

# UNITY OF LIFE, UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE

## University and Scientific Knowledge Enlightened by Josemaría Escrivá's Charism

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the intersection of scientific knowledge and faith through the lens of Josemaría Escrivá's charism, as it informs the unity of life and knowledge within the academic enterprise. Inspired by the work of Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, the study examines theological reflections on universities as spaces of integration and dialogue in a postmodern context. Drawing on the Trinitarian ontology, it argues that the unity of life and knowledge is rooted in the relational nature of creation, revealed through the *Logos*. Key themes include the historical evolution of metaphysics in academic settings, the synthesis of faith and reason, and the transformative potential of integrating theology with interdisciplinary approaches. The paper highlights how Escrivá's vision of the university as a "home" fosters intellectual growth while anchoring it in spiritual truth, offering a renewed paradigm for addressing contemporary challenges in higher education.

**KEYWORDS:** Unity of Knowledge, *Logos*, Trinitarian Ontology, University, Josemaría Escrivá.

**RIASSUNTO:** Il presente lavoro esplora l'intersezione tra conoscenza scientifica e fede attraverso la lente del carisma di Josemaría Escrivá, che informa l'unità di vita e di conoscenza all'interno dell'impresa accademica. Ispirandosi all'opera di Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, lo studio esamina le riflessioni teologiche sulle università come spazi di integrazione e dialogo in un contesto postmoderno. Basandosi sull'ontologia trinitaria, si sostiene che l'unità di vita e di conoscenza è radicata nella natura relazionale della creazione, rivelata attraverso il *Logos*. I temi chiave includono l'evoluzione storica della metafisica in ambito accademico, la sintesi tra fede e ragione e il potenziale trasformativo dell'integrazione della teologia con approcci interdisciplinari. L'articolo evidenzia come la visione di Escrivá dell'Università come "casa" favorisca la crescita intellettuale ancorandola alla verità spirituale, offrendo un paradigma rinnovato per affrontare le sfide contemporanee dell'istruzione superiore.

**PAROLE CHIAVE:** Unità della conoscenza, *Logos*, Ontologia trinitaria, Università, Josemaría Escrivá.

SUMMARY: I. *(Personal) Introduction*. II. *Metaphysics and University*. III. *The Inspiration of a Charism*. IV. *(Grateful) Conclusion*.

## I. (PERSONAL) INTRODUCTION

When I started my first research in theoretical physics, the professor who guided me would occasionally interrupt me and divert me from my work to talk about philosophical questions. Faced with my surprise at his expertise in this area, he explained to me that physicists often do not take an interest in the question of the meaning of life when they are young, but then in their forties they realize that death is a reality and suddenly start talking about philosophy, ending up in some cases talking nonsense because they simply do not know the subject.

This dialogue took place in Como, a city located on the shores of the lake of the same name and embellished by a magnificent 16<sup>th</sup>-century cathedral. On the façade, right on either side of the main portal, are two canopies with two statues that passers-by normally identify as saints. In truth, they are Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger, from the first century of the Christian era, but both pagans. The former was a naturalist, the latter a humanist. The iconographic choice may be shocking to the modern approach, which runs the risk of conceiving science and faith in dialectical opposition. But from a theological point of view, this placement is extremely significant, especially if one reads it from the representation, in the lunette of the same portal, of the adoration of the Child by the three Magi. The message thus conveyed is that the search for truth carried out even by non-Christians leads to God and can be a path to the encounter with the Word made flesh.

The purpose of these first lines of introduction in the personal register is to give reasons for the choice of the theme of the relationship between the unity of life and the unity of knowledge in the context of theological reflection on the university enterprise as a contribution in honor of Prof. Giuseppe Tanzella-Nitti, astronomer and theologian. His academic career is profoundly inspiring for that challenge to «re-think thought» to which the university enterprise is called in the new post-modern era. In particular, his focus on the lives of scientists and their relationship with faith prompted the choice of the topic of inves-

tigation proposed here.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, the theme will be developed through the consideration of the charism entrusted by God to Josemaría Escrivá, which inspired Prof. Tanzella-Nitti's path and which is read here from a theological perspective. At a methodological level, this will be achieved through the analysis of those works of the saint whose historical-critical editions have been published up to the time of writing. Quotations in Spanish have been translated directly into English.<sup>2</sup>

## II. METAPHYSICS AND UNIVERSITY

Pope Francis repeats that at this moment in history we are not merely in an era of change, but in the change of an era.<sup>3</sup> The apostolic constitution *Veritatis gaudium* on universities and ecclesiastical faculties is the result of this consideration. The proem of this document is particularly

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. G. TANZELLA-NITTI, *Search for the Unity of Knowledge: Building Unity inside the Subject*, «Annales Theologici» 20 (2006) 407-417 and IDEM, *The Book of Nature and the God of Scientists according to the Encyclical "Fides et Ratio"*.

<sup>2</sup> The works used with the versions from which they are translated are: JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Camino*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por P. Rodríguez, *Obras completas de Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 1.1, Rialp-Instituto Histórico Josemaría Escrivá, Madrid-Roma 2002; IDEM, *Santo rosario*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por P. Rodríguez (dir.), C. Ánchel y J. Sesé, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 2, Rialp, Madrid 2010; IDEM, *Conversaciones con mons. Escrivá de Balaguer*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por J.L. Illanes y A. Méndiz, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 3, Rialp, Madrid 2012; IDEM, *Es Cristo que pasa: homilias*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por A. Aranda, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 4, Rialp, Madrid 2013; IDEM, *La Abadesa de Las Huelgas*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por M. Blanco y M<sup>a</sup> del Mar Martín, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 5, Rialp, Madrid 2016; IDEM, *Amigos de Dios: homilias*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por A. Aranda, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 6, Rialp, Madrid 2019; IDEM, *Escritos varios (1927-1974)*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por P. Goyret, F. Puig y A. Méndiz, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie I: Obras publicadas 8, Rialp, Madrid 2018; IDEM, *En diálogo con el Señor: textos de la predicación oral*, edición crítico-histórica preparada por L. Cano y F. Castells, con la colaboración de J.A. Loarte, *Obras completas de San Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie V: Predicación oral 1, Rialp, Madrid 2017; IDEM, *Cartas*, edición crítica y anotada preparada por L. Cano; con la colaboración de J.A. Loarte; introducción de J.L. Illanes, *Obras completas de Josemaría Escrivá*, Serie II: Instrucciones y cartas 1.1-2, Rialp, Madrid 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. FRANCIS, *Speech at the Fifth National Conference of the Italian Church*, Florence, 10-XI-2015.

important because it points out a concrete way to respond dialogically to the challenge that postmodernity poses to those who carry out the academic enterprise under the inspiration of faith. The *incipit* of the document joins the Patristic heritage with the Magisterium of the Second Vatican Council, laying the foundation of the text in the affirmation that Christ is not an abstract idea, but the living Word, Light of every human being,<sup>4</sup> because only He can introduce us to the Mystery of the Father and His Love, thus revealing man to man and making each person know his own very high vocation.<sup>5</sup> This is why the joy of truth, which gives the apostolic constitution its title, expresses the yearning desire of the human heart that is restless «until it encounters and dwells within God's Light, and shares that Light with all people.»<sup>6</sup> The verbs in the text are particularly important, because they refer to *encountering*, *dwelling* and *sharing* with all people, tracing a real programmatic scan of university work.

These verbs reveal, in fact, the dynamic dimension of thought itself and of the quest, together with the tension towards unity, understood both vertically with the Creator and horizontally with all human beings and the whole of creation. This dynamic, which from the encounter with the Light of Christ leads one to dwell in It so as to be able to bring It to everybody, is explicitly Trinitarian and characteristic of the Church, as the people gathered by the God of Jesus Christ and set on a journey together to bring all things back to the Father with the Word in the Spirit of their Love. The joy of the Truth has its source, therefore, in the unity of the Triune God, from which the Church's mission in favor of every human being and creation itself is driven. Indeed, «God wants to associate humanity to that ineffable mystery of communion that is the Blessed Trinity, of which the Church is a sign and instrument in Jesus Christ».<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Jn 1:4.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 7-XII-1965, no. 22.

<sup>6</sup> FRANCIS, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 29-I-2018, n. 1 with reference to Augustine, *Conf.*, X, 23.33; I,1,1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 2.

This, according to the indications of the proem of *Veritatis Gaudium*, must have a concrete reflection in the renewal of ecclesiastical studies, under the guidance of four fundamental criteria: (a) the contemplation and introduction to the heart of the *kerygma*, in order to develop a Christian culture capable of recognizing and highlighting the web of relationships constitutive of reality due to the Trinitarian dimension of its Creator; (b) the inseparability of *logos* and *dia-logos*, not as a tactical choice, but as the only possibility of access to creation precisely because of the Trinitarian, hence relational, root that founds it; (c) the inter- and trans-disciplinarity not presented as a mere method, but as an intrinsic requirement of the path of wisdom, inseparable in itself from creativity; (d) up to the need to develop an ever more extensive and dense network between the different ecclesiastical institutions and between the latter and the civil ones.<sup>8</sup>

The relevance of the indications contained in this proem for the topic at hand is evident. Just as it is immediate to grasp even more the value of Prof. Tanzella-Nitti's academic career in the light of these indications. This is linked to his profoundly theological conception of the university.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it is the place that the Christian faith has created starting from the Trinitarian revelation to take care of the question of meaning and its universal claim, as I already learnt as a young physicist. In fact, the study of the various disciplines is structured as a university enterprise when one has faith that the individual parts make sense together. But this is only made possible if one believes that the world was created in Christ, so that nothing in creation is apart from the *Logos*. Indeed, the second divine Person is the Son who is always eternally turned towards the Father, as the Johannine prologue teaches. Therefore, the world has a meaning (in Greek precisely *logos*) that thought can find, recognizing a unity between the different parts and, therefore, the different disciplines, precisely because the Creator is triune.

Contemporary theology calls such a perspective “Trinitarian ontology”, i.e. a reading not only of God's being in a Trinitarian key, as

<sup>8</sup> See *ibidem*, n. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. G. TANZELLA-NITTI, *Il ruolo della teologia nell'università: il dibattito dell'epoca moderna e le prospettive odierne*, in J. LEAL, M. MIRA (edd.), *L'insegnamento superiore nella storia della Chiesa: scuole, maestri e metodi*, Edusc, Roma 2016, 523-538.

Christian dogma had to learn to do, but also as a reading of creation in the light of the Trinitarian depth of its Creator.<sup>10</sup> The connection of this approach with the university enterprise can be grasped by retracing the development of the “places” of research that have characterized the history of human thought in parallel with the solutions to the fundamental metaphysical question of the relationship between the One and the many.

This allows us to grasp how the momentum of thought towards the world cannot be uprooted from the question of the first principle or the ultimate cause, as modernity has claimed. The crisis of the current university institution can be traced precisely to an anti-religious prejudice, first, and anti-metaphysical, later, that has dialectically opposed modern research to that of the thought that preceded it.

For example, Plato at the end of *Tīmaeus* calls the sensible world “god” as the “only-begotten son” of the intelligible world.<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, the philosophical act is linked to love as the desire to generate in the beautiful.<sup>12</sup> Human thought can, in fact, follow the chain of “friends” back to the divine One as the “first Friend”.<sup>13</sup> This implies going beyond the material world with its imperfect images, as in the myth of the cave,<sup>14</sup> to the exclusively intelligible dimension, that is, to the perfection constituted by the world of ideas.

This metaphysical conception is deeply linked to the confrontation with the Sophists, whose criticism of myths undermined the foundations of the *polis* itself. If the *logos* is just words, without any connection with being and, therefore, with the truth, the law of the strongest applies. The issue is terribly topical, as demonstrated by the myth of *Theuth*,<sup>15</sup> in which the king of Egypt refuses the gift of writing offered to him by the deity who gives the myth its name, on the basis of the consideration that this would lead his citizens to stop remembering “from within” and rely on a technique that would gradually lead them to ignorance.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. P. CODA (with M.B. CURI, M. DONÀ, G. MASPERO), *Manifesto*, Dizionario Dinamico di Ontologia Trinitaria I, Città Nuova, Roma 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. PLATO, *Tīmaeus*, 92c.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. IDEM, *Symposium*, 206e; 208ab.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. IDEM, *Lysid*, 219d.

<sup>14</sup> See IDEM, *Republic*, 516-517.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. IDEM, *Phaedrus*, 274c-275b.

The question of the *logos* was linked to Parmenides and his assertion that only the One is, while the many are not. This implied that all reasoning would be impossible, because it gets at the reason of what is through the investigation of a succession of causes, thus traversing what for the Eleatic school was “non-being”, i.e. multiplicity. Paradoxes such as that of the liar or Achilles and the turtle were intended to demonstrate the impossibility of reasoning. But Plato’s thought could not stop at Parmenides because he was faced with the Sophists, to whom he had to show through thought that myths, beneath their fantastic shape, had a truthful content. Thus, in his work *Sophist*, he performs a symbolic parricide of Parmenides by introducing participation, i.e. by asserting that there are realities that are not Being but are, i.e. have a part in being. Or, put another way, there is a non-being that is because it is not Being with a capital but participates in being itself. This is Plato’s proposed solution to the question of the relationship between the One and the many.

From it derives a “soteriological” conception of thought and its exercise, giving rise to a corresponding place for its exercise, a place called *Akadêmia*. It consisted of an estate some six stadia from Athens where the great philosopher taught after his return from Italy around 387-388 BC. To grasp the connection with the metaphysical question and the confrontation with the sophists, it is important to go back to the origin of the name, which derives from *Akadêmos*, an Athenian hero buried there, whose myth tells us that he had saved Athens from the wrath of the Dioscuri, enraged by the kidnapping of their 12-year-old sister Helen, whose beauty would later be the cause of the Trojan War.<sup>16</sup> For the conception of the place of knowledge, the etymology of the hero’s name seems important, as it refers to the meaning «he who is distant from the people», consistent with Plato / Socrates’ conception of the metaphysical enterprise, aimed at preserving the *polis* through *logos*, as opposed to *doxa*, which the sophists manipulated with words. The metaphysical solution induced an exclusivist and aristocratic conception of the place of thought.

Quite different is what happens with the Christian era. The popular dimension of Christianity, well highlighted by Jean Daniélou as an

<sup>16</sup> See C.M. ANTONACCIO, *An Archaeology of Ancestors: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanhan 1995, 187-189.

essential trait that the Edict of Constantine in 313 allowed to emerge,<sup>17</sup> was at the origin of a confrontation between the different theological schools and the different traditions of Christian initiation, which religious freedom allowed to become known. Thus, the metaphysical question of the relationship between the one and the many became central to the Council of Nicaea and throughout the 4<sup>th</sup> century up to the First Council of Constantinople. The need to state the unity of God and the personal distinction of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit forced a distinction between substance-essence on the one hand and person-hypostasis on the other. This necessitated a reconfiguration of Aristotle's categories, particularly with regard to the relationship between first and second substance, along with the possibility of introducing the relationship, the least of the accidents, into the very immanence of the one eternal substance that is God. The preposition "from" implicit in the names of the divine Persons, particularly those of the Father and the Son, was thus reconfigured.

Indeed, Nicaea's formula «God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God», with its inclusive structure, aims at the very heart of the metaphysical question. Platonic participation, which arose from Parmenides' parricide, speaks of being with a lower case in relation to Being with a capital letter. With the *homousios* and the Trinitarian discussions of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the preposition "from" was resemantized as a connection between Being and Being both with a capital letter, that is, as a relation that is situated *in* the immanence of the divine substance itself, i.e. in the womb of the One.

This gave rise to a new reading of the world, because the creative Word was understood as the Son of the Father, whose identity is inseparably connected to their Love, that is, to the Holy Spirit who with them created the world. Matter, then, finds its root in the eternal relationship between the divine Persons, thus being imbued with logos and holiness. The world is, therefore, profaned by sin, but not profane in itself according to God's plan, as Olivier Clément has written.<sup>18</sup> Everything, then, has its unity in that one "verse" constituted by the Son's being turned towards the Father in the Holy Spirit.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. J. DANÉLOU, *L'oraison problème politique*, Fayard, Paris 1965, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. O. CLÉMENT, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City, New York 1995, 226.



This “reading” of creation in the light emanating from the Trinity will be the foundation of the new Byzantine and medieval era. The legacy of Patristic thought made it possible to organize every dimension of human knowledge and civil life around the center that is God. This, while perceived as absolutely transcendent, is also present in the world, founding it *ab aeterno* from within the intimate Trinitarian life and redeeming it in salvation history to bring it back to its fullness. This simultaneously transcendent and immanent character of the Christian Logos will be at the origin of that institution we call a university, understood as a house both of studies and of scholars and students (*universitas studiorum* and *universitas magistrorum et alumnorum*). This house of studies, open to all because it is addressed to all in Christ, is founded precisely on the Trinitarian conception, hence on the solution to the question of the one and the many offered as a gift by Christian revelation. In fact, just as substantial unity and personal distinction in God are given in the relationship, so unity of truth and disciplinary distinction are given in the place of study founded in them, which is conceived as a “home”. Wisdom literature is thus re-read in a Christological and Trinitarian sense, making possible a unified and relational approach to creation: «All things are two by two, one in front of the other, He has made nothing incomplete. The one confirms the merits of the other: who will be satisfied with contemplating His glory?».<sup>19</sup>

This is made possible by contemplation that reads that one “verse” that in Christ becomes accessible to the human being as the relationship of the finite with the infinite paternal Source. This excludes the possibility of dialectics, as legitimate differences can never be absolutized and opposed, because they are perceived as traces of the relational identity of every creature.

With modernity, this vision was secularized and radically reduced. The end of the Middle Ages had brought out the risk inherent in this tension towards a unitary vision made possible by reading creation in the light of Trinitarian revelation. The hermeneutic effort, in fact, particularly present at the level of abbeys, made it possible to move between the spheres of *historia naturalis*, philosophy and theology without interruption. The great advances of the subsequent era also have

<sup>19</sup> Sir 42:24-25.

their foundation in this transition. But at the same time, human intellect had to face the risk of closing in on its own unitary vision, losing that openness to the surplus of reality over thought that characterized the Patristic approach. Descartes' *cogito* with the claimed self-foundation of the subject in its own act of thinking initiated a new era, marked by the tension towards autonomy. From the (alleged) separation of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, studies increasingly overshadowed the inherent relationality in reality, moving away from the sapiential approach.

This gave rise to a new "home" of study, which can be identified in the Enlightenment with *Encyclopaedia*. Its etymology is extremely significant because it connects the circle (*en-cyclo*) and education (*paideia*), semantically shifting from education to information and enclosing knowledge in an articulation of bodies only juxtaposed but not interpenetrating. Philosophy and theology are increasingly being not only distinguished, an absolutely legitimate process, but also separated, a deleterious operation that makes it difficult to read metaphysics with the religious impetus that had marked its beginnings and that, at the same time, risks condemning theology to the self-referentiality of a language that can no longer reach those who do not believe. As a result, the various sciences are also becoming enclosed within an increasingly narrow disciplinary sphere characterized by an increasingly specialized language that is incapable of communicating with other spheres.

This brings us to the present situation, in which the divorce between knowledge and life is consummated. Logical and scientific reductionism, in fact, takes as its method that of analytical division and reduction into parts. But life is always metaphysically founded on unity. This is why modern reason has not only lost the capacity to generate, an act that the etymology of "concept" still reveals, but is even in danger of demanding the at least symbolic killing of the reality studied in order to know it. This is "diabolical" in a still etymological sense, because if knowledge is only obtained by dividing (*dia-ballein* in Greek), one can no longer study life. The risk is not for God, who is Life, but for the human being, who participates in life through his or her relations, both natural and cultural.

With the transition to the new post-modern era, awareness of this risk is increasingly emerging. Thus, the call for interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity can be read at the same time as a declaration of the

death of the university, which is originally constituted on them, thus differentiating itself from the technical schools, but also as a cry that rises up to demand a new form of thinking that succeeds once again in combining knowledge and life. This does not arise from an *a priori* ideological or confessional position, but from within the scientific and university enterprise itself, which, in order to overcome the hypertrophy of means and hypotrophy of ends typical of the present time, tends to recover unity in the distinction (without separation) of science and technology, of ends and means, of spirit and matter, thus going beyond modernity.

### III. THE INSPIRATION OF A CHARISM

This need to overcome modernity can be traced back to the realization that the pretense of bringing knowledge solely under the banner of epistemology, completely alienating it from metaphysics, has proved not only unsuccessful, but in the first place, unsound. The preoccupation with the scientific method has overshadowed the truth that it always rests on a metaphysical option, however implicit. A simple example can illustrate this passage: to observe the stars, as Prof. Tanzella-Nitti did when he worked as an astronomer, I need a telescope, whereas a microscope would not work, and vice versa if one wanted to observe cells, so that the answer to the question of the method of research can never be separated from the question of “what is” the object of my study. When, on the other hand, such a separation is given, one is inevitably resorting to a hidden and unspoken metaphysical option. Specifically, the Cartesian legacy has imposed a disciplinary individualism that dialectically opposes knowledge and relation. The latter would even be negative and anti-scientific. In light of the above, the current fragmentation is an inevitable consequence.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, in this context, the verbs *encounter* (the Light of God), *dwell* and *share* of *Veritatis Gaudium* have no place, because they presuppose that knowledge of oneself and of the world is founded on the light emanating from the Creator through reason, on the natural level, and through faith, on the supernatural level.

<sup>20</sup> For a positive proposal, see P. DONATI, A. MALO, G. MASPERO (eds.), *Social Science, Philosophy and Theology in Dialogue: A Relational Perspective*, Routledge, London 2019.

This harmony between faith and reason founded on the personal relationship with the one Creator is the foundation that allows Josemaría Escrivá, starting from the charism entrusted to him by God, to develop a conception of the university as «a home of peace, a haven of serene and noble restlessness, which facilitates the study and training of all».<sup>21</sup> This reference to the university as a “home” in which the paradoxical coexistence of restlessness and peace can take place is theologically founded precisely on the impossibility of conceiving knowledge apart from personal relationship, from which the mutual recall of unity of life and unity of knowledge derives.

By unity of life here is meant not only coherence between what one believes and what one chooses in one’s concrete existence, but also living and working together, which for the Christian is a real obligation even on a scientific level.<sup>22</sup> Escrivá repeated an icastic expression indicating the need for the faithful to have the piety of a child and the sound doctrine of a theologian, because love arouses the desire for knowledge of the beloved:

The desire to acquire theological science – good and sound *Christian doctrine* – is driven, first and foremost, by the need to know and love God. At the same time, it is also a consequence of a faithful soul’s concern to discover the deeper meaning of this world, the work of the Creator.<sup>23</sup>

The unity of life and knowledge is evident in the quoted text, which points simultaneously to the Trinitarian foundation of this unity, for the inseparability of the two divine processions, and to a fundamental consequence of this unity that makes possible, as we have seen, the development of the university enterprise as “home”. The concern to read the profound meaning of creation, in fact, derives precisely from faith in the unity that the Trinity pours into creation. And this does not only concern the ecclesiastical sphere, but has an eminently lay dimension linked precisely to creation in Christ. Escrivá writes:

We can imagine – to bring us somewhat closer to this unfathomable mystery – that the Trinity, in its intimate and unbreakable relationship of infinite love, eternally decides that the Only-Begotten Son of God the Father should take

<sup>21</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Conversaciones*, n. 78b.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. IDEM, *Camino*, n. 338.

<sup>23</sup> IDEM, *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 10.

on the human condition, taking on our miseries and sorrows, to end up nailed to a wood.<sup>24</sup>

The ideal concatenation underlying this text is extremely powerful. Firstly, the Trinity is Mystery of Love in which the reason for unity and the reason for plurality coincide, because absolute Love itself requires an eternal Lover, an eternal Beloved and the eternal act of Love that unites them. But this implies that creation by the triune God is eminently an act of love, which therefore refers back to the union of the Lover with the beloved, here now written in capital letters, the former, and in lower case the latter, unlike in the Trinity. The incarnation is thus contemplated “from within” the Trinity itself, inseparably from the creative act as its fulfilment. This in no way undermines the absolute freedom of the Creator, but rather reinforces it. This is why it is important to emphasize that the reference to the Passion at the end of the quoted passage does not refer to a will of the Father for the Son to suffer, but to the unconditional readiness for love itself that men take to the extreme, crucifying the Logos who became flesh.

In Escrivá's view, the freedom of God's children becomes the ultimate meaning of the world and history, because the very reason for creation is Love. This makes it possible to contemplate reality in its ontological depth, recognizing the relational web that sustains it in being, the true basis of the possibility of the university enterprise. But such a reading, grounded in the perception of God's Love, is not merely sentimental, because it implies recognizing the “drama” that freedom introduces into history. This is characterized by «indeterminacy», since it is «open to multiple possibilities that God did not want to preclude»,<sup>25</sup> running the «risk» inherent in it<sup>26</sup> and in the «chiaroscuro»<sup>27</sup> that characterizes it, up to the extreme of the cross.

The charism received by Josemaría Escrivá led him to read the Sacrifice of Christ in Johannine terms, as a place where it is possible to encounter the Light of the Word who became flesh to enlighten every man:

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 95.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 99.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 113.

<sup>27</sup> IDEM, *Amigos de Dios*, n. 24.

*Instaurare omnia in Christo*, this is St Paul's motto for the Christians of Ephesus (Eph 1:10); to inform the whole world with the spirit of Jesus, to put Christ in the bowels of all reality: *Si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum* (Jn 12:32), when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all things to myself. Christ, through his Incarnation, his working life in Nazareth, his preaching and his miracles in the quarters of Judea and Galilee, his death on the Cross, his Resurrection, is the center of creation, he is the Firstborn and the Lord of every creature.<sup>28</sup>

The unity of creation is, therefore, reconstituted by the Word who becomes flesh and loves man and the world itself to the extreme. This founds the possibility of encountering the One who is the meaning of everything also in daily life, in work and, therefore, in research. Hence, «An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer».<sup>29</sup>

In this way, the effort to recognize the meaning of the cosmos and the effort to gain knowledge from creation can be read from the perspective of the relationship with the incarnate Logos. And this translates into the possibility of recognizing Him in one's neighbor, to whom one is connected like the verses of a poem:

We must recognize Christ who comes to meet us in men, our brothers. No human life is isolated; every life is intertwined with other lives. No person is a verse in itself: we are all part of the same divine poem that God writes with the contribution of our freedom.<sup>30</sup>

In this way, the first verb, *encounter*, of *Veritatis Gaudium* makes the second possible, that is, to *inhabit* the Light of God. Nature and human world, in fact, cannot be understood in a dialectical sense with respect to the Creator, whose Love makes every corner of the cosmos and history "home" to God and His children:

Everything that is honest, down to the smallest event, contains both human and divine significance. Christ, the perfect man, did not come to destroy what is proper to the human condition; but by taking on our nature – except sin – he came to ennoble it, he came to share all the anxieties of man, except the sad adventure of evil.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> IDEM, *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 105.

<sup>29</sup> IDEM, *Camino*, n. 335.

<sup>30</sup> IDEM, *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 111.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 125.

In this way, it becomes possible not only to read the world and history in the light emanating from Trinitarian revelation, but also to inhabit creation through the warmth and power of that light. And this radically affects everything. The possibility of *inhabiting* the Light of God is thus configured as a response to God's love for mankind that leads him to  *dwell* among us. The giving of Trinitarian Love, with the unity and distinction of the Lover, the Beloved and their bond of Love, makes love for the world possible, the world that is no longer considered profane, even though it was profaned by original sin:

There is nothing that is foreign to the attentions of Christ. Speaking with theological rigor, without limiting ourselves to a functional classification, we cannot say that there are realities – good, noble, and even indifferent – that are exclusively profane: because the Word of God established his dwelling among the children of men, hungered and thirsted, worked with his hands, knew friendship and obedience, experienced pain and death. *For it pleased God to make all things complete dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, by the blood of his cross to reconcile the things that are on earth and those in heaven (Col 1:19-20).*

We must love the world, work, human realities. Because the world is good: Adam's sin broke the divine harmony of creation, but God sent his Only Begotten Son to restore peace. And so we, having become children of adoption, can free creation from disorder and reconcile all things with God. Every human situation is unrepeatable; it is the result of a unique vocation that must be lived intensely, realizing the spirit of Christ in it. And when one lives Christianly among one's fellow human beings, in an inconspicuous but faith-consistent manner, each of us is *Christ present among men*.<sup>32</sup>

Thus the work and study of men becomes a work of liberation that brings out the uniqueness of each person and each creature, because the meaning of everything, absolutely everything, is divine filiation. Then it becomes possible to be for others Christ who passes by, that is, *alter Christus, ipse Christus*, with a bold formula by Escrivá.<sup>33</sup>

The encounter with the Light and the act of dwelling with it makes it possible, then, to share that Light and that Love with every human being, precisely through the unity of life and knowledge, made

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 112.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. P. O'CALLAGHAN, *The Inseparability of Holiness and Apostolate. The Christian, 'alter Christus, ipse Christus', in the Writings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*, «Annales Theologici» 16 (2002) 135-164.

accessible by Trinitarian revelation. The *meeting* and *dwelling* of *Veritatis Gaudium* are therefore followed by *sharing*:

The Christian, in making Christ present among men by being Christ himself, seeks not only to live an attitude of love, but also to make God's love known through his human love.<sup>34</sup>

Sharing the Light of Christ cannot only take place on the outside, as if it were information or abstract knowledge. Instead, it is the very life of the Christian that becomes the "place" of the encounter, because the faithful is the "home" of the Trinity and, therefore, inhabits the Mystery. This is not a mere enigma or riddle, the answer to which is inaccessible due to the limits of the knowing subject. Instead, it is a cognitive limit linked to the infinite depth of the known object, which at the same time is the eternal and omnipotent Subject that relationally founds the being of reality itself.

Thus knowledge is inseparable from love, to the extreme that it is the human love of the Christian that transmits divine Love. Knowledge of the Light of Christ is thus given in life, in the unity of life that becomes unity of knowledge. In this way, research can become an expression of love for God and the world, as a response to the Love of the triune God who created the world. In this line, the study of theology should also be proposed to the laity, because the love for Christ founded in baptism implies the tension towards the knowledge of the Beloved.

But this also extends to the whole of creation, whose ultimate meaning is Christ himself. Escrivá has very theologically pregnant expressions, such as when he states: «there is something holy, divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, which it is up to each one of you to discover.»<sup>35</sup> This *quid divinum*<sup>36</sup> is not a superstructure that is added from outside by grace to daily life, work or study, but for creation in Christ already the natural level speaks of its Creator, even if only the light of revelation allows one to fully grasp this message. Escrivá writes with great depth:

If the world has come from the hands of God, if He has created the human being in His image and likeness, and has given the very human being a spark of His light, the work of the intelligence must – even if it is hard work – disen-

<sup>34</sup> J. ESCRIVÁ DE BALAGUER, *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 115.

<sup>35</sup> IDEM, *Conversaciones*, no. 114.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, n. 116a.



tangle (*desentrañar*) the divine meaning which all things already naturally have; and with the light of faith, we also perceive their supernatural meaning, that which results from our elevation to the order of grace. We cannot admit the fear of science, because any work, if it is truly scientific, tends to truth. And Christ said: *Ego sum veritas*. I am the truth.<sup>37</sup>

The sequence of quotations so far culminates in this extremely theologically pregnant passage. The foundation is the creation of the human being in His own image and likeness by God, for which the possibility of knowing and searching, with all the effort this entails, is an essential element of being human. The task of reason is defined as bringing out from the bowels of reality (*desentrañar*) the divine sense that every reality has, note well, naturally. This does not oppose, nor is it superimposed on the supernatural sense characteristic of the order of grace, in a declination of union without confusion and distinction without separation that makes it possible to unconditionally welcome scientific research because everything tends towards truth, the fullness of which, both for the human being and for the world and history, is given in Christ.

All this can be read from the perspective, already mentioned, of Trinitarian ontology, that is, in that reading of creation made possible by the Trinitarian light, which brings out the relationality of the real and, therefore, of truth itself. Escrivá's Christocentrism is thus configured in a Trinitarian sense, radically distinct from any form of Christomonism.

In this way, the unity of life and knowledge that should characterize the university is presented under the sign of universality, made possible by the truth of Christian salvation, which precisely because it is true and precisely because it is authentic salvation concerns every thing and every human being.<sup>38</sup> The role of intellectuals in society is thus linked to the possibility they have of having an overall vision.<sup>39</sup>

Hence, the unity of knowledge that makes the university enterprise possible is founded, in the light of that participation in the Trinitarian life made possible by the charism received by Josemaría Escrivá, in the creation in Christ, hence in the reading of the cosmos, of history, of ev-

<sup>37</sup> IDEM, *Es Cristo que pasa*, n. 10d.

<sup>38</sup> IDEM, *Amigos de Dios*, no. 230.

<sup>39</sup> IDEM, *Cartas 3*, 87a.

eryday life made possible by Christian revelation. But this is not understood in a merely intellectual sense, but as a personal relationship with the three divine Persons, showing how the unity of life that underpins the unity of knowledge is a gift of the triune God. Unity of life, in fact, is in itself a pleonasm, because there is no life without unity, but this unity is not merely the logical unity of the geometric point, because it is always a reflection of the Trinitarian unity of the Creator and Redeemer.

#### IV. (GRATEFUL) CONCLUSION

What has been said explains through a theological reading of Josemaría Escrivá's charism why he not only personally loved the academic enterprise, but founded and inspired several universities, as a consequence of fidelity to the charism God had entrusted to him. Just as God wanted to run the risk of our freedom, so He also runs the risk of our journey towards knowledge, an essential dimension of human life and, therefore, of Christian life. The perspective of creation in Christ lead Escrivá to embrace the attitude of the Fathers of the Church, who knew that only wonder knows.<sup>40</sup>

But this corresponds to the very genealogy of the university institution which, in the proposed reconstruction, is the result of the Trinitarian reading of the question of the one and the many. The current crisis of this institution can, thus, be traced back to the loss of the relational matrix in the reading of the world, due to the modern individualist approach. Today's «light nihilism», according to a beautiful expression by Alejandro Llano, which has supplanted Nietzsche's heroic nihilism, multiplies the possibilities of choice, denying, however, *a priori*, that one choice can be given for which it is worth renouncing all others. The unity of life and knowledge thus become impossible, to the point of undermining the very identity of the person, who, without the Trinitarian foundation, risks falling back into the Greek mask, that etymologically was the origin of the term, or rather into the plurality of masks that would represent the parts of one's self, regardless of the unity of one's life and history.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> GREGORY OF NYSSA, *In Canticum*, Gregorii Nysseni Opera VI, 358,12-359,4.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. A. LLANO, *Universidad y unidad de vida según san Josemaría Escrivá*, Documentos del Instituto de Antropología y Ética, 24, Pamplona 2002.

Instead, Prof. Tanzella-Nitti's academic journey demonstrates precisely how the charism that inspired it has made possible a relational unification of different academic perspectives, whereby the verbs *encounter*, *inhabit* and *share*, which *Veritatis Gaudium* refers to the relationship of the university enterprise to the Light of Christ, have become a reality, in the unity of knowledge and life.

