; rather, it should shape every decision, action, and relationship, making Christianity not just a belief but a lived reality.

A Christian is called to bring the light of faith into every dimension of life, turning each moment into an opportunity to encounter God. This integration of faith into daily routines fosters not only personal growth but also a culture of justice, solidarity, and respect for human dignity. The presence of lay Christians in the world is not just beneficial within the Church but is vital in the very places where social and cultural decisions are made.

In this sense, unity of life is not an unreachable ideal but a concrete and accessible path for every Christian seeking to live their vocation to the fullest. Far from being a utopian aspiration, it is a practical response to the challenges of modern life, providing the foundation for a more just, unified, and truth-centered society. Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría remind us that faith is not reserved for rare or dramatic moments—it is in the ordinary, in daily perseverance, where holiness takes root and transforms the world from within.

## 5. Conclusion

In a world marked by fragmentation and the loss of a sense of transcendence, the teaching of unity of life remains a fundamental key for today's Christian. The growing separation between faith and professional, family, and social life has led to an identity crisis for many believers, who often feel they must choose between their spiritual vocation and their daily responsibilities. However, rather than being opposing spheres, these dimensions must be integrated into a unified existence, where the presence of God illuminates every action, decision, and human relationship.

Saint Joseph, in his silent fidelity, offers an enduring image of this integration. His life, marked by silence and fidelity, shows that holiness is not found in extraordinary gestures but in the daily commitment to ordinary responsibilities. Without presenting him as a doctrinal teacher, we can affirm that in his example we recognize the value of well-done work, perseverance in adversity, and coherence between belief and action. His life suggests that greatness does not lie in external recognition but in faithfulness to one's mission—whatever that mission may be.

Now more than ever, the challenge for Christians is to be authentic witnesses in a world where truth is relativized, and faith is increasingly confined to the private sphere. Unity of life is not just a spiritual concept but a concrete response to the dispersion and superficiality of contemporary culture. Integrating faith into all aspects of life not only strengthens personal identity but also offers a more coherent and hopeful vision of the world.

This reflection opens new opportunities for further study and deepening the understanding of the unity of life in different contexts. The relationship between spirituality and work, the impact of secularization on Christian identity, and the role of the family as a space for faith formation are topics that deserve greater attention. Likewise, the example of Saint Joseph and his influence on lay spirituality could be explored in greater depth from theological, philosophical, and social perspectives.

Unity of life is not merely an ideal or an unreachable goal; it is a vocation for all, a gentle and persistent call from God to make our whole life — with its joys, burdens, and routines — a response of love. In Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaría, we find not perfect men, but faithful ones. Their lives invite us to believe that God is truly present in what seems small, and that even in the midst of our limitations, holiness is possible. It is in daily life, lived with coherence, humility and trust, where the Gospel quietly transforms the world.

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