

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF HOLINESS IN THE LAITY: NEWMAN, ESCRIVÁ AND WOJTYŁA

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ABSTRACT

John Henry Newman, Josemaría Escrivá, and Karol Wojtyła are three modern saints who insisted on the general or universal call to holiness in everyday life, which until recent centuries focused on religious vows, degrees of prayer or mystical experiences. All three taught that this call is rooted in the sacrament of baptism with its subsequent growth by means of prayer, sacramental life, and the exercise of the virtues. They conceived of Christian holiness in terms of the imitation of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. For them, each Christian participates in the threefold office of Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King. Their teaching on divine filiation, sanctification of work and secular realities is a notable contribution towards a theology of holiness which calls for further elaboration.

Keywords

Newman; Escrivá; John Paul II; Holiness; Laity; Threefold office of Christ; Holy Spirit; Divine filiation; Identification with Christ; Sanctification of work

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Since the early sixteenth century, there has been a gradual re-discovery and deepening of the concept of holiness or sanctity understood as a theological category of Christian life for all the faithful, including the laity. Holiness has been conceptualized as the union of man with God by means of sanctifying grace through which the Christian lives the virtue of charity and the other theological and moral virtues to a high degree. Over the centuries, emphasis has been placed on different aspects of this process: divinization and adopted

filiation (St. Athanasius, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Maximus the Confessor,¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa), ascetical life and prayer in monasticism (St. Augustine, St. Benedict), profession and practice of the evangelical counsels (St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi), identification with Christ (St. Theresa of Avila, St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Devotio moderna*), practice of charity and acceptance of God's will (St. Francis de Sales) and the way of spiritual childhood (St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus).²

The modern and contemporary awareness of the universal call to holiness has led to a renewal and development of an earlier emphasis: identification with Christ and divine filiation, and a new perspective: sanctification of work. This article identifies the contributions made by St. John Henry Newman, St. Josemaría Escrivá, and St. John Paul II (Karol J. Wojtyła) to a theology of holiness, which is not centered on religious vows or the mystical state. For these three priests, sanctity consists in Christian perfection, which is lived out in ordinary life by all men and women, the majority of whom are laity. They emphasize the gradual deification or divinization through a configuration with Christ. Here we discuss some specific notions which they have in common in their teaching about sanctification.

1. Historical Overview

For many centuries, the call to sanctity, directed by Christ Himself, to all Christians was relegated primarily to priests and members of religious communities. Since the fourth or fifth centuries onwards, a clear distinction was made between two types of Christians: those who were called to follow the commandments and those who were called to live the beatitudes by leaving society to seek holiness in religious communities.³ In subsequent centuries a theology of 'Christian perfection'⁴

¹ See Paul O'Callaghan, *Children of God in the World* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 142–156.

² See Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 54–56, 57–72, 80–108, 162–168, 178–217.

³ See José Luis Illanes, *Tratado de Teología Espiritual* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2007), 138–150.

⁴ Adolphe Tanquerey (1854–1932) has a chapter titled 'The Duty of Tending to Perfection' which begins with the faithful but focuses on those in religious orders and the priesthood (*The Spiritual Life*, Tournai: Desclee & Co., 1930, 176–205). Tanquerey explains that a Christian cannot remain in the state of grace for long unless he strives to make progress in the spiritual life, and adds: 'It is only in this restricted sense that we maintain the obligation of perfection for ordinary Christians.' (177).

developed around the pursuit of holiness through the practice of the three evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, and obedience) with the profession of vows to live these counsels. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (1274–1323), the evangelical counsels dispose man more perfectly for charity for the attainment of his end. The vows, which are acts of the virtue of religion, have the function of healing man's nature, freeing him to dedicate himself wholly to the highest pursuit.⁵

Through the exercise of these acts of the virtue of religion, some persons enter into the religious state, which was held to be perfect because of the means it provides to obtain holiness. Aquinas explained the vows in therapeutic, ascetic, and oblationary terms.⁶ Although the pursuit of holiness was not limited to the religious vocation, this state was considered the 'state of perfection'.⁷ The profession of vows, practice of a rule in convents or monasteries, and contemplative life thus became the paradigm of Christian life and many religious institutions were founded for the spiritual growth of religious and priests.⁸ The laity practiced popular devotions, celebrated feasts of their patron saints, and some joined third orders. The earlier theological tradition looks to perfection through the exercise of religious vows considered as the perfect means associated with infused contemplation and mystical gifts.⁹ A more recent tradition, instead, conceives of the pursuit of charity through the exercise of all the theological and moral virtues in the sanctification of work, family, and other secular realities. For the latter, the means are the acts of all these virtues rather than those specific to the virtue of religion and the three vows.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Catholic doctrine of sanctifying grace and justification through sacramental grace was defined at the Council of Trent. However, the earlier theological understanding of Christian holiness remained the same. The Protestant reformers,

⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 186, a. 2. For a detailed explanation, see Gregory Pine, O.P. 'Religious Life as a State of Perfection,' *Nova et Vetera* 19, no. 4 (2021): 1181–1214: 1209.

⁶ *ST*, II-II, q. 186, a. 7.

⁷ Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life*, 185–187.

⁸ Gregory Pine, O.P. presents the Thomistic teaching on the relationship between the virtue of religion and charity, and maintains the importance of the theological category of state of perfection. Gregory Pine, O.P. 'Religious Life as a State of Perfection,' 1181–1214.

⁹ For the Patristic notion of *theosis* or deification see Kharlamov, V. (2008). 'Theosis in Patristic Thought,' *Theology Today* 65, no. 2 (2008): 158–168, doi: 10.1177/004057360806500203.

who maintained the teaching of justification through faith alone, taught instead the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.¹⁰ The Reformers rediscovered the value of ordinary life and work as a Christian vocation, but they excluded the mediation of the Church. The Church was no longer considered an instrument of salvation; it was only a symbol of salvation. Furthermore, ‘neither the Lutheran idea of work as “profession” nor the Calvinist-Puritan idea of sanctification of work was really aimed at the redemption of the world and thereby at its inner healing and sanctification’.¹¹ Whereas John Wesley (1703–1791) taught a ‘holiness tradition’ which emphasized the sanctity of God contrasted with man’s sinfulness, the Swiss protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) wrote about the total otherness of God (God as the wholly other, *totaliter aliter*). In his second edition of the Epistle to the Romans (1922), Barth insisted on God’s transcendence; for Barth, man cannot speak about God; he can only wait for God’s revelation of himself. In his later work, *Church Dogmatics* (1950), Barth explained how God speaks to man in Christ, giving a new ‘Christological concentration’ to his entire theological work.¹²

During the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic theologians debated on the need for infused prayer to reach this perfection. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (1877–1964), in line with the work of John Arintero, O.P. (1860–1928), offered a very detailed description of three stages on the way of perfection available to all: purgative, illuminative, and unitive.¹³ Another line of thinking represented by Joseph de Guibert, SJ (1877–1942) held the view that Christian perfection does not require infused contemplation or necessarily consist in mystical experiences or the mystical state.¹⁴

In general, however, there has been a consensus among theologians and spiritual writers that Christian perfection is the fullness of Christian life effected by the transformative work of the Holy Spirit and

¹⁰ See Martin Rhonheimer, ‘Affirming the World and Christian Holiness,’ in *Changing the World, The Timeliness of Opus Dei* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2009), 33–44.

¹¹ Rhonheimer, ‘Affirming the World and Christian Holiness,’ 39.

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Christian Life*, vol. IV (Bloomsbury, 2017). See ‘Preface’ by Hans Anton-Drewes, ix.

¹³ Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange holds that although everyone is called to infused contemplation, only some are called in a proximate and immediate way. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), 319–324.

¹⁴ Jordan Aumann, ‘Mystical Experience, the Infused Virtues and the Gifts,’ *Angelicum* 58, no. 1 (1981): 33–55, 33.

his gifts. This sanctity begins with the sanctifying grace received in Baptism and involves a life of prayer, frequent reception of the Sacraments, and the practice of the theological and moral virtues, which leads to a growth and perfection in charity.¹⁵ In the words of Gustave Thils (1909–2000), ‘... the definitive criterion of true and total Christian perfection is the perfection of charity, the heroic practice of the virtue of one’s state in life’.¹⁶

We can find these themes in the writers discussed in this article, who stand out for anticipating or underlining the Christocentric and Trinitarian doctrine on sanctity beginning with Baptism and teach on the universal call to holiness put forth in the Second Vatican Council.

2. Newman, Escrivá and Wojtyła

John Henry Newman (1801–1890), Josemaría Escrivá (1902–1975), and Karol J. Wojtyła (1920–2005) are three modern-day saints who were born and raised in very different social and religious environments. The first was alive during Vatican Council I; the other two during Vatican Council II. They each exerted significant influence through their preaching, spiritual direction and writing.

Instead of treatises on Christian perfection, they wrote mostly reflections and homilies on this topic, employing a less abstract language which is more accessible to audiences. Their approach to this subject differs from the traditional approach, with its focus on the vows and its frequent classification of prayer and the ascetical life. Although Escrivá and John Paul II were familiar with this doctrine of the evangelical counsels, vows, and mystical theology and encouraged those called to this consecrated life,¹⁷ they considered sanctity from the perspective of a filial relationship and a friendship with God. Josemaría Escrivá often spoke of a divine friendship with Jesus Christ, who called His disciples

¹⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 184, a. 3.

¹⁶ Gustave Thils, *Christian Holiness*, 43. Writing in 1961, Thils explains the universality of the call to holiness which is not limited to 1) consecrated persons, 2) monks and religious, or 3) the laity, 27–44. For him, the foundation for Christian sanctity is supernatural life and participation in the holiness of God which demands constant growth and development, 45–6.

¹⁷ For instance, John Paul II wrote that: ‘By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, ‘that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world.’ Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican, March 25, 1966), 16.

friends. Escrivá also urged people to befriend the Holy Spirit by which he meant attention and docility to the inspirations and motions of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Similarly, John Paul II asked: ‘Is not Christ the supreme friend and the teacher of all genuine friendship?’¹⁹ This divine friendship is based on God’s charity, about which in the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas comments: ‘Now the friendship of charity is based on the fellowship of happiness, which consists essentially in God, as the First Principle, whence it flows to all who are capable of happiness.’²⁰

Escrivá appreciated the fourth-century Doctor of the Church, St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), who said: ‘The truth is that all men must rise to the same heights; and what has made the world go upside down is that thought that only the monk is obliged to a higher perfection and that all others can live as they please. But it is not so!’²¹ Escrivá quoted this passage, explaining that:

There is a parenthesis of centuries – very long and inexplicable one – in which to seek Christian perfection by means of sanctification of everyday work, each one through his professional work and in his own state of life, was a doctrine that sounded and sounds as if something new.²²

Although Newman, Escrivá, and Wojtyła are well-known writers, their teaching on sanctification is less well-known. Newman, for example, is widely recognized in various subjects of theology, yet relatively few theological studies exist on his teaching of Christian sanctity.²³

¹⁸ See Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1981), 93, 120; Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1974), 134–136.

¹⁹ Apostolica Exhortation *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), 9. See also *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), 34 and 52.

²⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 26, a. 2.

²¹ St. John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores eorum qui ad monasticam vitam inducant*, 1, III, 14 [PG 47, col. 374].

²² Josemaría Escrivá, *Letters I*, 3, 3 a, January 9, 1932, ed. Luis Cano (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 2020), 163.

²³ For instance, it is surprising that Gustave Thils’ important work *Christian Holiness* alludes once only to Newman and makes a few bibliographical references to his works. *Christian Holiness, A Precis of Ascetical Theology* (Tiel: Lanoo Publishers, 1961), 117, 613, 727. For a good presentation of the spiritual and ascetical teaching of Newman see: Ryan J. Marr, *Seeking God with St. John Henry Newman* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor), 2020.

3. John Henry Newman

Newman was raised in a family which subscribed to the Low Anglican Church. As a child his faith and religious practice were grounded on the reading of the Bible. Also at a young age he was influenced by the Calvinist doctrines and religious zeal of Walter Mayers, one of the school masters.

Despite Newman's deep biblical piety inspired by Evangelical teachers, he gradually developed a growing awareness of the value of religious tradition as found in the Anglican Church.²⁴ He understood that holiness is rooted in a new birth through Baptism,²⁵ in a life of prayer, and in the exercise of the virtues. A sort of moral strictness in his early Evangelical period later gave way to an emphasis on the action of the Holy Spirit and the life of grace.²⁶ In the Church Fathers, especially St. Athanasius (c. 296–373), he discovered the idea of *theosis*, or divinization²⁷ and the action of the Indwelling Spirit in the Church and in each Christian's soul. In a Christmas sermon (1842), Newman echoes the Greek Fathers:

Men we remain, but not mere men, but gifted with a measure of all those perfections which Christ has in fullness, partaking each in his own degree of the His Divine Nature so fully, that the only reason (so to speak) why His saints are not really like Him, is that it is impossible – that He is the Creator, and they his creatures; yet still so, that they are all but Divine, all that they can be made without violating the incommunicable majesty of the Most High.²⁸

²⁴ Cyril O'Regan discusses Newman's opposition to the complex liberal prejudice against the pursuit of holiness, 'John Henry Newman and the Argument of Holiness,' *Newman Studies Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 52–74.

²⁵ Newman, 'The Indwelling Spirit,' *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900–1910) 2: 223.

²⁶ *Oxford University Sermons* (1843/1871), 3, 'Evangelical Sanctity the Completion of Natural Virtue.' For a study of moral perfection in Newman's sermons see, Keith Beaumont, 'The Spiritual and Doctrinal Significance of Newman's Sermons,' in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: His Life and Thought*, ed. Juan R. Vélez (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

²⁷ Brian E. Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition: "The Veil of the Letter" and the Person of Christ,' in *Newman and Truth*, ed. Ker I. and Merrigan T. (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 147–188.

²⁸ Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8: 253

His later Anglican sermons indicate that he reached a balanced understanding of the interplay between God's grace and human action, and his focus was 'the person of Christ, and his significance for the person in grace'.²⁹ Brian E. Daley explains how this was key for Newman's understanding of sanctity as participation in God's holiness:

Similarly, it seems mainly from his study of Athanasius that Newman drew his own strong sense of salvation as actual transformation in Christ, as 'divinization', a participation in the holiness and in the very being of God. Although this idea appears as early as Irenaeus, it was Athanasius who first emphasized it clearly as the purpose and result of the Incarnation of the Word.³⁰

The future English saint commented on the biblical teaching of God's holiness and man's call to holiness 'without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb 12:14). Newman, in fact, chose this line from the *Letter to the Hebrews* as the opening text for the sermon 'Holiness, Necessary for Future Blessedness' (1826). A few years later, when he published volume one of *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (1834), he placed this as the first sermon in the volume, indicative of the centrality he gave to Christian perfection. In addition to this key notion of Christian life, throughout Newman's sermons, there is a Christological dimension.³¹ Drawing from the creeds, revelation and the Church Fathers, his sermons insist on the doctrine of Christ's Incarnation and work of redemption and his fulfillment of the Old Testament.

When writing about the Church in *Prophetical Office of the Church* (1837), he asserted that Christ has made it participate in his threefold office of priest, teacher, and king. In the sermon 'The Christian Ministry' (1834), he affirmed that consecrated ministers also share in Christ's threefold office, not just the prophetic and kingly.³² In another sermon, 'The Three Offices of Christ' (1840), he noted that the Apostles

²⁹ Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition,' 168.

³⁰ Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition,' 166–167.

³¹ Jaak Seynaeve indicates three facets of Newman's teaching on sanctity: 1) holiness comes first; 2) his 'teaching on holiness is fully Christological, Christocentric'; and 3) Christian holiness calls for fostering relationships (*cor ad cor loquitur*). 'Holy Scripture as "First Principle" in Newman's Teaching on Christian Holiness,' *Internationale Cardinal-Newman-Studien* 12, Sigmaringendorf (1988): 40–41.

³² Newman, 'The Christian Ministry,' *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 2: 25.

shared in Christ's triple office.³⁵ Newman acknowledged, in the 1877 Preface to the *Prophetical Office*, that the Roman pontiff also takes part in some way in the three *munera*. We are left, however, with the question of the manner of the layperson's assimilation to Christ since, in these texts, participation in the threefold office is specified only for the hierarchy and ordained ministers.

Newman thought of sanctity in terms of the holiness of God, Who is holiness Himself, and Who in the person of Christ asks his disciples to be holy. Newman quoted Christ's words: 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (1 Pt 1:16; Mt 5:48) and explained:

His Law is the declaration of His infinite and glorious attributes, and thereby becomes the rule by which all beings imitate, approach, and resemble Him. And when He created them, He provided that it should be to them what it ought to be. God loves holiness, and therefore, as became a good and kind Father, He created all His children holy ... He formed them upon the pattern of the Law; He moulded them into symmetry by means of it. He created man 'in His own image, and after His likeness'; that is, upon the type of the Law. He put His Spirit within him, and set up the Law in his heart; so that, what He is in His infinite nature, such was man, such was Adam in a finite nature, – perfect after his kind.³⁴

Thus, holiness refers to a participation or likeness to God in whose image and likeness man was created and a restoration of the image marred by sin. The effect is that the Christian, under the personal influence of Christ, becomes a living witness to others.³⁵

Newman considered the beauty of God's being and attributes and was captivated by the expression the 'beauty of holiness' found in the King James version of the Bible (Ps 96:9),³⁶ and he sometimes used it to express a quality of worship.³⁷ He used this expression as early as 1825 in an Address to the Church Missionary Meeting.³⁸ He found

³⁵ Newman, 'The Three Offices of Christ,' *Sermons on Subjects of the Day* (1843/1869), 62.

³⁴ Newman, 'The Law of the Spirit,' *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 5: 145–146. Beaumont, 'The Doctrinal and Spiritual Significance of Newman's Sermons.'

³⁵ Newman, 'Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Gospel,' *Oxford University Sermons*, 5: 96.

³⁶ 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.' Ps 96:9 [KJV].

³⁷ *LD* ix, 616.

³⁸ Guy Nicholls, *Unearthly Beauty*, 18.

examples of sanctity of life in the Anglican Church³⁹ and later in the lives of Roman Catholic saints, especially the Jesuits.⁴⁰

In his novels⁴¹ and personal meditations, Newman employed the adjective ‘beautiful’ to refer to the person of Christ.⁴²

Newman slowly realized the necessary role of the other sacraments in addition to Baptism. As an Anglican clergyman, he began to read daily prayers in the parish church and to hold a weekly communion service – which was very uncommon for Anglicans of the time. When he became a Roman Catholic, daily Mass and frequent confession became central to his religious life. In a Catholic sermon of 1849, ‘Saintliness the Standard of Christian Principle’, Newman comments on the great variety found in the lives of saints, yet in all ‘grace overcomes nature’⁴³ and their lives ‘show to the multitude what God can do, and what man can be’.⁴⁴

Perfection for Newman, however, does not imply sinlessness and absence of human idiosyncrasies. In a letter to a religious sister, Augusta Theodosia Drane, who had written a biography of her foundress, Mary Margaret Hallahan (1803–1868), Newman praises the boldness of the biographer who:

has had faith enough in the substantial sanctity and perfection of the dear Mother whom she has lost, to be sure that that Mother would lose nothing by having every one of her characteristics brought into light, and that Almighty God does not need our managements and artifices, our observance of mawkish proprieties and tenderness towards weak sandalizabilities (sic), in order to set off duly the creations of His grace.⁴⁵

He continues by explaining that she has placed before the reader ‘something *real*’ avoiding the common practice of ‘cutting up a Saint into virtues and of distributing him into pigeon holes, which serves to

³⁹ For example, after the death of his Anglican friend, Samuel Wood, Newman remarked to another friend that the deceased was one of the most excellent men that he knew, a man of interior life, and that Christians should ‘try to cultivate personal holiness.’ *LD* ix, 335. Letter to Maria Giberne, May 11, 1843.

⁴⁰ *LD* ix, 305. Diary entry, April 12, 1842.

⁴¹ Newman, *Loss and Gain* (1848) and *Callista, A Tale of the Third Century* (1855).

⁴² Newman, *Meditations and Devotions* (1893), 342.

⁴³ Newman, *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (1849), n. 5, 98.

⁴⁴ Newman, *Mixed Congregations*, n. 5, 99–100.

⁴⁵ *LD* xxiv, 262. Letter to Augusta Theodosia Drane, May 29, 1862. Mary Margaret Hallahan was the foundress of an Order of Dominican nuns.

destroy the special value of biography over didactic composition, and without intending it, goes far to deny to Holy Church her prerogative of being “circumcudate varietate”.⁴⁶

Newman points beyond the hierarchy and sacraments for signs of the Church’s sanctity. For him, the internal signs of holiness in the Church were more convincing than the external notes. And he found those in individuals. Frequently, he addresses the subject of faith, obedience of faith, and earnestness, which form the substance of personal sanctity. Still, in his sermons, he deals more with holiness in the Church and the action of the Holy Spirit within the Church as the source of that holiness.⁴⁷ Addressing the theological nature of the Church and its holiness, Newman developed, like Johann Möhler (1796–1838), a pneumatological ecclesiology established on Christological grounds.

The study of history led Newman to admire the accomplishments of the Benedictines and their school of sanctification.⁴⁸ He thought that St. Benedict (480–547), St. Dominic (1170–1221), and St. Ignatius (1491–1556), respectively, represented the great teachers of the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern times; where Benedict was a type of Poetry, Dominic of Reason, and Ignatius of Practical Government or Prudence.⁴⁹ While praising these models, he chose a fourth type of school, so to speak, that of St. Philip Neri (1515–1595), which was holiness in the world, and he took the Apostle of Rome as his patron. Following Neri, Newman held that ‘the Congregation of the Oratory ... is a community of secular priests, living together without vows, for the fulfillment of their ministry, under a rule and with privileges given them by the Holy See’.⁵⁰ Neither Neri or Newman intended to found a new religious body with its members under religious vows or the counsels which correspond to these.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *LD* xxiv, 262. The words ‘circumcudate varietate’ taken from Ps 45, are translated: ‘In many-colored robes she is led to the king’ Ps 45:11 (KJV).

⁴⁷ Miguel de Salis Amaral and John Nepil, ‘John Henry Newman’s Personal View of the Holiness of the Church: Some Useful Insights for our Times,’ *Newman Studies Journal* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2020): 81–94.

⁴⁸ Newman praised the monastic life as a special calling, but not obligatory for all Christians. See Greg Peters, ‘John Henry Newman’s Theology of the Monastic/Religious Life as a Means to Holiness,’ *Newman Studies Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 7–17, 17.

⁴⁹ *HS*, ii, 369–370.

⁵⁰ Newman’s Oratory Papers, 25 (August 18, 1856), in *Newman the Oratorian*, ed. Placid Murray (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2004), 314.

⁵¹ Newman thought that all Christians need to observe the evangelical counsels but ‘there are many Counsels, and not *all* are necessary for perfection, but the observance of

In 1856, the founder of the English Oratory told his brothers that they were secular priests and clerks (sic). They were not regular priests (regulars) and aimed at a different type of perfection: 'We are neither religious, nor have the perfection proper to religious.'⁵² Monks, he explained, unlike Oratorians, renounce pursuits and studies, which they had done before entering a monastery.⁵³ Newman sought a perfection in ordinary life instead of within the religious life, and he explained that perfection in terms of the fulfillment of ordinary duties accomplished with love.⁵⁴ 'It is a life of faith, hope and charity, elicited in successive acts according to the calls of the moment and to the vocation of the individual. It does not consist in any specially (sic) heroic deeds.'⁵⁵ He thus qualified that perfection does not mean doing any extraordinary service or special heroic deeds but in completing tasks and doing them without flaws. He offered a simple yet telling description of these ordinary duties, which included going to bed and waking up on time.⁵⁶

4. Josemaría Escrivá

Escrivá, a native of the northern province of Aragon in Spain, was born into a Catholic family and grew up under the reforms of Pius X, and the influence of the Council of Trent and its catechism. Soon after a deep religious experience at the age of fifteen he entered the seminary. There he studied the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and throughout his life he returned to texts of Aquinas along with the writings of the Church Fathers. As previously noted, he especially liked the writings of St. John Chrysostom; this saint's practical application of truths to Christian life resonated strongly with Escrivá's appreciation for holiness in ordinary life, as exemplified in the lives of many early Christians. He

one or other; and as counsels are very different from each other in themselves, and still more in the mode of fulfilling them there will be very different modes of pursuing and practicing perfection, and men may be all going on to perfection, though they look very different from each other', Oratory Paper, n. 25, 317.

⁵² Oratory Paper, n. 25, 315.

⁵³ Oratory Paper, n. 25, 325. He gave the example of Cesar Baronius (1538–1607), who upon the insistence of St. Philip, wrote a history of the Church, *Annales Ecclesiastici*. Many others wrote on history, antiquities and topography. Newman also spoke of the pursuit of fine arts and music by members of the Oratory.

⁵⁴ Oratory Papers, n. 28, 360.

⁵⁵ Oratory Paper, n. 25, 316.

⁵⁶ *Newman the Oratorian*, 360.

knew well the writings of St. Theresa of Avila and the Spanish classics in spirituality and literature and had devotion to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus (1873–1897), whose *Story of a Soul* he read with great interest.

In 1928, while on a spiritual retreat in Madrid as a young priest, he received from God an intellectual vision of Opus Dei with the mission to spread the universal call to holiness and to apostolate. From that moment on, the goal of his entire life became that of striving for holiness, and teaching others to do likewise. The call to holiness was specified further by another divine locution which took place in October 1931 when Fr. Josemaría had a transforming spiritual experience of his divine filiation.⁵⁷

In comparison with Newman, we could say that whereas Newman emphasized God as Creator without neglecting God as Savior and Sanctifier, Escrivá privileged the awareness of God's Fatherhood. He frequently taught Christians to meditate on Jesus' revelation of the Father, and to apply to themselves the words of Psalm 2: 'Tu es filius meus ...' Both Newman and Escrivá speak of God's providence as a manifestation of His Fatherhood, but Escrivá lays the accent precisely on God's Fatherhood. He insists, as St. Thérèse of Lisieux had done in the generation before him, that we are children – little children – before our Heavenly Father.

Through these authors, we see a sort of progression or development in the Christian understanding of holiness. We are small children, brothers and sisters, before God in Christ. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit makes the Christian another *Christ*, and thus he becomes a son in the Son,⁵⁸ and is therefore introduced into the life of the Trinity. Escrivá often used the terms '*alter Christus*' (another Christ) and '*ipse Christus*' (Christ himself) to refer to the spiritual and sacramental configuration and identification with Christ.⁵⁹

Escrivá, like Newman, underlines the Christological and pneumatological underpinning of Christian life. The foundation for his teaching

⁵⁷ Andres Vasquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1 (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2001), 332–338, 'The Early Years'.

⁵⁸ E. Mersch wrote about our filiation through the Son of God. (Filii in Filio, *Rev. Theol.*, 1938, 700. See G. Thiils, *Christian Holiness*, 85–87.)

⁵⁹ St. Augustine had spoken of *Christianus alter Christus*, but the source of St. Josemaría's use of the term is not clear. See Ernest Burkhardt and Javier López, *Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaría, A Study in Spiritual Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2017), 62. Burkhardt and Lopez study this identification with Christ under the theological concept of participation, 2, 78–84.

on holiness is the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul, along with the action of the Holy Spirit. There are three characteristic elements in his doctrine: 1) divine filiation,⁶⁰ and identification with Christ, 2) a spirit of freedom and practice of the virtues, and 3) sanctification of everyday work.

Divine filiation, frequently mentioned in his writings, is a loving awareness of being a son of God which is distinct from the knowledge of this truth. It becomes the foundation for the Christian life. It is the way that a Christian experiences his or her faith and responds to Christ's invitation to be perfect (Mt 5:18). Escrivá frequently mentions other biblical texts in his preaching to teach about holiness and God's will for man's sanctification, especially Ephesians 1:4–5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3.⁶¹ Man's vocation to holiness is precisely as adopted children, as St. Paul taught when he wrote that God 'destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ' (Eph 1:5).

For this Spanish saint, every Christian is grafted unto Christ in Baptism and thereby made to share in his priesthood. Through this and the other sacraments and by means of his prayer and work, he grows in identification with Christ, becoming in some way *ipse Christus*.⁶² Every Christian, not just the ministerial priest, must be configured to Christ, even though a ministerial priest is consecrated through the sacrament of Orders. He taught lay persons that they should exercise the 'priestly soul' which they have by virtue of their union with Christ in Baptism. This doctrine is found in his preaching:

A Christian knows that he is grafted onto Christ through baptism. He is empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, called to act in the world sharing the royal, prophetic and priestly role of Christ. He has become one and the same thing with Christ through the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and love. And so, like Christ, he has to live for other men, loving each and everyone around him and indeed all humanity.⁶³

⁶⁰ José Luis Illanes notes the novelty of Escrivá's spirituality in contrast to the preceding ones of mystical union. Instead of following the paradigm of the spousal relation it follows that of the father-son relation. *Tratado de Teología Espiritual* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2007), 574–575.

⁶¹ *Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, ed. José Luis Illanes (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2013), See Enrique Molina, 'Santidad,' 1113–1123, and Vicente Bosch, 'Santidad, Llamada Universal a la,' 1123–1126.

⁶² Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 120.

⁶³ Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 106.

Escrivá thus points out the role of the laity as mediators, subordinate to Christ's mediation as king, prophet and priest. He teaches that the laity too are destined to be ambassadors for Christ, salt and light of the earth and missionaries – without necessarily calling themselves missionaries.

Escrivá's spiritual theology is deeply Trinitarian. The mysteries of divine filiation and incorporation in Christ are realized by the Holy Spirit through the sacraments and prayer. Already as a young priest, Escrivá practiced a strong devotion to the Holy Spirit which he passed on to his spiritual sons and daughters. In a homily for the feast of Pentecost (1969), titled 'the Great Unknown' he writes:

The action of the Holy Spirit can pass unnoticed, because God does not reveal to us his plans, and because man's sin clouds over the divine gifts. But faith reminds us that God is always acting. He has created us and maintains us in existence and he leads all creation by his grace toward the glorious freedom of the children of God.⁶⁴

In this homily, he explained that 'docility' sums up the necessary attitude of the Christian to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Here and throughout his priestly life, he encouraged persons to pray to the Sanctifier and to be docile to his inspirations.

In addition to his teaching on divine filiation, another distinctive though not unique element of his spiritual theology is an emphasis on meditation of Christ's life as it is found in the Gospel. He invites the reader to see and to listen to Christ in the Gospel scenes. Escrivá's writings are scriptural meditations leading to discipleship and friendship with Christ. In comparison, Newman's analysis of the Scriptures is no less deep and encompassing, but his analysis moves more along theological lines rather than an experiential encounter with Jesus.

An underlying theme stressed by Escrivá was the spirit of freedom by which men and women serve God. Freedom is primarily the capacity to love God and to choose the means to accomplish this. He emphasized this meaning of freedom rooted in divine filiation, a correct understanding of natural law and the moral conscience, as well as the Magisterium, which are frequent points of reference for his teaching. Unlike the earlier spiritualities that emphasized the evangelical

⁶⁴ Escrivá, 'The Great Unknown' in *Christ is Passing By*, 130.

counsels – especially poverty, obedience and chastity – he drew more attention to the three theological virtues and insisted on practicing all the virtues well.

Another very significant development in the spiritual theology of St. Josemaría Escrivá is his theology of the ‘sanctification of work’. For him, work and ordinary life become an integral part of holiness, and the Christian should try to carry out the ordinary in an extraordinary way, that is, with love for God and neighbor.⁶⁵ The founder of Opus Dei repeats the terms ‘sanctification of work’ countless times in his writing and preaching and explained:

Those who want to live their Faith perfectly and to do apostolate according to the spirit of Opus Dei, must sanctify themselves with their work, must sanctify their work and sanctify others through their work. It is while they work alongside their equals, their fellow working men from whom they are in no way different, that they strive to identify themselves with Christ, imitating His thirty years in the workshop in Nazareth.⁶⁶

As would be expected, Newman too, in line with other great saints beginning with St. Benedict, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales and St. Ignatius, had acknowledged the reality of work for God’s glory and the service of men. This was specified in an Anglican sermon: ‘Doing Glory to God in Pursuits of the World.’ Escrivá, however, goes further than Newman, teaching that the sanctification of work is the ordinary path of holiness for men and women. Most people usually live in the midst of the occupations of the world; that is there where they are called to live holy lives, and that is the reality which they must make holy. Escrivá spoke of work as the raw material of their holiness, the materializing of the spiritual life, a notion which finds its correlation in

⁶⁵ Then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger commented in 2002, that Escrivá corrected the erroneous understanding of heroic virtue as reserved for exceptional people. ‘This is an erroneous concept of holiness, a wrong perception which has been corrected – and this seems to me to be the main point – by Josemaría Escrivá,’ *L’Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), 41–49, October 2002.

⁶⁶ Escrivá, ‘Opus Dei: An Association which fosters the search for holiness in the World,’ in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1993), 70.

the Incarnation.⁶⁷ He was inspired by the thought of the early Christians and fittingly quotes the *Letter to Diognetus* in his writings.⁶⁸

Escrivá's doctrine on the sanctification of ordinary life is found in many different texts and summarized in the homily 'Passionately Loving the World'.⁶⁹ This evangelical teaching would be proclaimed later in *Lumen Gentium* and in other Vatican II documents.

Like Newman before him, Escrivá did a great deal to foster the study of the faith and formation of character in university students. He established student residences – more precisely *colegios mayores* ('college halls') along the same lines. Escrivá was concerned with the religious practices and the spiritual and moral difficulties faced by students and made it a point to offer them the necessary sacramental and spiritual care. He told students that they could be 'modern day saints' and that '... an hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer'.⁷⁰

5. Karol J. Wojtyła

This intellectually gifted young Pole received the early spiritual and religious formation from his parents and from a layman, Jan Tyranowski (1901–1947), who, steeped in a Carmelite spirituality, promoted the practice of the living rosary. After the early death of his mother, Wojtyła, at the age of nine, embraced a deep spiritual trust in Mary's maternity, which would mark his entire life. In his formative years, the teaching of the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross – the abandonment of the dark night – also had a noticeable impact on Wojtyła's spiritual life.⁷¹ The mystery of suffering and the Cross, Carmelite spirituality, and later devotion to Divine Mercy shaped his spirituality.

Wojtyła pursued a serious philosophical formation at the Catholic University of Lublin, where he developed, within a personalist perspective, a Christian anthropology and sexual ethics that resulted in his works *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person* (composed

⁶⁷ Escrivá, 'Passionately Loving the World' in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 113–123.

⁶⁸ Escrivá, 'Singuli Die' (1953–1966) in *Letters*, I, 4, 16.

⁶⁹ *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 113–123. For mention of the redemptive dimension of work, see Escrivá, *Forge* (New York: Scepter Publishers), 1987, n. 702.

⁷⁰ Escrivá, *The Way* (New York: Scepter Publishers) 1954, n. 335.

⁷¹ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), 61.

during Vatican II)⁷² and afterwards his catechesis on human love (*Theology of the Body*). These texts outline man's initial vocation, original fall, and subsequent redemption and the gift of grace, as well as the need for each person to make the gift of self to others and live in a communion of persons.

As a young parish priest in Poland, he worked extensively with young people, opening up for them horizons of Christian sanctity and cultural engagement with Marxist atheism and secularism. He did this by means of study groups and on vacations in the mountains and lakes of Poland.⁷³ Throughout his life, he continued to challenge young men and women to respond to the demands of the Gospel and to strive to live holy lives, and as pope, he did this by means of World Youth Days. In his *Letter to the Youth*, he invited them to find meaning in their lives by following Christ: 'Your youth opens different prospects before you; it offers you as a task the plan for the whole of your lives. Hence the question about values; hence the question about the meaning of life, about truth, about good and evil.'⁷⁴

The experience of communism gave John Paul II a direct and profound understanding of the evil of practical and theoretical atheism. He dedicated various encyclicals to teach a correct vision of material realities, work and justice.⁷⁵ For him, work is God's plan for man and through work man develops as a person and manifests his dignity.⁷⁶

In *Novum Millenio Ineunte*, the pope urged Catholics to see holiness, both personal and ecclesial, as the goal to be sought, highlighting the universal call to holiness taught by Vatican II. As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few 'uncommon heroes' of holiness. 'The ways of holiness are many,

⁷² In part 2 of the *Acting Person*, Wojtyła develops the notion of transcendence. He describes the person's self-possession closely linked to self-governance and self-determination.

⁷³ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*. See in particular, 'Srodowisko,' 98–102, and 'The Gospel in Kayaks,' 102–105.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* (March 31, 1985), 4.

⁷⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letters *Laborem et Exercens* (September 14, 1981), *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (September 1, 1991).

⁷⁶ Wojtyła held that man exercises his free will in such a way as to constitute himself through his acts and work according to what his intellect values as good. See John J. Coughlin, 'Pope John Paul II and the Dignity of the Human Being,' 27 *Harv. J. L. & Pub. Pol'y* 65 (2003–2004), 66–67. Available at: https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/494.

according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life.⁷⁷

In the same text, he proposed ‘this high standard of ordinary Christian living’ as the program for the new millennium of the Church and made it clear that this would require a genuine ‘training in holiness’, through daily prayer, a eucharistic spirituality and the practice of charity. This programmatic text was developed further by two documents, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae*, which offer a picture of John Paul II’s doctrine of sanctity in the key of a eucharistic and Marian spirituality.⁷⁸

The pope’s appreciation for Christian perfection in the ordinary lives of men and women prompted him to recognize many as models of holiness for the Church.⁷⁹ It is no surprise that he praised the contributions of Newman and Escrivá. He named the English saint venerable and mentioned him in the encyclical *Fides et ratio* as an example of one who had formulated well the relation between reason and faith. He beatified and later also canonized the Spanish founder whom he called the ‘saint of the ordinary’ and whose teaching on sanctification of work he shared.

John Paul II did not write in a systematic way on a theology of holiness, and there are few studies on this subject in his works.⁸⁰ However, his writing and teaching on Christian life, at various periods of his own life, present a theological anthropology which is the foundation for his understanding of holiness: 1) man created in the image and likeness of God, and Christ, Redeemer of Man, and 2) a Trinitarian and Christological theology of the ‘gift of self’. The pope’s Christocentric anthropology is summarized in articles 22 and 24 of *Gaudium et Spes* and in his first encyclical letter *Redemptoris Hominis*.⁸¹ Commenting on what was

⁷⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), 31.

⁷⁸ John Thavis, ‘John Paul II’s spiritual journey,’ *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, last modified May 19, 2011, https://www.catholicaherald.com/news/local_news/john_paul_ii_s_spiritual_journey.

⁷⁹ Between 1978–2004, among the 450 men and women canonized, 250 of these were laypersons. Philip Zaleski, ‘The Saints of John Paul II,’ *First Things* 16 (March 2006): 28–32.

⁸⁰ Danielle M. Peters concurs with this view in her book, *Ecce Educatrix Tua, The Role of the Virgin Mary for the Pedagogy of Holiness in the Thought of John Paul II and Joseph Kentenich* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2009), 2, 102.

⁸¹ Peters, *Ecce Educatrix Tua*, 67–68.

for him a paradigmatic council text (*GS*, 24), he offers a description of holiness in another memorable passage, *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

Being a person means striving towards self-realization (the Council text speaks of self-discovery), which can only be achieved ‘*through a sincere gift of self*’. The model for this interpretation of the person is God himself as Trinity, as a communion of Persons. To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist ‘for’ others, to become a gift.⁸²

In the same text, the pope explains how God’s self-revelation as a communion of persons serves as the model for man’s gift of self. His Trinitarian theology, in the three-year catechesis preceding the start of the new millennium, expounds on the Church’s teaching on the three Divine Persons and the communion of persons.⁸³ This rich catechesis offers a foundation for Christian holiness, which revolves on filiation and identification with Christ and the Spirit as Person-Gift.

Other important elements in his theology of holiness⁸⁴ include: 1) spiritual abandonment in God through a life of faith, 2) sacramental life, 3) contemplative prayer, rooted in meditation of the mystery of Christ in the Scriptures, 4) a Marian spirituality, 5) sanctification of suffering and the Cross, and 6) the spirituality of Divine Mercy.

Like the two other saints, Pope John Paul II stressed the importance of faith and the practice of daily meditation of the Scriptures. Like Escrivá, he lived a filial abandonment to God and a deep Marian spirituality and advanced a theology of work, contributing his own personalistic and ethical insights and highlighting the demands of justice for workers.

⁸² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 7.

⁸³ Peters, ‘John Paul II’s Theology of Holiness,’ in *Ecce Educatrix Tua*, 101–125.

⁸⁴ For an insightful article, see Magda Bušková, ‘Conversion As The Path To The Recovery Of Humanity In The Context of St John Paul II’s Theology of Holiness,’ *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica* 11, no. 1 (2021): 109–128. Bušková studies John Paul II’s thought on holiness, presenting it as a ‘theology of holiness’ (110–11, 116, 126) and a development of the Christocentric teaching found in Vatican II (115). She highlights the notion of sanctity as union with Christ, which John Paul II developed in his encyclical *Redemptoris Hominis* (116), and his other Trinitarian encyclicals. This process of constant inner conversion begins at Baptism (116), and is strengthened in the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist (118).

Thus, for the three saints here studied, holiness is based on the indwelling of the Trinity with an emphasis on divine filiation (Escrivá) and identification with Christ (Escrivá and Wojtyła) lived out through prayer, sacramental life, and practice of all the virtues, especially the theological virtues. It is realized in the everyday ordinary lives of Christians. A high degree of contemplative prayer and mystical union with Christ is not a requirement or characteristic element of holiness. For instance, Newman, who consigned to writing all of his personal experiences and thoughts, offers very little, if anything, to suggest that he had contemplative prayer as described by St. Theresa of Avila.⁸⁵ Escrivá referred to the prayer of ordinary men and women such as a milkman or a poor handicapped woman who knew nothing of spiritual theology but were clearly closely united to God. For his part, Wojtyła was inspired by the life of Jan Tyranowski, a simple tailor in Krakow who had a deep life of prayer. God communicates his grace and gifts, ultimately holiness, to his children in countless ways, and even though prayer is a fundamental one, the daily life and prayer of most Christians is very different from that of monks and members of religious orders.

This model and approach to holiness speaks to everyone, not just consecrated religious or priests. It contrasts with the older model, which does not correspond well to the lives of married Christians, youth, martyrs, or secular priests, few of whom practiced contemplation in the traditional sense or, with the exception of some, took vows. These three writers, therefore, do not focus on the vows as the means of Christian perfection. They understand and show appreciation for the vocation of consecrated religious men and women. Yet, for them, the will of God can be lived out by the majority of Christians at work and through relationships in the world without the mediation of vows. By means of the acts of all the virtues, the faithful, laypersons, and secular priests can be conformed to Christ by the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit and live charity to a high degree. Furthermore, these three saints have in common that they highlighted the laity's contributions to the Church, the subject briefly considered below.

⁸⁵ A reading of Newman's *Letters and Diaries* leads to same conclusion as Fr. Zeno in his biography: *John Henry Newman, His Inner Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 274–276.

6. Laity in the Church

Newman was a pioneer in defending the indispensable contribution of the laity in society and the Church. His emphasis was on their contributions in civil professions and university life. He taught the laity that they have a mission as Christians. By means of their religious formation – including some study of theology – he encouraged men and women to contribute to political and cultural life, government and education.⁸⁶ In his *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (1859–1860) Newman articulated the concept of the *sensum fidelium* by which the faithful, made up primarily by laity, act *per modum unius* in the Church, bearing witness in the liturgy and customs to the Apostolical Tradition.⁸⁷

The founder of Opus Dei understood the vast contribution the laity make to the Church, considered as the Mystical Body of Christ. He focused on their contribution to the life of the Church as professionals and tradesmen in the secular world rather than to the Church's institutional and teaching dimension as directors of diocesan offices, theology professors, or ecclesiastical judges, without disregarding that for some this constitutes their specific way of serving the Church.

Lay people have their own way of contributing to the holiness and apostolate of the Church. They do so by their free and responsible action within the temporal sphere, to which they bring the leaven of Christianity. Giving Christian witness in their everyday lives, spreading the word which enlightens in the name of God, acting responsibly in the service of others and thus contributing to the solution of common problems: these are some ways in which ordinary Christians fulfil their divine mission.⁸⁸

Karol Wojtyła, as a priest, archbishop, and later pope, worked untiringly to promote the laity's full participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church. As pope, he explained the laity's participation in

⁸⁶ This subject is examined in more detail in 'Newman's Farsighted Understanding of the Laity's Role in the Church' in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: his Life and Thought*.

⁸⁷ Juan R. Vélez, Synods in Newman's ecclesiology and in the twenty first century. *The Downside Review* 141, n. 2 (2023).

⁸⁸ Escrivá, 'Opus Dei: An Association which fosters the search for holiness in the World,' in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 59.

Christ's threefold mission: priestly, prophetic, and kingly, especially in the encyclical letter *Redemptor hominis*.⁸⁹ He pointed out that, among these three, the kingly dimension, by which they order creation through their work and cooperation in its redemption, makes their secular character stand out: 'The lay faithful's position in the Church ... comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character.'⁹⁰

Although the lay faithful take part in the priesthood and prophetic office of Christ, it is the secular, or kingly office that is specific to them.⁹¹ With reference to the Council's description of the Christian vocation as a share in Christ's kingly mission, the pope wrote: 'This dignity is expressed in readiness to serve, in keeping with the example of Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve". If, in the light of this attitude of Christ's, "being a king" is truly possible only by "being a servant" then "being a servant" also demands so much spiritual maturity that it must really be described as "being a king".'⁹²

Two decades earlier, the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* had expounded on this teaching when defining the laity as:

all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.⁹³

The Fathers of Vatican II further specified that '[w]hat specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature.'⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, (March 4, 1979), 13–14, 16, 18 and 21. In the same encyclical, art. 20 refers to the Christian's sharing in Christ office of priest.

⁹⁰ *Christifidelis Laici*, 15. See also the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, (August 6, 1993), 107.

⁹¹ Josef Clemens, 'The Vocation and Mission of the lay faithful in the light of the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*,' accessed September 18, 2022, <http://laici.va>.

⁹² *Redemptoris Hominis*, 21.

⁹³ Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, (November 21, 1964), 31.

⁹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

Conclusion

For Newman, Escrivá, and Wojtyła, ‘Christian holiness’ is a key category for theology and in the moral and spiritual life which is not exclusively or primarily centered on the exercise of religious vows in the state of perfection or tied to a high degree of contemplative prayer. These authors offer insights for dogmatic and spiritual theology and widen our understanding of holiness.⁹⁵ Their work can contribute to the elaboration of a theology of holiness, which for centuries has revolved around spiritual counsels and religious vows. Drawing from their own meditation of the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers, they understood sanctification as the work of the Holy Spirit acting on the faculties of the believer through the sacramental and ascetical life. Divine filiation and christian holiness grows through identification with Christ by means of the virtues, especially the theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which perfect the person conforming him to Christ.

As pastors, these three saints taught lay persons to aspire to Christian holiness. Through their example and preaching, they also emphasized in a new way the role of the theological and moral virtues in living Christian perfection in everyday life.

Newman reaffirmed the concept of *sensus fidelium* exercised by the faithful, noting its importance for the life of the Church. For his part, Escrivá shed new light on the universal call to holiness⁹⁶ through sanctification of professional work and stressed the royal priesthood of the faithful, exercised through prayer and sacrifice united to the eucharistic sacrifice. Wojtyła, whose teaching was in agreement with those of the former, highlighted and developed the Christocentric teaching of Vatican II in relation to Christian life and holiness.

Both Escrivá and Wojtyła (as Pope John Paul II) applied the theological notion of the *tria munera Christi* to the laity’s participation in Christ’s kingly office and sanctification of the world. They emphasized the imitation of Christ for whom ‘to reign is to serve’ (*LG*, 36).⁹⁷ For

⁹⁵ For mention of Yves M. Congar, Romano Guardini, Alvaro del Portillo, José Luis Illanes, Pedro Rodriguez, see ‘Farsighted Vision of the Laity’s Role in the Church,’ in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: His Life and Thought*.

⁹⁶ Benedict XVI, Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, (September 30, 2010), 48.

⁹⁷ John Paul II also applies this to the Virgin Mary. See John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (June 29, 1995), 10.

both, this function is exercised primarily, although not exclusively, through their action in the world rather than in the governance of the Church or its prophetic mission.

The intuitions and contributions of these authors require a systematic theological treatment that includes further study on the sanctification of ordinary work and that addresses different questions, such as how the ontological configuration to Christ takes place and how the ontological distinction between the Creator and creatures is preserved.

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