



The Christian in the World: Sanctifying Everyday Work

By Russell Shaw

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The Christian in the World: Sanctifying Everyday Work

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INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, perhaps as many as twenty-five, I found myself at a Catholic seminary giving a talk on lay spirituality. I was about as well equipped to address that topic as I would be to speak to you concerning my experiences as pilot of the Space Shuttle. That I was giving the talk was a tribute to two things: the indulgent optimism of the friend who'd invited me to speak and my own erroneous certitude that, if push came to shove, I'd always have something worthwhile to say on virtually any subject, no matter how little I really knew about it. You tend to think that way about yourself when you are young.

Have you ever done something in public that was so uncompromisingly stupid that, years later, you still shrivel up a little whenever you recall it? That's how it was with me on this occasion. All that saved me from total devastation was my ignorance of how badly I was doing—that, and the courtesy of the audience, which for the most part didn't have the heart to tell me. If I've occasionally expressed my views in public on one topic or another since then, it has only been because, after that performance, there was no place to go but up.

Remember, I was speaking about lay spirituality. And what did I have to say? In effect, that there's no such thing as spirituality for lay people. Priests and religious have real interior lives. The most lay people can hope for is occasionally to remove themselves from their natural environment—family, job, the world—in order to steal a little time to act like monks and nuns.

Otherwise, spirituality for lay people had really to be considered out of the question. There were just too many obstacles, and the biggest of them all was precisely this thing called “the world.” The world was large, noisy, confusing, full of distractions and temptations. As a factor in the life of a Christian layman, it had two, and only two, functions to perform: first, as a place where you learned to say no—where “doing good” was “avoiding evil”; second, as something to be avoided, shunned, fled from as much as possible, so that you could lead some kind of poor imitation of the monastic life in

whatever scattered corners of time and circumstance you might snatch for the purpose.

ANOTHER WAY OF THINKING

In retrospect, I can laugh at this caricature of lay spirituality (I hope you're laughing, too), but at the time I saw nothing humorous in it. I made my points with complete seriousness and utter ingenuousness. It never even occurred to me that there might be another way of thinking about these matters. And thank God it didn't; otherwise, I'd have never gotten through my talk.

There is nevertheless one thing to be said in defense of my performance on that occasion a quarter of a century ago: I wasn't the only one who thought that way. Indeed, I was simply parroting what had been for a long, long time a not uncommon Christian view of the world, the spiritual life, and the awkward situation of lay people. In my naiveté, I probably stated the case in exceptionally unnuanced fashion, but in essence I was simply saying what had been said many times before: that "the world" is an unremittingly hostile environment for a Christian, and lay people interested in sanctity—or even, simply, in saving their souls by the skin of their teeth—do well to remove themselves from it as much as they can.

Classic sources of Christian thinking do not support this view, but they do contain elements which, taken out of context can be—and sometimes have been—misunderstood in this way. That is the case, for example, with some passages in St. Augustine and, centuries later, *The Imitation of Christ*. This should not be misinterpreted, however. St. Augustine was a genius and a saint, one of the fathers of the Church and one of the founders of Western civilization. *The Imitation of Christ* is a spiritual classic, from which anyone can still derive much profit. I'm hardly in a position to set either straight on the basis of my superior wisdom. But it nevertheless remains true that some have found, or imagined they found, in both Augustine and the *Imitation* certain strands of thought which, alongside much that is priceless and perennially valid, constituted, if taken in isolation from everything else, a rather skewed and inadequate vision of the Christian vocation in the world.

For example, in the tenth book of the Confessions, St. Augustine undertakes to define what he calls “the happy life.” Not surprisingly, he identifies it entirely and exclusively with God:

There is a joy that is not granted to the wicked, but only to those who worship You for your own sake, and for whom you yourself are joy. This is the happy life, to rejoice over you, to you, and because of you: this it is, and there is no other. Those who think that there is another such life pursue another joy and it is not true joy.

Given Augustine’s personal history—long years of dalliance with false joys of the flesh and the intellect, followed by one of the most profound and far-reaching conversions in history—it isn’t hard to comprehend the experiential origins of this passage. But it does raise some large questions which need to be understood clearly and taken altogether seriously by people trying to make Christian sense of life in the world.

I will leave the serious argument to philosophers and theologians; but I think all of us, whether philosophers and theologians or not, need to consider the relationship between loving the Good which is God and loving human goods. We are made in such a way that our choices necessarily concern human goods, and, even where God is in question, we must approach him (or draw away from him) through the use (or misuse) which we make of creatures. It is not possible for us entirely to leap over creatures, to set aside human goods and the choices we make among them as of no account, and to rush directly into the arms of God. And yet, sometimes at least, the impression is given that this is the Christian ideal.

Consider a passage like this in *The Imitation of Christ*:

Oh, this is the highest and safest wisdom, that by contempt of the world we endeavor to please God. . . . And, therefore, wean your heart from all earthly things which are visible and perishable; and turn yourself to the invisible eternal things. For all those who follow their carnal desires defile their conscience and lose the grace of God.

As anyone familiar with the Imitation knows, this little book is shot through with similar passages expressing the same thought. I do not mean to suggest that nothing true and important is being said here. But it is essential to understand what *contemptus mundi*, contempt of the world, truly means in an orthodox Christian context. As the Second Vatican Council

points out, the “world” which this formula has in view is the world as it is infected by the “spirit of vanity and malice which transforms into an instrument of sin those human energies intended for the service of God and man” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 37). It is not the world in and of itself, the world of God’s creation and human artifice, which we are meant to direct to the benefit of human beings and the glory of God by our good choices and actions. God made the world: are we really meant to turn up our noses at it?

That’s a very good question, and it points to two difficulties with the mistaken view of Christian life which I’ve been discussing here. The first is that it isn’t very healthy for us. The second is that it isn’t very healthy for the world.

Of course I don’t mean “healthy” in the sense of gratifying, or pleasurable or conducive to comfort and convenience, which is the ordinary sense in which the word is used. Instead, I mean “healthy” in the sense of “consistent with and conducive to objective best interests”—ours and the world’s. To put it simply, when we conceive of Christian life as the practice of an unqualified, extreme “contempt of the world,” we place ourselves in the position of having to act against the God-given law of our own nature, while at the same time we turn the world over to philosophies and value systems which are radically opposed to Christianity. The first thing, quite simply, is impossible; the second thing, unfortunately, is all too possible.

As to the impossibility of the thing—I mean, actually living this way—I submit that this is the case even with cloistered religious, who, in a manner consistent with their style of life, must come to God through human goods quite as much as the rest of us. But this is even more apparent with the rest of us, who aren’t cloistered religious and who live very much in “the world.” We know quite well that, for better or worse, we are either going to work out our salvation there or, most likely we will not work it out at all.

But when distorted spiritualities hold up to us a model of other-worldliness which is neither realizable nor desirable, we are likely to do either of two things: either we will live alienated, ineffectual, and more or less marginalized lives on the fringes of secular society (the sort of people who peddle flowers in airports and hand out religious tracts in bus stations); or else, turning our backs on the conspicuously unacceptable ideal which has been proposed to us, we will plunge headlong into the world, uncritically appropriating not just secularity but secularism as our value system (the sort of people who may go to church on Sunday out of social convention but who

spend the rest of the week doing what they please in order to get what they want out of life).

As to the bad consequences for the world from having Christians adopt these attitudes and try to live by them, I believe they have been painfully apparent for centuries and account, at least in part, for many of the worst problems of the present day.

To explain that rather sweeping judgment, I call your attention to something which, at first glance, may not seem to have much to do with our topic, namely, the continuing uncertainty in many minds about the purpose or purposes of the Second Vatican Council.

Obviously the scope of Vatican II was immense. Where do you begin? With liturgy? Doctrine? Priesthood and religious life? Ecumenism? The role of laity? It's hard to find a handle.

WHAT POPE JOHN XXIII HAD IN MIND

The best place to begin, I think, is where Pope John XXIII did. The man who convened Vatican II all those years ago had something in mind, and an evaluation of the council and its aftermath should start with that.

What Pope John had in mind was never a secret, but it was and remains something so large, so momentous, that even today it is hard to keep in focus. He wished, quite simply, to heal the centuries-old rift between the Church and the world and, analogously, between the natural and the supernatural in the lives of individual persons.

In the document formally convoking Vatican II in 1961, Pope John spoke of a “crisis under way within society” and creating for the Church a task of “immense gravity . . . as in the most tragic periods of its history.” He explained:

It is a question in fact of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the gospel—a world which exalts itself with its conquests in the technical and scientific fields, but which brings also the consequences of a temporal order which some have wished to reorganize excluding God.

I know that ecclesiastical prose like that generally has the effect of sleeping gas, but it would be a mistake to view this particular sample as mere boilerplate from the Vatican archives. Pope John was here stating a fundamental fact about the modern world: to a great extent, it has lost sight of God. “Hence,” he said, “there is a weakening in the aspiration toward the values of the spirit. Hence an urge for the almost exclusive search for earthly pleasures. . . . And hence there is a completely new and disconcerting fact: the existence of a militant atheism which is active on a world level.”

New though it is in some significant respects, this state of affairs didn’t come about overnight. At least since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, the Church and secular culture have been moving apart. And the roots of this process went back even further—all the way back to the exaggerated other-worldliness, the all-too-literal contemptus mundi, that some Christians had mistakenly espoused. One consequence, on the world’s

side, has been more and more to view supernatural religion as irrelevant to authentic human concerns and even as an obstacle to progress. The logical outcome of this is secular humanism as we find it in the world today—militantly atheistic and messianic in its Marxist version, religiously indifferent and self absorbed in the garb of Western consumerism.

By the middle years of the twentieth century, as Pope John observed, secular society, increasingly cut off from the influence of supernatural religion, was in rather desperate straits. Technological progress, combined with confusion and conflict over fundamental values, had brought humanity to the brink of an unprecedented crisis. And this in turn created a paradoxical opportunity for the Church. As the pope put it, “Many people who did not realize the importance of its mission in the past are, taught by experience, today more disposed to welcome its warnings.”

On its side, the Church was apparently in a good position to respond. Having weathered many tribulations during the last several centuries, it was by midpoint in the twentieth century a strong, healthy, selfconfident community of faith—“reinvigorated intellectually . . . interiorly purified . . . ready for trial,” to quote Pope John again. All it needed was internal renewal and updating, in order to slough off some of the anachronistic cultural accretions that weighed it down and, in particular, to set aside the false otherworldliness which had inhibited its role in human affairs.

How well has Pope John’s master plan been realized? I will leave that to others—although it does appear that the task outlined by Pope John has proved much larger and harder than perhaps he or anyone else anticipated at the time. But if this broad-brush approach makes anything clear, it is that in speaking of “winning back the world,” we are speaking of something intensely real and serious, with momentous social as well as individual consequences.

In fact, winning back the world is essential, both for the world and for us. For this is a central and indispensable element of the vocation of lay persons: to sanctify themselves in and through their involvement in the secular order and at the same time to contribute to the sanctification of the secular order itself—to the restoration of all things in Christ to which, we believe, history is ultimately tending.

You will notice I’ve just introduced another term into this discussion—“vocation.” It is, I assure you, absolutely crucial. Only by beginning to think of ourselves as people with true vocations—in the fullest sense of that term—

can we possibly grasp the magnitude of our task and the seriousness of our obligation.

And here, too, of course there's a problem. What do we ordinarily understand—what have we been conditioned to understand—by the word vocation? For many people, “vocation” refers to the special calling which draws priests and religious into the priesthood and religious life. Priests and brothers and nuns have vocations. The rest of us have jobs, I suppose. Families. Commitments and relationships of various kinds. But certainly not vocations.

This way of thinking is absolutely false and immeasurably harmful. Let me be as clear about this as I possibly can. Everybody has a vocation—not in some weak, accommodated sense, but in a full, literal, altogether robust and demanding sense. One of the great problems of Christian life for many centuries has been the lack of an adequate theology of vocation. Only in recent years, painfully and partially, have we begun to confront this problem and try to correct it.

A UNIQUE PERSONAL VOCATION

Indeed, it might be well if we thought of ourselves not merely as having “vocations” but as living in an exceptionally rich vocational context. First, the common Christian vocation shared by every baptized person—the vocation to love and serve God and neighbor and work out one’s salvation by doing so. Next, this common calling is further specified by the choice of a state of life—as layman or priest or religious, as married or single—which carries with it a whole raft of duties and obligations. Finally, an individual’s place in the scheme of things receives its ultimate specification through his unique personal vocation—the special role which he, and only he, is called to play in God’s salvific plan.

What is this thing called “unique personal vocation”? Perhaps it might be described as the sum total of who and what I am, with all that entails as far as moral obligations and apostolic opportunities are concerned. So, for example, I am a husband (of this particular wife), a father (of these particular children), a worker (in this particular job), a writer (of these particular books and articles), a friend (of these particular people), a citizen (of this particular country), a member (of this particular parish, these particular organizations), and so on and so on, literally almost *ad infinitum*, until I’ve expressed the whole complex web of roles and commitments and duties which make up my life.

But can all of this really be called a vocation? Indeed it can—provided, of course, that it isn’t left simply on the natural level, but instead is directed to apostolate—or, more precisely, to seeking out and finding the apostolic purposes which this network of roles and commitments and duties has in God’s eyes. In other words, in regard to every element of my life, I am meant to seek out and do the will of God, to find the means of continuing God’s redemptive work in Jesus and of helping to restore all things to God in Christ.

You find this idea in St. Paul, in the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. You find it in many places in Vatican II. And you find it in Pope John Paul II, especially his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*. There Pope John Paul calls on the Church to take full account “of the individual Christian’s vocation and of responsibility for this singular, unique and unrepeatable grace by

which each Christian in the community of the People of God builds up the Body of Christ.” Describing this principle as “the key rule for the whole of Christian practice,” he adds:

It is precisely the principle of “kingly service” that imposes on each one of us, in imitation of Christ’s example, the duty to demand of himself exactly what we have been called to, what we have personally obliged ourselves to by God’s grace, in order to respond to our vocation (Redemptor Hominis, 21).

Another recent writer, Germain Grisez, has summed up a number of these matters in a passage worth quoting at some length for its clarity and precision. It goes as follows:

Every Christian is called to follow Jesus. Jesus’ basic commitment and our act of faith share the attitude toward the Father: “Your will be done.” But God’s will for each individual differs, for he gives each one different gifts and tasks. These God-given gifts and tasks constitute a personal vocation, a calling to accept the gifts and use them to carry out the tasks. The appropriate response to this vocation is a commitment or group of commitments, by which one undertakes to do God’s will in one’s own life. . . . Thus, for the faithful Christian, vocation is neither something to be invented nor arbitrarily chosen, but a divine calling to be discerned.

Obviously, the discernment of a “vocation” in this sense is not something to be done once and for always. Rather, it is a continuing—indeed, a daily—process. Even though, ordinarily, one discerns and makes one’s fundamental vocational commitments—to a state of life, for instance—once and for always, still the practical implications, the concrete entailments of living these commitments, must be sought out every day. As the same writer expresses it:

It follows that the finding and accepting of one’s personal vocation cannot be done once for all. Determinations of one’s state in life and occupation, once made, may require subsequent unfolding. . . . Prior commitments always must be faithfully fulfilled, but faithfulness also demands growth. . . . [This] shows one of the main reasons why personal vocation is so important: The whole of each Christian’s life ought to be lived by faith . . . and this will be so only if one’s every thought, word, and deed implement one or more of the commitments pertaining to one’s personal vocation.

Things of enormous importance follow from this view of vocation, and there is no time now to consider them all. But it's appropriate that we reflect in this context on a matter of paramount practical importance in your life and mine. I mean our work.

Here also we have to begin by setting aside certain false but rather widely held ideas. Work is not a punishment for sin, a curse laid by God on the human race. No doubt what we now find painful and frustrating about work is, in one way or another, related to original sin and also to personal sin. But this is not to say that the impulse to work arises from sin. Genesis tells us, for example, that immediately after creating man and woman, "God blessed them, saying: Be fertile and multiply; fill and earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). And again: "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it" (Genesis 2:15). Our first parents evidently were workers long before that regrettable incident with the snake and the apple tree. Work is a fundamental part of the human vocation as such.

Furthermore, it is now also a fundamental element of our Christian vocation. Work is not a distraction from Christian life, existing in basic and ineradicable tension with our calling as Christians. Rather, and especially for those of us who live and work in the world, work is a central component of our personal vocations as followers of Jesus Christ. We shall either become worker-saints or, quite possibly, we shall not become saints at all. Work is for us an essential means of sanctification.

Evidently, though, this notion of "sanctification" requires specification and clarification. Like a lot of "religious" language, it isn't self-explanatory, even though people sometimes proceed as if it were. When we speak of sanctification in reference to work, we are in fact speaking of two quite different, but equally important realities. One is personal sanctification. The other is the sanctification of the world. Both need explaining.

As to personal sanctification, I take it that, on the side of the individual, this is essentially a matter of what is done and the reason for which it is done. The first consideration obviously excludes certain forms of activity: presumably it is not possible to sanctify oneself through bank robbery and drug peddling. On the other hand, any decent occupation can be the medium of sanctification. Potentially, at least, all kinds of work are valid, relevant, promising opportunities for personal sanctification.

What is crucial, of course, is the intention for which the work is performed. But let's not be too painfully pious about this. Most people work for two obvious reasons: personal satisfaction and money—and those are excellent reasons. Moreover, they are fully compatible with—and perhaps even necessary to—the kind of intention which is more immediately and perceptibly related to personal sanctification. If a man doesn't find at least a measure of ordinary human satisfaction in his job, he's very unlikely to have the natural dispositions and habits—diligence, punctuality, orderliness, cheerfulness, and so on—which underlie the pursuit of sanctity in and through work. Similarly, a man's other commitments and relationships—most notably, to his family—make it a matter of serious obligation that he take very seriously the whole question of compensation for work. A layman who imagined that seeking sanctity ruled out a prudent interest in earning money would be not only eccentric but morally blameworthy.

THE INDISPENSABLE INTENTION

Having said that, however, we need also to recognize that the intention underlying work must be something over and above the ordinary, good, human motives of personal satisfaction and money. Quite simply, the indispensable intention here is love: love of God and love of other human beings. And precisely this realization is essential to overcoming the tendency to equate sanctity with extraordinary deeds—to suppose that, unless we are doing something which is visibly, tangibly out of the ordinary, it has no bearing, and can have none, on our sanctification.

Love, then, is the key to sanctification through ordinary work. It comes down to what St. Therese of Lisieux called the “little way”—“the way of spiritual childhood, the way of trust and absolute self-surrender.” The founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaria Escriva, preached the same message. “Anything done out of love,” he wrote, “is important, however small it might appear. . . . Our Lord tells us that everything is valuable—those actions which from a human point of view we regard as extraordinary and those which seem unimportant. Nothing is wasted.”

In what does sanctity consist? Evidently, in doing the duties that belong to our own lives—responding to our unique personal vocations, of which our work is an essential part—with great love of God and neighbor. For some this may mean performing dramatic deeds. For most, it will mean living a hidden life but investing its elements with such intense love that the result is spiritually heroic.

The second reality to which we refer in speaking of sanctification through work is the sanctification of the world. This is not an easy concept, but let me offer at least a few thoughts on the subject.

First of all, let's put aside the idea that the “sanctification of the world” requires imposing a rigid religious party line on the structures and institutions of secular society. There are indeed serious, binding principles of the natural moral law which govern—or at least ought to govern—economic life, politics, defense policy, and virtually every other social context. The Catholic Church, furthermore, does indeed have a body of social doctrine, incorporating the natural moral law but also based in part on

revelation, which is applicable to all these areas of conduct. The world is not a kind of moral free-fire zone where anything goes. But that nevertheless leaves enormous space for the exercise of responsibility and moral creativity by Christians in the world.

Specifically, it leaves space for the sort of thing which I believe Pope John had in view in calling the Second Vatican Council and which Pope John Paul had in view in calling a synod of bishops to review the successes and failures in carrying out the council's program.

RESCUING SECULAR SOCIETY

The important innovators in the life of the modern Church have aimed rather consistently and unanimously at fostering integration of the natural and the supernatural, the this-worldly and the other-worldly, in Catholic thought and practice. It was Pope John's conviction that in this way the Church would be able in effect to rescue secular society which, having lost touch with the supernatural dimensions of human life and destiny, found itself by the middle of the twentieth century in a profound crisis pointing toward a potentially apocalyptic conflict between the secular humanisms of West and East.

"Though not having direct earthly ends," he wrote, "[the Church] cannot fail to interest itself in the problems and worries of here below. It knows how beneficial to the good of the soul are those means that are apt to make the life of those individual men and women who must be saved more human. It knows that by vivifying the temporal order with the light of Christ it reveals men to themselves; it leads them, therefore, to discover in themselves their own nature, their own dignity, their own end."

As I have said, for many centuries before Vatican II, the tendency of not a few Catholics was largely in the other direction—excessive other-worldliness, too little appreciation for human goods and for the continuity between life in this world and life in the next. Unfortunately, the tendency since Vatican II has been in just the other direction. Instead of striking a balance, Catholics in large numbers have trooped into the camp of the "secular," sloughing off religious values and beliefs on the way. The challenge for those who applaud neither excess seems obvious. And it is precisely through work, our constructive engagement with the secular order, that we respond.

What in fact is the significance of our work? Most fundamentally, I think, it has two meanings. First, as Genesis suggests, work is co-creation: it is a means, perhaps the most important routinely available to us, of cooperating with God in realizing the as yet unrealized elements of his plan for creation. The deists mistakenly supposed that God made the world as a kind of giant mechanism which now simply goes on ticking away like a huge

grandfather's clock. But we, on the contrary, must affirm that God continues to create. Only now he calls us to participate in bringing about the fullness of creation as he intends it. This we do in many ways, but especially through our work.

But besides seeing work as co-creation and ourselves as co-creators, we need now, in light of Christ, to see work also as co-redemptive and ourselves as co-redeemers. For St. Augustine and *The Imitation of Christ* are overwhelmingly correct in supposing that there is indeed a great deal of evil in the world. But the response we are called upon to make as Christians, followers of Christ, is not to flee the world but redeem it. "And so," writes the founder of Opus Dei, "I keep on repeating to you that the world can be made holy. We Christians have a special role to play in sanctifying it. . . . The great mission that we have received in baptism is to redeem the world with Christ."

And how are we to do that? The only possible answer is that we are meant to do it as Christ did. It was Jesus' mission as Redeemer to overcome evil; and he accomplished this by perfect fidelity to the will of the Father—fidelity for which, in the end, evil was visited upon him. In some small way, according to the circumstances of our lives, this is also the necessary pattern for people who presume to call themselves Christians. The Cross is the symbol of Christianity, not merely in memory of Christ, but as a twofold reminder to us: that we are to follow him and how we are to follow him.

WHERE IS THE CONNECTION?

All this may sound very lofty, but also very far removed from ordinary experience and especially from our everyday work. What, then, is the nexus—if any—between concepts like “co-creation” and “co-redemption” and what most of us do on most week days, generally between nine and five, in an office or classroom or some other routine setting? In fact, that question has already been answered. The nexus is love. Where the motive is love, there are no small or insignificant deeds. And whatever is done out of love, in the service of God and others, has redemptive value. “Work is born of love,” St. Josemaria says. “It is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. . . . We have been rightly told, ‘In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God’s glory’.”

Now, thinking of work in this way and actually working in this spirit is extremely simple, and comes to us as second nature—no? Evidently not! At this point, where the question “How?” naturally arises, I’ve come both to the really difficult part of this presentation and, necessarily, to its end. I can only tell you that to have a realistic hope of accomplishing a program such as this, two things are indispensable: a personal plan for the nurturing of a healthy interior life and perseverance in executing the plan in the face of obstacles, among which there are, perhaps, none more grave than the distractions—the hum-drum routine, the frenetic pace, the appeals to vanity and selfishness and base motives of all kinds—which often accompany work itself. Without a plan and perseverance, lofty talk about sanctifying work and winning back the world is mere idle chatter.

And yet, however unaccustomed we may be to thinking in these terms, realities like co-creation and co-redemption truly are the stuff of our vocations and the ultimate purposes of our work. There are two extremes to be avoided. One is to take work as a self-explanatory end in itself, the very *raison d’être* of existence, and so join the world on its own terms. The other, which I was arguing for twenty-five years ago, is to regard the world and the work we do there as radically incompatible with sanctity and so shun and flee them whenever possible. Neither approach is acceptable.

As laymen, we are meant to save our souls in large part through our work and, in doing so, to save the souls of many others. It is, finally, just as St. Josemaria said twenty-five years ago—which, I suppose, was about the time that I was saying something quite different.

We must be convinced that our professional vocation is an essential part of our condition as Christians. Our Lord wants you to be holy in the place where you are, in the job you have chosen. . . . Every job that is not opposed to the divine law is good and noble, and capable of being raised to the supernatural plane, that is, inserted into the constant flow of Love which defines the life of a child of God. . . . The sanctification of ordinary work is, as it were, the hinge of true spirituality for people who, like us, have decided to come close to God while being at the same time fully involved in temporal affairs.



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