

## Prayer and the Fundamental Structure of the Faith

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IN THE YEARS THAT BRING US to the second millennium, the Church is called to the great task of the *new evangelization*. The impulse of the Holy Spirit leads it by a road plagued with challenges: the Gospel must be announced not just to those who ignore it but also to those who try to forget it or have already done so. It has to be proclaimed without ceasing to bring us to deepen our commitment to Christ. For the new evangelization, the evangelizers themselves have to be evangelized. The encounter with Christ and full adherence to His Person are based on faith, *initium salutis*. If faith is a gift from God, it is important to prepare for it and resolve the doubts that are an obstacle to receiving it, and once adhering to this faith, we must not cease, with the help of God, to believe in it.

So, in our preparation for the tasks that are offered to us, the living examples of a lived faith and holiness are an essential aid. And one such example is a saint of our day, St. Josemaría Escrivá. Reflecting on certain aspects of his spirituality, we will try to draw some applicable conclusions to the apostolate of faith in the context of the new evangelization.

Steps: to be resigned to the will of God; to conform to the will of God; to want the will of God; to love the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

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★ Trans. John Martin Ruiz, O.P., from “La oración y la estructura fundamental de la fe,” in *Santidad y Mundo: Actas del Simposio Teológico de estudio en torno a las enseñanzas del beato Josemaría Escrivá, Roma, 12–14 de octubre de 1993*, ed. Manuel Belda (Pamplona, ES: EUNSA, 1996), 91–108.

<sup>1</sup> Josemaría Escrivá, *The Way* (New York: Scepter, 2002), no.774.

And before:

Resignation? . . . Conformity? Love the will of God!<sup>2</sup>

Meditating on faith in the spirituality of St. Escrivá, we can start with this thought that, with few lapidary formulas, describes the path of holiness lived by the saint himself and taught to his sons and daughters. Indeed, his own life is an example of a constant availability to the will of God, sought with all his soul.

When this will takes the form of the Cross and draws from him wailings that might seem reproaches to God, immediately, with a sort of spontaneous reflex, he responds with total acceptance so that the deep peace that dwells in him is never destroyed.

According to the spiritual tradition rooted in the heart of the Gospel and illustrated particularly by the *Way of Perfection* of Teresa of Avila, the love of the Father finds its concrete and everyday realization in the search of God's will, the object of the third petition of the Our Father: *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.

And, indeed, the will of God is communicated to us through the moral conscience enlightened by faith and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The judgments of conscience later remit the specific actions that we must carry through or, otherwise, avoid. However, if you attach to the word "action" such a broad meaning that it also includes internal attitudes, conscience asks us often for a reaction, an acceptance of the events that make up the fabric of our existence and that we have chosen or, on the contrary, we would have preferred to reject. To each individual are presented events or outside demands that repel or cost him much. This set of circumstances that do not depend on us and are integrated into our lives should be forewarned with the eyes of faith.

Which leads us to a triple certainty: God's Providence is omnipotent, embraces all things; all things work for good for those who love God (see Rom 8:28); and the Father's will is a will that loves us.

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (see 1 Thess 4:3). Sanctification, in turn, passes by way of participation in the Cross of Jesus.

Union with God is a filial relationship in the Only Son; and Christian prayer, which expresses this relationship with the Father, has as its source the depths of the same Holy Spirit, according to the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., no. 757.

puzzling words of Paul to the Romans and Galatians: “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. In fact, you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry: ‘Abba, Father!’ For the Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him” (see Rom 8:14–17; cf. Rom 8:26–30; see Gal 4:4–7). The thought that we have transcribed obtains its entire dimension in light of this great Pauline text.

The mystery of filial adoption by grace, which shapes our identity as baptized, is at the core of the spirituality of Josemaría Escrivá. Such filiation, which above all has an ontological meaning, must become transformed into life, must be lived through the exercise of the Christian virtues, among which stand out the theological virtues. And it comes to be fully life when there is a perfect union of one’s will with the will of the Father. The union, the fusion of the will, defines love and, in our case, the supernatural love of charity. But this same love presupposes that each direct his life in the light of faith.

There are times when life brings setbacks, illnesses, disappointments, sufferings, trials, or also demands of sacrifices that seem to be beyond our strength. How to recognize in all this the sign of the goodness of our Father in heaven?

It can then be understood why loving God’s will is an expression of holiness but also how, to reach such identification, you have to go a long way.

*To resign oneself to the will of God:* more than once this expression has been used to indicate acceptance of the divine will. But resignation is only a first step, a procedure still very imperfect. It means that one has conquered a first movement of rebellion; but the one who resigns himself adopts an external attitude as regards the will of God. His will does not surrender to God; rather he suffers, he gives way as does the weak relative to the strong. His attitude is more servile than filial. If it depended on him, things would have been arranged differently. However, he has conquered rebellion in himself. And this can be a first step forward.

*To conform oneself to the divine will:* This is a new development. There is submission to the will of God because the soul adopts a religious attitude, informed by the virtue of religion about God. His Lordship is recognized; one stands as the servant in relation to the Master. This compliance may already be a great and noble attitude.

But the human will and the divine will still do not come together perfectly. The human will does not entirely allow itself to be caught; there is still a remnant of exteriority. The divine will presents itself in the form of fate, of necessity; it is not yet the Father's will.

We could bring up the great school of the Stoics; and there has even been talk of a Christian stoicism. However, one has taken a step further, because the attitude is essentially religious.

*To want the will of God:* this step is superior in perfection, as it implies, on the part of the human will, an active, positive moment of going out to meet God's will. However, it is possible that, as did the previous one, this attitude derives from the virtue of religion, configuring itself as the ending of this natural virtue. The virtue of religion is the most perfect of the moral virtues, but it is not a theological virtue.

*To love the will of God.* Certainly, to love is to want. But not just any desire for the will of God is set to love in the sense used here, which is the supernatural love of charity. To love the will of God is typical of he who lives the grace of divine filiation and moves with his whole being, with the burning flame of his love, to meet what God wants, for such a will is the will of the Father and, thus, is a supremely lovable will. In such love of the Father's will is fully carried out to term the *sequela Christi*, conformity with the offering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Yet, not as I will, but as you will" (Matt 26:39). Such love, as shown by Jesus's offering, can be heroic; it can even lead to immolation and the sacrifice of the self.

Therefore, if the love of God's will represents the expression of theological charity, it is clear that the life of charity presupposes and simultaneously activates the life of faith. It leads, then, to *faith working through love* (Gal 5:6). How to know, if not, that the Providence of God, the One who is our Father, embraces all of history, whether the history of mankind or that of single individuals? He is attentive to any of our actions, to everything that happens, to every one of our encounters. He is present in the everyday things, in the most common, that make the place of our sanctification and the encounter with Christ. Josemaría Escrivá used to say to his sons and daughters, "Ordinary life is the true place of your Christian life."<sup>3</sup>

As a result, in the education for holiness we will have to insist on what refers to the faith and strength of that faith. We will also insist on what pertains to its operational strength. I have selected some

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<sup>3</sup> Josemaría Escrivá, *Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá* (New York: Scepter, 2008), no.113 (translation revised).

significant texts. "Some call imprudence and rashness what is in fact faith and trust in God."<sup>4</sup> Confidence in God belongs to faith and hope. It is, at its root, the attitude of faith in the loving Providence of the Father and his saving action. Such confidence in the presence and action of the Father is at the basis of apostolic action. "A keen and living faith. A faith like Peter's. When you have it—our Lord has said so—you will move mountains, humanly insuperable obstacles that rise up against your apostolic undertakings."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout all his life, Josemaría Escrivá gave witness to a love of this kind for the will of God. I remember a few episodes concerning this. At the beginning of the Work in Madrid, he had found a precious help in Mr. José María Somoano, who died after a sudden illness on July 17, 1932. The blow was very hard to Escrivá: "Lord, why have you taken him? Why deprive yourself of a faithful servant, who could have been so effective in service to your Work? But you know more and do what is best for him and for us."<sup>6</sup> He strongly felt the blow he suffered, but his reaction of faith arose immediately.

In the spring of 1941, his mother, from whom he had asked so much associating her with the apostolate of the Work, fell ill. He had promised to preach a course of exercises to the clergy of Lérida, in Catalonia. Having heard the doctor's optimistic diagnosis, he leaves Madrid, entrusting his mother to the Lord. Two days later, during the exercises, they inform him that his mother is dead. Lacerated by pain, he cannot but complain to God in a filial way; but his complaint immediately follows the acceptance of God's will: "Lord, you do this to me? While I was taking care of your priests, you do this to me?" But a little later he adds, "Let it be done, let it be fulfilled, let it be praised and eternally exalted the most just and most lovable Will of God above all things.—Amen.—Amen."

Upon arrival in Madrid, he goes to the chapel where the body rests. Just as when he received the news, he bursts into tears. When he rises again, he asks for a stole and recites the *Tè Deum*. However, he cannot contain a lament: "My God, my God, what have you done? You have taken everything from me: everything you take from me. I thought that these my daughters really needed my mother, and you leave me with nothing . . . without anything!" But then you hear

<sup>4</sup> Josemaría Escrivá, *Furrow* (New York: Scepter, 1992), no. 43.

<sup>5</sup> *The Way*, no. 489.

<sup>6</sup> *Registro Histórico del Fundador* (RHF), 20165 (pp. 1635–36). This is the catalogued collection of material pertaining to the work of Josemaría Escrivá that is held in the archives of the Opus Dei prelature in Rome.

this prayer: “Lord, I am happy because I know you love her and that you had a detail of trust with me. . . . It has to be ensured that all my children are with their parents when they die, but sometimes it will not be possible. And you, Lord, have disposed that, in this, I had gone first.”<sup>7</sup>

I now evoke his reaction to the death of three of his sons in a road accident in 1960. The anguished question directed to God “why?” is also followed by an act of abandonment to Divine Providence.<sup>8</sup> And the same attitude is found again and again throughout a lifetime in which trials were not lacking, particularly when serious threats hovered over the Work.<sup>9</sup>

If we treat of this, it is because there is a reason: St. Escrivá lived deeply the mystery of the Cross, leading him to write, “The wholehearted acceptance rendered to the Will of God necessarily brings joy and peace: happiness in the Cross. Then one sees that Christ’s yoke is gentle and that his burden is not heavy.”<sup>10</sup> It is necessary to know how to recognize the Cross of Christ in trials. To encounter the Cross “is to find happiness, joy . . . it is to identify oneself with Christ, and therefore, to be a child of God.” He adds: “The foundation of the spiritual life of the member of Opus Dei is the sense of his divine filiation.”<sup>11</sup>

St. Escrivá asks his sons and daughters to be apostles in everyday ordinary life, in which the Work completed with all its demands, with honesty, constitute the place of sanctification. Then the aspects of the life of faith particularly exalted can be understood: a “more humble, lively, and operative faith,”<sup>12</sup> because faith shows itself in humility,<sup>13</sup> a “sacrificed”<sup>14</sup> faith, proper of someone who is struggling to be a saint.<sup>15</sup>

The faith of the apostle must banish doubt, and when the assault of temptation arrives, the one who wishes the salvation of souls must shout, following in the footsteps of the father of the sick child of whom the Gospel speaks: “Lord, help my unbelief.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>7</sup> RHE, 4417.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. F. Gondrand, *Al paso de Dios*, 3rd ed. (Madrid: ES: Rialp, 1985), 224.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 206ff.

<sup>10</sup> *The Way*, no. 758 (translation revised).

<sup>11</sup> RHE, 20119 (p. 13).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Josemaría Escrivá, *The Forge* (New York: Scepter, 2002), no. 257.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 324.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 155 (translation revised).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Furrow*, no. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *The Forge*, no. 257.

In the writings of this blessed, we often find a term: the word *supernatural*. Faith gives us a “supernatural vision of events.”<sup>17</sup> Speaking of his Work, Monsignor Escrivá repeated to his children that they are not here to realize a “human endeavor but a great supernatural work, which began fulfilling in it, to the letter, all that is needed so that it can be called, without boasting, God’s Work.”<sup>18</sup>

The Founder makes clear here what the principle, the soul of his Work is: it is a *supernatural work*. By saying what that Work is, he simultaneously establishes a very high standard. If fidelity to this standard were to falter, the Work would cease to exist.

Indeed, the vocation is aimed primarily at the laity. They are the ones called to tend, with the help of grace, to the sanctification and apostolate in ordinary life, in which work, carried out with competence and professionalism, plays a key role.

It is inevitable now to raise a vital question. What relationship exists between this vocation and the temporal commitment that, as the Second Vatican Council will recall strongly, is part of the vocation of the laity? We know that, despite the specific guidelines emanating from the Council, there are many uncertainties in this respect: it tilts between the confusion of the fields and radical separation, positions both disastrous.

The guidelines of Josemaría Escrivá on this point have clarity all the more remarkable because they came to his mind in a particularly restless period, in which the passions of party affiliation seem to prevail over everything. Young people gather around him—we are in Madrid, at the beginning of 1936—they are impressed by the fact that he is never mixed in political discussions. He simply reminds them of the doctrine of the Church and the obligation of every Christian to assume their proper responsibilities in society. Above all, he never ceases to repeat the new commandment of fraternal love.<sup>19</sup>

Later, in 1939, addressing a group of students, he will put them on guard against a too human conception of acting, even if it obeys noble patriotic motives: “But do not forget that there is a higher reality: the Kingdom of Christ, which has no end. And for Christ to reign in the world, it first has to reign in your heart. Does he truly reign? Is your heart for Jesus Christ?”<sup>20</sup>

Monsignor Escrivá would never tire of asserting the autonomy

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., no. 657 (translation revised).

<sup>18</sup> RHF, 21500, no.1.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.* (pp. 108–09).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, (p. 144).

of the laity in the temporal sphere<sup>21</sup>: “I love liberty because without liberty we could not serve God; we would be wretched. We have to teach Catholics to live, not to be called Catholics, but to be citizens who assume personal responsibility for their personal and free actions.” He would go so far as to say, with a formula that requires a correct understanding because it contains something of a paradox: “the sons of God in the *Opus Dei* live despite being Catholics.”<sup>22</sup>

For this reason, such freedom is again found on the plane of elections and political commitments. What attitude will have to be adopted by the members of *Opus Dei* in the public life of their country? “The one they please! freely. I do not care about the position of each, I defend their freedom. Otherwise, I could not defend mine. And I’m from a land where we do not tolerate imposition.”<sup>23</sup> Leaving aside the humor of the last words, the position of the founder of *Opus Dei* responds to two essential reasons. The first lies precisely in the proper supernatural character of the vocation to the Work, which must be protected from any inclination toward a purpose other than the Kingdom of God. With this, St. Josemaría does not intend to deny the necessary evangelical inspiration of the temporal commitment. However, he underlines that it is up to each individual to personally discover and make effective the concrete realization of that impulse.

The second motive is the supernatural horizon where his Work is situated: “Do not forget that the world is our thing, that the world is our home, that the world is a work of God and that we are to love it as we ought to love those who are in the world. It is our job to consecrate the world to God, through this dedication to the service of the Lord, each in the exercise of their ordinary work, to be a testimony to Jesus Christ and also to serve the Church, the Roman Pontiff, and all souls. Therefore, we must understand the world, we must raise it, we must divinize it, we must purify it, and we must redeem it with Christ, because you are co-redeemers with Him.”<sup>24</sup>

Still let us cite these clear statements of 1967: “The purpose at which *Opus Dei* aims is to encourage the pursuit of holiness and the exercise of the apostolate by Christians living in the midst of the world, whatever their status or condition. . . . Christ is present in

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* (pp. 162–234).

<sup>22</sup> RHE, 20565 (pp. 36–39).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* (p. 40).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* (p. 45).

any honest human task. . . . Opus Dei has as its unique and exclusive mission to spread this message. . . . And to those who grasp this ideal of holiness, the Work offers the spiritual means and doctrinal, ascetical and apostolic formation needed to do it in their own lives.”<sup>25</sup> For this reason, the members of the Work “do not act as a group, but individually, with personal freedom and responsibility.”<sup>26</sup>

Monsignor Escrivá stands against any pretension of “using the laity for ends which exceed the proper limits of the hierarchical ministry.”<sup>27</sup> He warns against a certain way of defining the vocation of lay Catholics; it is not that these penetrate in social settings! “The members of the Work have no need to penetrate the temporal sector for the simple fact that they are ordinary citizens, equal to others, and therefore they were already there.”<sup>28</sup> Which, taken together, is to draw a vocation of the laity, specifically a *supernatural* vocation to sanctification and the apostolate.

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The sense of freedom by which the person responds to the love of God and the supernatural nature of the vocation guide the concept of the spiritual life itself of Josemaría Escrivá. The insistence on ordinary life should not be understood as an invitation to uniformity. The truth is just the opposite. His experience as spiritual director has taught him that God’s ways fit each person uniquely. In a homily on the life of prayer (April 4, 1955), we read: “There are countless ways of praying, I say again. God’s children do not need a method, graphed and artificial, to go to their Father. Love is inventive, industrious; if we love, we will discover personal, intimate paths that lead us to this ongoing dialogue with the Lord.”<sup>29</sup>

And shortly before, in a beautiful passage about mental prayer, we find: “Let there not be missing in our day a few moments especially dedicated to attend to God, raising our thoughts toward Him, words have no need to come to our lips, because they sing in the heart. . . . Each of you, if he wants, can find his own channel for this conversation with God. I don’t like to talk about methods or formulas,

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<sup>25</sup> *Conversations*, no. 255 (translation revised).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 66.

<sup>29</sup> Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God* (New York: Scepter, 1997), no. 255 (translation revised).

because I've never been a friend of constricting anyone: I have tried to encourage everyone to get closer to the Lord, while respecting each soul as it is, with its own characteristics. Ask Him to work his designs in our life: not only in the head, but in the heart and in all our external activity."<sup>30</sup>

In this way, Monsignor Escrivá offers his sons and daughters a path of spiritual freedom, which is not the same as a path devoid of demands: "You are contemplative souls in the midst of the world," he says, and uses this beautiful formula: the "heroism without noise of your ordinary life."<sup>31</sup> The vocation of the laity in the world requires this contemplative attitude, without which it would lose its proper supernatural character, making it impossible to transform the world: "If not, they will not transform anything, but they will be transformed; rather than Christianizing the world, the Christians will become worldly."<sup>32</sup>

The difficulties that come from ordinary life are not to be invoked against this doctrine. On the contrary, the common life is perfectly suited to look in it for the means of the life of prayer. "The street"—he writes in a letter of 1959—"does not prevent our contemplative dialogue; the bustle of the world is, for us, a place of prayer."<sup>33</sup>

The sense of divine filiation carries with it the sense of God's presence. Never will St. Escrivá cease to insist on this truth of faith and its spiritual fruitfulness: "It is necessary to be convinced that God is near us continually. . . . And he is here like a loving Father. He loves each of us more than all the mothers in the world can love their children, helping us, inspiring us, blessing . . . and forgiving. . . . It is vital to be imbued, to be saturated with the knowledge that the Lord, who is near us and in heaven, is Father and very much our Father."<sup>34</sup>

It is not difficult to see to what extent this is consistent with the teaching of Vatican II about the vocation, the holiness, of the baptized and in particular the vocation of the laity.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., no. 249 (translation revised).

<sup>31</sup> RHE, 29850 (p. 3).

<sup>32</sup> Postulación de la Causa de Beatificación y Canonización del Siervo de Dios Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Sacerdote, Fundador del Opus Dei, *Artículos del Postulador*, Rome 1979, nos. 212–13.

<sup>33</sup> Josemaría Escrivá, *Carta*, (January 9, 1959).

<sup>34</sup> *The Way*, no. 267. Cf. also *Furrow*, no. 658 (translation revised).

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Following what has been presented until now, I would like to propose some reflections on the demands of the life of faith in the context of the new evangelization.

Faith encounters in its path demands and obstacles that depend on its own nature and that recur in each new generation. But there are also unique challenges of each particular era. The latter will attract our attention in the first place.

After the symbolic event of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, one often speaks of the end of the age of ideologies. The formula is only partially accurate. In fact, it ignores the traces that the Marxist ideology has left in spirits, as well as the wounds whose severity will be appearing successively. But above all it tries to indicate the global checkmate to a system considered from the cultural point of view. And, indeed, the Marxist ideology, taken here as a finished model, but not unique, of ideology, translates the will of the instigators of society and of the State to give to its own project and its justification the value of an absolute that would be imposed on all members of society. For this reason, the totalitarian power cannot be conceived without including its ideological dimension. Their representatives considered themselves, according to the famous formula of Stalin, as engineers of souls. Having put their hands in teaching and in the mass media, with an impressive propaganda apparatus, with the support of terror and intimidation, they expressed the need to convince at all costs, and regardless of the means used. The totalitarian power, whose ideology was auto-qualified as scientific, had to be the proprietor of beliefs, and the people subjected to such power would have to share such convictions unanimously. The consensus thus obtained, in large part fictitious and feigned, replaced the truth. Ideologies are lies and illusions that impose themselves or are imposed on the community, so that the ideological era meant the triumph of pseudo-truth because the lie is a false claim that at all costs is intended to pass as real. It is much more than a simple mistake. And hence the decline or collapse of ideologies, whose deception suddenly becomes clear, brings with it a crisis of the meaning of truth. If what we had been taught as true was false and deceitful, where do we find truth? Are we facing an illusion? In such context, the temptation of nihilism is very strong. Because ideologies have perverted the very notion of truth, the current crisis of culture is essentially a crisis of truth.

For these reasons, and with the prospect of the new evangelization, the apostles have to be witnesses of the truth: testimonies, first, of the virtue of faith. It is worth recalling here the words of Jesus: "You will know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). And since the crisis of truth also reaches the field of culture, the witness of the truth, who has an intellectual vocation, must be present in the domains of philosophy and metaphysics.

Ideology mimics the truth. Therefore, its fall can help weaken and obscure the meaning of truth. Other sectors of our culture can cooperate to this same end.

If the modern era has been able to develop the very idea of ideology, it is due undoubtedly to the fact that the political power had the means to put pressure on spirits much more effectively than in the past. But it stems also, and more radically, from the fact that a latent crisis concerning the idea of *certainty* already existed for some time.

The notion of certainty is distinct from that of truth: someone possesses certainty of a truth. Certainty indicates the quality of possession, the assimilation of truth by a subject. A certain truth is a truth that no argument could pull out of the spirit. Thus, certainty means the property of truth by which this can be imposed in an indisputable way to the spirit. While the truth expresses the relationship of conformity of the judgment with the known reality, certainty is the effect of the truth, the nature of its location in the subject that knows: there are certain truths and probable truths.

The truth is imposed with certainty when the spirit discovers its *evidence*, immediate or mediate. Then the object is made present to the spirit.

Now, in modern culture, there has been a shift of emphasis, whose importance should not be underestimated: opposing the very nature of things, certainty has taken the lead on the evidence of truth. First of all we have sought certainty.

From this have been derived two consequences. The first is a characteristic form of rationalism. The *how* of knowledge has been sought before anything else; the perfect possession of the object has become a criterion of truth, excluding in this way, from the field of knowledge, all imperfect knowledge of the truth. And this is why human reason has been closed in itself.

The second consequence can be found in the opposite direction. The urgent quest for certainty that puts at the forefront the subjective aspect of knowledge has opened the way to the psychological substi-

tutes of certainty. Devoid of any connection with the truth, certainty has become a reassuring subjective attitude. And through this door have entered the ideologies. Without any wondering about its foundations, what is certain has been pursued just because it is comforting.

The issue is of concern to the witness of truth in a direct way. Indeed, theological faith carries with it a relationship between evidence and certainty that has no equivalent in the order of human affairs. Usually, the degree of certainty depends on the degree of evidence. In theological faith coexist the absence of evidence and the perfect firmness of certainty, and this because the act of faith is based on a motive stronger than the natural evidence of reason—namely, the authority of God that reveals and its supreme veracity. So there is, without a doubt, evidence as a basis of faith, but evidence that is given us through a mediator: “No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him” (John 1:18).

The witness of truth must be fully aware of the specificity of theological faith. St. Escrivá teaches: “Faith is a supernatural virtue which disposes our intelligence to give assent to the revealed truths, to say yes to Christ, who has given us a full understanding of the saving plan of the Blessed Trinity.”<sup>35</sup> These lines illuminate the behavior that is expected of us.

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The realm of ideologies has been that of “certainties” that already no longer had truth as a cause. That is why they have been interpreted as answers, in the individual and social sphere, to the need for security. “Certainties” would be in this sense lies, thanks to which we would defend ourselves from the tragic aspect of our existence, subject to the inexorable law of time and expiration. This resource having failed, man should learn to live without certainty; skepticism and relativism would, thus, be the foundations of a new wisdom.

On behalf of such an attitude, of resigned despair, believers will be accused of being either fanatics or anachronistic beings who strive to hold on to the old certainties. This new cultural context calls for a remarkable testimony of faith and of its novelty. It is necessary to make clear that the certainties of the believer come from divine truth, the source of meaning, peace, and joy. Such testimony will dissipate prejudices and obstacles if its expression is authentically evangelical.

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<sup>35</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 191 (from homily given on October 12, 1947; translation revised).

In effect, the witness to the truth has to face a double hurdle: that of the soothing certainty that no longer is referred to truth, and the corresponding rejection of certainties as illusions that man has to learn to do without.

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Crisis of truth, temptation to skepticism. A third challenge appears in the path of the new evangelization: that of syncretism. What has been said so far does not yet cover all the trends that appeal to our world. Along with the inclination that leads to nihilism, there is also need to confront a diffused and wild religiosity and the largely new problems posed by the encounter between Christianity and non-Christian religions. Vatican Council II, through *Nostra Aetate*, has opened the doors to an interreligious dialogue that does not turn out to be exclusive of the missions. But a strong temptation arises when one is open with sympathy to the positive elements of other religions, to lose sight of the specificity of Christianity and the universality of salvation that it obtains for us: "Nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The temptation of syncretism consists in considering that the various religious experiences are in essence identical, historical religions being but mere contingent manifestations. Christianity appears then as one religion among others. Such temptation seduces many spirits, and even if it is in an attenuated form, it exerts its influence also in some theologians.

Faced with this challenge, which is a great provocation for the coming century, it is essential and vital that the witness of truth be convinced of the transcendence of the Christian faith, of its uniqueness. Its specificity depends on the personal relationship established with the person of Jesus Christ, Son of God made man. We now recall the insistence of Monsignor Escrivá on the supernatural aspect, as well as his insistence on the life of union of the believer with Jesus. Let us also remember his sense of the Eucharist and, through homilies that he has left us, his constant and very specific invitation to the *sequela Christi*. The daily meditation on the Gospel and the participation in the liturgy of the Church leads the disciple to that familiarity with Jesus, who is at the center of our faith. The witness of truth is thus impelled to deepen the awareness of his identity as son of God in the only-begotten Son. It would also be appropriate to recall the deep Marian devotion of St. Escrivá, as well as his love for the Church.

We are thus faced with a rich treasury that the architects of the new evangelization are invited to use to be up to the tasks that await them.

**N&V**