Romana is the bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. These pages reprint documents of the Holy See directed to the entire Church, as well as those referring specifically to Opus Dei. It also provides news about the activities of the Prelate and the Prelature in the service of the Church and the local dioceses. Brief articles are included about some of the apostolic initiatives fostered by faithful of the Prelature within their profession and in society at large in their endeavor to infuse a Christian spirit into the secular sphere.

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature. This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.

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EDITORIAL
The Year 2000, a point of departure

Mankind has arrived at the Year 2000 of the Christian era. Few institutions throughout the course of history have been in existence for 20 centuries. But the Catholic Church has reached this milestone as a living and growing reality. Furthermore, it has reached the age of two thousand years while still in a state of germination, with the marvelous promise of “a new heaven and a new earth.”[1] For it continues being the mysterious prelude of the Kingdom in which it will find its definitive form. “Christ is the Lord of time; he is its beginning and its end; every year, every day and every moment are embraced by his incarnation and resurrection, and thus become part of the ‘fullness of time.’”[2]

The year 2000 is above all a year of the Lord’s favor,[3] an important stage in the time of salvation, which brings us true life. The mystery of Christ comes to meet humanity with new vigor, and with him comes his all-powerful grace.

From the first moment of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II has not ceased to focus attention on Christ’s central role in the scenario of the year 2000. It is Christ who gives meaning to the crucial moment of this new century and millennium. It is he who guarantees the victory of his Kingdom,[4] even in the face of the current symptoms of religious and moral crisis. “If we look at today’s world,” wrote the Pope almost a decade ago, “we are struck by many negative factors that can lead to pessimism. But this feeling is unjustified: we have faith in God, our Father and Lord, in his goodness and mercy. As the third millennium of the redemption draws near, God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity, and we can already see its first signs.”[5]

The history of salvation begins again at every moment. For individuals, for peoples, for cultures, it is always a time to let oneself be given new life through the grace of Christ. And this is true of the year 2000 in a special way. “Christian life is a continuous beginning again each day. It renews itself over and over.”[6] Therefore the bimillennium of Christ cannot be just a beautiful anniversary which leaves an emotional memory in one’s soul; it must instead be the fruitful occasion of a new spiritual stimulus.
This is what we have been preparing for during the past three years, following the clear path mapped out for us by the Pope through his teaching and example. The years of preparation for the Jubilee have been a spiritual journey leading Christians and the Church to this most favorable time, which should produce a firm resolution of conversion in the heart of each one of us. “The period of the Jubilee introduces us to the vigorous language which the divine pedagogy of salvation uses to lead man to conversion and penance. These are the beginning and the path of man’s healing, and the necessary condition for him to recover what he could never attain by his own strength: God’s friendship and grace, the supernatural life, which alone can bring fulfillment to the deepest aspirations of the human heart.”[7]

The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, rather than a momentary celebration, is a point of departure. The future is opening up before Christians like a path cleared constantly by grace, leading to an ever fuller incorporation of Christ’s life in our own lives. This presents us with a supernatural challenge that we have to confront eagerly: a stretch of time that we have to fill with Christ, the “plenitude of time.” We Christians know that we have been made free by our faith, and our personal freedom finds its natural channel in the eager effort to unite all things in [Christ].[8] “We know that we have to renew the world in the spirit of Jesus Christ, that we have to place our Lord at the summit and at the heart of all things.”[9]


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Message for World Youth Day (June 29, 1999)

“The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14)

My dear young people

1. Fifteen years ago, at the close of the Holy Year of the Redemption, I entrusted to you a great wooden Cross, asking you to carry it across the world as a sign of the love which the Lord Jesus has for mankind and to proclaim to everyone that only in Christ who died and is risen is there salvation and redemption. Since that day, carried by generous hands and hearts, the Cross has made a long, uninterrupted pilgrimage across the continents, to demonstrate that the Cross walks with young people and young people walk with the Cross.

   Around the “Holy Year Cross,” World Youth Days were born and developed as meaningful “moments of rest” along your journey as young Christians; a constant, pressing invitation to build life on the rock that is Christ. How can we fail to bless the Lord for the countless fruits born in the hearts of individuals and in the whole Church thanks to the World Youth Days, which in this last part of the century have marked the journey of young believers towards the new millennium?

   After spanning the continents, that Cross now returns to Rome bringing with it the prayers and commitment of millions of young people who have recognized it as a simple and sacred sign of God’s love for humanity. Because Rome, as you know, will host World Youth Day of the Year 2000, in the heart of the Great Jubilee.

   Dear young people, I invite you therefore to undertake with joy the pilgrimage to Rome for this important ecclesial appointment, which will rightly be the “Youth Jubilee.” Prepare to enter the Holy Door, knowing that to pass through it is to strengthen faith in Him in order to live the new life which he has given to us (cf. Incarnationis Mysterium, no. 8).

2. I chose as the theme for your 15th World Day the lapidary phrase
with which Saint John the Apostle describes the profound mystery of God made man: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). What distinguishes the Christian faith from all other religions, is the certainty that the man Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, the Word made flesh, the second person of the Trinity who came into the world. “Such is the joyous conviction of the Church from her beginning, whenever she sings ‘the mystery of our religion’: ‘He was manifested in the flesh’” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 463). God, the invisible one is alive and present in the person of Jesus, Son of Mary, the Theotokos, Mother of God. Jesus of Nazareth is God with us, Emmanuel: he who knows Him knows God, he who sees Him sees God, he who follows Him follows God, he who unites himself with Him is united with God (cf. Jn 12:44-50). In Jesus, born in Bethlehem, God embraces the human condition, making himself accessible, establishing a covenant with mankind.

On the eve of the new millennium, I make again to you my pressing appeal to open wide the doors to Christ who “to those who received him, gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12) To receive Jesus Christ means to accept from the Father the command to live, loving Him and our brothers and sisters, showing solidarity to everyone, without distinction; it means believing that in the history of humanity even though it is marked by evil and suffering, the final word belongs to life and to love, because God came to dwell among us, so we may dwell in Him.

By his incarnation Christ became poor to enrich us with his poverty, and he gave us redemption, which is the fruit above all of the blood he shed on the Cross (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 517). On Calvary, “ours were the sufferings he bore... he was pierced through for our faults” (Is 53: 4-5). The supreme sacrifice of his life, freely given for our salvation, is the proof of God’s infinite love for us. Saint John the Apostle writes: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that everyone that believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). He sent Him to share in every way, except sin, our human condition; he “gave” him totally to men, despite their obstinate and homicidal rejection (cf. Mt 21:33-39), to obtain, through his death, their reconciliation. “The God of creation is revealed as the God of redemption, as the God who is ‘faithful to himself’ and faithful to his love for man and the world which he revealed
on the day of creation... how precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he gained so great a Redeemer” (Redemptor Hominis, nos. 9.10)

Jesus went towards his death. He did not draw back from any of the consequences of his being “with us,” Emmanuel. He took our place, ransoming us on the Cross from evil and sin (cf. Evangelium Vitae, no. 50). Just as the Roman Centurion, seeing the manner in which Jesus died, understood that he was the Son of God (cf. Mk 15:39) so we too, seeing and contemplating the Crucified Lord, understand who God really is, as he reveals in Jesus the depth of his love for mankind (cf. Redemptor Hominis, no. 9). “Passion” means a passionate love, unconditioned self-giving: Christ’s passion is the summit of an entire life “given” to his brothers and sisters to reveal the heart of the Father. The Cross, which seems to rise up from the earth, in actual fact reaches down from heaven, enfolding the universe in a divine embrace. The Cross reveals itself to be “the center, meaning and goal of all history and of every human life” (Evangelium Vitae, no. 50).

“One man has died for all” (2 Cor 5:14): Christ “gave himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). Behind the death of Jesus there is a plan of love, which the faith of the Church calls the “mystery of the redemption”: the whole of humanity is redeemed, that is, set free from the slavery of sin and led into the kingdom of God. Christ is Lord of heaven and earth. Whoever listens to his word and believes in the Father, who sent him, has eternal life (cf. Jn 5:25). He is the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29.36), the high priest who, having suffered like us, is able to share our infirmity (cf. Heb 4:14) and “made perfect” through the painful experience of the Cross, becomes “for all who obey him, the source of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9).

3. Dear young people, faced with these great mysteries, learn to lift your hearts in an attitude of contemplation. Stop and look with wonder at the infant Mary brought into the world, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger: the infant is God himself who has come among us. Look at Jesus of Nazareth, received by some and scorned by others, despised and rejected: He is the Saviour of all. Adore Christ, our Redeemer, who ransoms us and frees us from sin and death: He is the living God, the source of Life.
Contemplate and reflect! God created us to share in his very own life; he calls us to be his children, living members of the mystical Body of Christ, luminous temple of the Spirit of Love. He calls us to be his: he wants us all to be saints. Dear young people, may it be your holy ambition to be holy, as He is holy.

You will ask me: but is it possible today to be saints? If we had to rely only on human strength, the undertaking would be truly impossible. You are well aware, in fact, of your successes and your failures; you are aware of the heavy burdens weighing on man, the many dangers which threaten him and the consequences caused by his sins. At times we may be gripped by discouragement and even come to think that it is impossible to change anything either in the world or in ourselves.

Although the journey is difficult, we can do everything in the One who is our Redeemer. Turn then to no one, except Jesus. Do not look elsewhere for that which only He can give you, because “of all the names in the world given to men this is the only one by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12). With Christ, saintliness — the divine plan for every baptized person — becomes possible. Rely on Him; believe in the invincible power of the Gospel and place faith as the foundation of your hope. Jesus walks with you, he renews your heart and strengthens you with the vigor of his Spirit.

Young people of every continent, do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium! Be contemplative, love prayer; be coherent with your faith and generous in the service of your brothers and sisters, be active members of the Church and builders of peace. To succeed in this demanding project of life, continue to listen to His Word, draw strength from the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance. The Lord wants you to be intrepid apostles of his Gospel and builders of a new humanity. In fact, how could you say you believe in God made man without taking a firm position against all that destroys the human person and the family? If you believe that Christ has revealed the Father’s love for every person, you cannot fail to strive to contribute to the building of a new world, founded on the power of love and forgiveness, on the struggle against injustice and all physical, moral and spiritual distress, on the orientation of politics, economy, culture and technology to the service of man and his integral development.
4. I sincerely wish that the Jubilee, now at the door, may be an opportune time for courageous spiritual renewal and an exceptional celebration of God’s love for humanity. From the whole Church may there rise up “a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Father, who in his incomparable love granted us in Christ to be ‘fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God’” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, no. 6).

May we draw comfort from the certainty expressed by Saint Paul the Apostle: If God did not spare his only Son but gave him for us, how can he fail to give us everything with him? Who can separate us from the love of Christ? In every event of life, including death, we can be more than winners, by virtue of the One who loved us even unto the Cross (cf. *Rom 8: 31-37*).

The mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God and that of the Redemption he worked for all men, constitute the central message of our faith. The Church proclaims this down through the centuries, walking “amidst the misunderstandings and persecutions of the world and the consolations of God” (St. Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 18, 51, 2; PL 41,614) and she entrusts it to her children as a precious treasure to be safeguarded and shared.

You too, dear young people, are the receivers and the trustees of this heritage: “This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. And we are proud to profess it, in Jesus Christ Our Lord” (*Roman Pontifical*, Rite of Confirmation). We will proclaim it together on the occasion of the next World Youth Day, in which I hope very many of you will take part. Rome is a “city-shrine” where the memory of the Apostles Peter and Paul and other martyrs remind pilgrims of the vocation of every baptized person. Before the world, in August next year, we will repeat the profession of faith made by Saint Peter the Apostle: “Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (*Jn 6:68*) because “you are the Christ the Son of the Living God!” (*Mt 16:16*).

Also to you boys and girls who will be adults in the next century, is entrusted the “Book of Life,” which on Christmas Eve this year the Pope, the first to cross the threshold of the Holy Door, will show to the Church and to the world as the wellspring of life and hope for the third millennium (*Incarnationis Mysterium*, no. 8).
May it become your most precious treasure: in the careful study and
generous acceptance of the Word of the Lord, you will find nourishment
and strength for your daily life, you will find motivation for tireless
commitment to the building of a civilization of love.

5. Let us now turn our eyes to the Virgin Mother of God, of whom the
city of Rome treasures one of the earliest and most honored monuments
which the devotion of the Christian people has dedicated to her: the
Basilica of Saint Mary Major.

The Incarnation of the Word and the Redemption of mankind are
closely linked with the Annunciation when God revealed to Mary his plan
and found in her, a young person like yourselves, a heart totally open to the
action of his love. For centuries Christian devotion has recalled every day,
with the recitation of the Angelus Domini, God’s entrance into the history
of man. May this prayer become your daily meditated prayer.

Mary is the dawn which precedes the rising of the Sun of justice,
Christ our Redeemer. With her “yes” at the Annunciation, as she opened
herself completely to the Father’s plan, she welcomed and made possible
the incarnation of the Son. The first disciple, with her discreet presence she
accompanied Jesus all the way to Calvary and sustained the hope of the
Apostles as they awaited the Resurrection and Pentecost. In the life of the
Church she continues to be mystically the one who precedes the Lord’s
coming. To Mary, who fulfills without interruption her ministry as Mother
of the Church and of each Christian, I entrust with confidence the
preparation of the 15th World Youth Day. May Most Holy Mary teach
you, dear young people, how to discern the will of the heavenly Father in
your life. May she obtain for you the strength and the wisdom to speak to
God and to speak about God. Through her example may she encourage
you to be in the new millennium announcers of hope, love and peace.

Looking forward to meeting many of you in Rome next year, “I
commend you to God, and to the word of his grace that has power to build
you up and to give you your inheritance among all the sanctified” (Acts
20:32), while, gladly and with great affection, I bless all of you, with your
families and your loved ones.

From the Vatican, June 29th 1999, solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.
Letter Concerning Pilgrimages to the Places Linked to the History of Salvation (June 29, 1999)

To all who are preparing to celebrate in faith the Great Jubilee

1. After years of preparation, we find ourselves at the threshold of the Great Jubilee. Much has been done during these years throughout the Church to plan for this event of grace. But now, as in the last stage of preparation for a journey, the time has come for the finishing touches. The Great Jubilee is not just a series of functions to be held, but a great interior experience to be lived. External factors make sense only in so far as they express a deeper commitment which touches people's hearts. It was in fact this inner dimension that I wished to point out to everyone in my Apostolic Letter Tertio Millennio Adveniente and the Jubilee Bull of Indiction Incarnationis Mysterium, both of which were well received by a great many people. In them the Bishops found helpful suggestions, and the themes proposed for the different years of preparation have been amply meditated upon. For all of this I wish to thank the Lord and to express my sincere appreciation to the Pastors and the entire People of God.

Now, the imminence of the Jubilee prompts me to offer some thoughts connected with my own desire, God willing, to make a special Jubilee pilgrimage, to visit some of the places which are closely linked to the Incarnation of the Word of God, the event which the Holy Year of 2000 directly recalls.

My meditation therefore turns to the “places” in which God has chosen to “pitch his tent” among us (Jn 1:14; cf. Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-13), thus enabling man to encounter him more directly. In a sense, I am completing what I wrote in Tertio Millennio Adveniente, in which the dominant perspective, against the background of the history of salvation, was the fundamental relevance of “time.” In fact, the spatial dimension is
no less decisive than the temporal in the concrete accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation.

2. At first sight, it may seem puzzling to speak of precise “spaces” in connection with God. No less than time, is not space completely subject to God’s control? Everything has come from his hands and there is no place where God cannot be found: “The Lord’s is the earth and its fullness, the world and all its people. It is he who set it on the seas, on the waters he made it firm” (Ps 24:1-2). God is equally present in every corner of the earth, so that the whole world may be considered the “temple” of his presence.

Yet this does not take away from the fact that, just as time can be marked by kairos, by special moments of grace, space too may by analogy bear the stamp of particular saving actions of God. Moreover, this is an intuition present in all religions, which not only have sacred times but also sacred spaces, where the encounter with the divine may be experienced more intensely than it would normally be in the vastness of the cosmos.

3. In relation to this common religious tendency, the Bible offers its own specific message, setting the theme of “sacred space” within the context of the history of salvation. On the one hand, Scripture warns against the inherent risks of defining space of this kind, when this is done as a way of divinizing nature: here we should recall the powerful anti-idolatrous polemic of the Prophets in the name of fidelity to Yahweh, the God of the Exodus. On the other hand, the Bible does not exclude a cultic use of space, in so far as this expresses fully the particularity of God’s intervention in the history of Israel. Sacred space is thus gradually “concentrated” in the Jerusalem Temple, where the God of Israel wishes to be honored and, in a sense, encountered. The eyes of Israelite pilgrims turn to the Temple and great is their joy when they reach the place where God has made his home: “I rejoiced when I heard them say, ‘Let us go to God’s house’. And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!” (Ps 122:1-2).

In the New Testament, this “concentration” of sacred space reaches its summit in Christ, who is, in his person, the new “temple” (cf. Jn 2:21), in which dwells the “fullness of Godhead” (Col 2:9). With his coming,
worship was destined radically to surpass material shrines in order to become worship “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:24). In Christ, then, the Church too is considered by the New Testament to be a “temple” (cf. 1 Cor 3:17), as is the individual disciple of Christ, since each is inhabited by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 6:19; Rom 8:11). Clearly, this does not mean that Christians cannot have places of worship, as the history of the Church well shows; but it must not be forgotten that these are intended only to serve the liturgical and fraternal life of the community, at the same time knowing that the presence of God by its nature cannot be restricted to any one place, since his presence, which has its fullest expression and communication in Christ, pervades all space.

The mystery of the Incarnation therefore reshapes the universal experience of “sacred space,” on the one hand relativizing it, and on the other hand underlining its importance in new terms. The very “taking of flesh” by the Word (Jn 1:14) is in fact a reference to space. In Jesus of Nazareth, God has assumed the features typical of human nature, including a person's belonging to a particular people and a particular land. “Hic de Virgine Maria Iesus Christus natus est” — these words take on a peculiar eloquence in Bethlehem, inscribed over the place where, according to tradition, Jesus was born: “Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.” The physical particularity of the land and its geographical determination are inseparable from the truth of the human flesh assumed by the Word.

4. For this reason, in the perspective of the two thousandth anniversary of the Incarnation, I have a strong desire to go personally to pray in the most important places which, from the Old to the New Testament, have seen God's interventions, which culminate in the mysteries of the Incarnation and of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. These places are already indelibly etched in my memory, from the time when in 1965 I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land. It was an unforgettable experience. Today I still gladly go back to what I wrote then, pages full of emotion. “I come across these places which you have filled with yourself once and for all... Oh place... You were transformed so many times before you, His place, became mine. When for the first time He filled you, you were not yet an outer place; you were but His Mother's womb. How I long to know that the stones I am treading in Nazareth are the same which her
feet touched when she was Your only place on earth. Meeting You through the stone touched by the feet of Your Mother. Oh, corner of the earth, place in the holy land — what kind of place are you in me? My steps cannot tread on you; I must kneel. Thus I confirm today you were indeed a place of meeting. Kneeling down I imprint a seal on you. You will remain here with my seal — you will remain — and I will take you and transform you within me into the place of new testimony. I will walk away as a witness who testifies across the millennia” (Karol Wojtyla, *Poezje. Poems*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1998, p. 168).

When I wrote those words, more than thirty years ago, I could not have imagined that the witness to which I pledged myself then I would render today as the Successor of Peter, at the service of the whole Church. It is a witness which sets me in a long procession of people, who for two thousand years have gone in search of the “footprints” of God in that land, rightly called “holy,” pursuing them as it were in the stones, the hills, the waters which provided the setting for the earthly life of the Son of God. Since ancient times the travel diary of the pilgrim woman Egeria has been well known. How many pilgrims, how many saints, have followed her path down the centuries! Even when events in history disturbed the essentially peaceful nature of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, giving it an aspect which, whatever the intentions involved, was hard to reconcile with the image of the Crucified One, more sensitive Christian souls sought only to find the living memory of Christ on that soil. And Providence decreed that, alongside the brethren of the Eastern Churches, for Western Christianity it would be the sons of Francis of Assisi, the saint of poverty, gentleness and peace, who in truly evangelical style would give expression to the legitimate Christian desire to protect the places where our spiritual roots are found.

5. It is in this spirit, God willing, that I intend on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 to follow the traces of the history of salvation in the land in which it took place.

The starting-point will be certain key places of the Old Testament. In this way I wish to express the Church’s awareness of her irrevocable links with the ancient people of the Covenant. For us too Abraham is our “father in faith” par excellence (cf. *Rom* 4; *Gal* 3:6-9; *Heb* 11:8-19). In the Gospel of
John we read the words which one day Christ said of him: “Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad” (8:56).

The first stage of the journey which I hope to make is linked to Abraham. In fact, if it be God’s will, I would like to go to Ur of the Chaldees, the present-day Tell el-Muqayyar in southern Iraq, the city where, according to the biblical account, Abraham heard the word of the Lord which took him away from his own land, from his people, from himself in a sense, to make him the instrument of a plan of salvation which embraced the future people of the Covenant and indeed all the peoples of the world: “The Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.... By you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves”’ (Gen 12:1-3). With these words, the great journey of the People of God began. It is not only those who boast physical descent from him who look to Abraham, but also all those, and they are countless, who regard themselves as his “spiritual” offspring, because they share his faith and unreserved abandonment to the saving initiative of the Almighty.

6. The experience of the people of Abraham unfolded over hundreds of years, touching many places in the Near East. At the heart of this experience there are the events of the Exodus, when the people of Israel, after the hard trial of slavery, went forth under the leadership of Moses towards the Land of freedom. Three moments mark that journey, each of them linked to mountainous places charged with mystery. There rises first of all, in the early stage, Mount Horeb, as Sinai is sometimes called in the Bible, where Moses received the revelation of God’s name, the sign of his mystery and of his powerful saving presence: “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14). No less than Abraham, Moses was asked to entrust himself to God’s plan, and to put himself at the head of his people. Thus began the dramatic event of the liberation, which Israel would always remember as the founding experience of its faith.

On the journey through the desert, it was again Sinai which was the setting for the sealing of the Covenant between Yahweh and his people, thus linking the mountain to the gift of the Ten Commandments, the ten “words” which commit Israel to a life fully obedient to the will of God. In
reality, these “words” are indicative of the pillars of the universal moral law written in every human heart, but they were given to Israel within the context of a mutual pact of fidelity, whereby the people undertook to love God, recalling the wonders he had done in the Exodus, and God guaranteed his enduring kindness: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). God and the people pledged themselves to each other. If, in the vision of the burning bush, the place of the “name” and of the “plan” of God, Horeb, was above all “the mountain of faith,” now for the pilgrim people in the desert it became the place of encounter and of the mutual pact, in a sense therefore “the mountain of love.” How often down the centuries, in denouncing the faithlessness of the Covenant people, did the Prophets see it as a kind of “marital” infidelity, a genuine betrayal of God the bridegroom by the people, his bride (cf. Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:1-43).

At the end of the Exodus journey, there rises another peak, Mount Nebo, from which Moses could see the Promised Land (cf. Deut 32:49), without the joy of setting foot there but certain in the knowledge of having reached it. His gaze from Nebo is the very symbol of hope. From that mountain he could see that God had kept his promises. Once more, however, he had to abandon himself trustingly to the divine omnipotence for the sake of the final accomplishment of the plan that had been foretold.

It will probably not be possible for me on my pilgrimage to visit all these places. But I would like at least, please God, to visit Ur, the place of Abraham’s origins, and then go to the famous Monastery of Saint Catherine, on Sinai, near the mountain of the Covenant, which in a way speaks of the entire mystery of the Exodus, the enduring paradigm of the new Exodus which was to be fully accomplished on Golgotha.

7. These and other itineraries of the Old Testament are full of meaning for us, but clearly the Jubilee Year, the solemn commemoration of the Incarnation of the Word, draws us above all to the places where Jesus lived his life.

First of all, I very much want to visit Nazareth, the town linked to the actual moment of the Incarnation and the place where Jesus grew “in wisdom, age and grace before God and men” (Lk 2:52). Here Mary heard
the Angel’s greeting: “Hail, O full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1:28). Here Mary spoke her *fiat* to the message that called her to be mother of the Saviour and, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, to become the womb that would welcome the Son of God.

And how could I not then visit Bethlehem, where Christ was born, and the shepherds and the wise men gave voice to the adoration of all humanity? At Bethlehem too there rang forth for the first time that greeting of peace which, spoken by the Angels, would continue to echo from generation to generation until our own day.

Especially charged with meaning will be the visit to Jerusalem, the place of the death on the Cross and of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Certainly, there are many other places associated with the earthly life of the Saviour and so many of them deserve to be visited. How can we forget, for instance, the Mount of the Beatitudes, or the Mount of the Transfiguration, or Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus entrusted the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter, establishing him as the foundation of his Church (cf. Mt 16:13-19)? In the Holy Land, from north to south, we may say that everything recalls Christ. But I will have to be satisfied with the more important places, and Jerusalem in a sense sums them them all up. There, please God, I intend to immerse myself in prayer, bearing in my heart the whole Church. There I shall contemplate the places where Christ gave his life and took it up again in the Resurrection, imparting to us the gift of his Spirit. There my wish would be to cry out once more the great consoling certainty that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

8. Among the places in Jerusalem most closely tied to the earthly life of Christ, I will have to visit the Upper Room, where Jesus instituted the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Church’s life. Here too, according to tradition, the Apostles were gathered in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Christ, when on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them. Then began the final stage of the journey of the history of salvation, the time of the Church, Body and Bride of Christ, a people making its pilgrim way through time, called to be the sign and instrument
of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1).

The visit to the Upper Room is thus meant to be a return to the very origins of the Church. The Successor of Peter, who in Rome lives at the place where the Prince of the Apostles faced martyrdom, cannot but constantly retrace the steps to the place where Peter, on the day of Pentecost, began to proclaim in a loud voice with the inebriating power of the Spirit, the “good news” that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf. *Acts* 2:36).

9. The visit to the Holy Places of the Redeemer’s earthly life leads logically to the places which were important for the infant Church and which saw the missionary outreach of the first Christian community. There are many of them, if we follow the account of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. But in particular I would also like to be able to pause in meditation in two cities linked especially to the story of Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles. I am thinking first of all of Damascus, the place which recalls his conversion. The future Apostle was in fact on his way to that city in the role of persecutor, when Christ himself crossed his path: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” (*Acts* 9:4). From there, the zeal of Paul, now conquered by Christ, spread with unstoppable force to affect a large part of the then known world. The cities evangelized by him were many. It would be nice to be able to visit Athens, where Paul gave his magnificent speech in the Areopagus (cf. *Acts* 17:22-31). If we consider the role played by Greece in shaping the culture of the ancient world, we understand how that speech of Paul’s can in a sense be considered the very symbol of the Gospel’s encounter with human culture.

10. Abandoning myself completely to the divine will, I would be happy if this plan could be put into effect at least in its main points. It would be an exclusively religious pilgrimage in its nature and purpose, and I would be saddened if anyone were to attach other meanings to this plan of mine. Indeed, spiritually I am already on this journey, since even to go just in thought to those places means in a way to read anew the Gospel itself; it means to follow the roads which Revelation itself has taken.

To go in a spirit of prayer from one place to another, from one city to another, in the area marked especially by God's intervention, helps us not
only to live our life as a journey, but also gives us a vivid sense of a God who has gone before us and leads us on, who himself set out on man's path, a God who does not look down on us from on high, but who became our travelling companion.

The pilgrimage to the Holy Places thus becomes a highly meaningful experience and in a sense is evoked by every other Jubilee pilgrimage. The Church cannot forget her roots. Indeed, she must return to them again and again if she is to remain completely faithful to God's plan. This is why I wrote in the Bull Incarnationis Mysterium that the Jubilee, celebrated at the same time in the Holy Land, in Rome and in all the local Churches throughout the world, “will have, as it were, two centers: on the one hand, the City where Providence chose to place the See of the Successor of Peter, and on the other hand, the Holy Land, where the Son of God was born as a man, taking our flesh from a Virgin whose name was Mary” (n. 2).

While this focus on the Holy Land expresses the Christian duty to remember, it also seeks to honor the deep bond which Christians continue to have with the Jewish people from whom Christ came according to the flesh (cf. Rom 9:5). Much ground has been covered in recent years, especially since the Second Vatican Council, in opening a fruitful dialogue with the people whom God chose as the first recipients of his promises and of the Covenant. The Jubilee must be another opportunity to deepen the sense of the bonds that unite us, helping to remove once and for all the misunderstandings which, sad to say, have so often through the centuries marked with bitterness the relationship between Christians and Jews.

Nor can we forget that the Holy Land is also dear to the followers of Islam, who look to it with special veneration. I dearly hope that my visit to the Holy Places will provide an opportunity to meet them as well, so that, without compromising clarity of witness, there may be a strengthening of the grounds for mutual understanding and esteem, as well as for cooperation in the effort to witness to the value of religious commitment and the longing for a society more attuned to God's designs, a society which respects every human being and all creation.

11. In this journey through the places where God chose to pitch his “tent” among us, great is my desire to be welcomed as a pilgrim and
brother not only by the Catholic communities, whom I shall meet with special joy, but also by the other Churches which have lived uninterruptedly in the Holy Places and have been their custodians with fidelity and love of the Lord.

More than any other pilgrimage which I have made, the one I am about to undertake in the Holy Land during the Jubilee event will be marked by the desire expressed in Christ’s prayer to the Father that his disciples “may all be one” (Jn 17:21), a prayer which challenges us more vigorously at the exceptional time which opens the Third Millennium. For this reason, I trust that all our brothers and sisters in faith, in a spirit of openness to the Holy Spirit, will see in my pilgrim steps in the land travelled by Christ a “doxology” for the salvation which we have all received, and I would be happy if we could gather together in the places of our common origin, to bear witness to Christ our unity (cf. Ut Unum Sint, n. 23) and to confirm our mutual commitment to the restoration of full communion.

12. It therefore only remains for me to extend a warm invitation to the entire Christian community to set out spiritually upon the path of the Jubilee pilgrimage. This can be done in the many ways that I suggested in the Bull of Indiction. But it is certain that many will also do so by actually journeying to the places that have been particularly important in the history of salvation. In any event, we must all make that inward journey which seeks to move us away from whatever, in us and around us, is contrary to God’s law, so as to be able to encounter Christ fully, professing our faith in him and receiving the abundance of his mercy.

In the Gospel, Jesus seems always to be travelling about. He seems to be in a hurry to move from one place to another in order to proclaim the imminent coming of God’s Kingdom. He proclaims and he calls. His “Follow me” prompted the Apostles’ ready response (cf. Mk 1:16-20). Let us all feel touched by his voice, his call, his summons to a new life.

I say this especially to young people, before whom life is opening up like a journey full of surprises and promises.

I say it to everyone: let us set out in the footsteps of Christ!

May the journey that I intend to make in the Jubilee Year be an image
of the journey of the whole Church in her desire to be ever more ready to respond to the voice of the Spirit, in order to go more quickly to meet Christ, the Bridegroom: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’” (Rev 22:17).

From the Vatican, on 29 June, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, in the year 1999, the twenty-first of my Pontificate.

Message for the World Day of Peace (December 8, 1999)

“Peace on Earth to those whom God loves!”

1. This is the proclamation of the Angels which greeted the birth of Jesus Christ two thousand years ago (cf. Lk 2:14), and which we will hear re-echoing joyfully on the holy night of Christmas, when the Great Jubilee will be solemnly inaugurated.

   At the dawn of the new Millennium, we wish to propose once more the message of hope which comes from the stable of Bethlehem: God loves all men and women on earth and gives them the hope of a new era, an era of peace. His love, fully revealed in the Incarnate Son, is the foundation of universal peace. When welcomed in the depths of the human heart, this love reconciles people with God and with themselves, renews human relationships and stirs that desire for brotherhood capable of banishing the temptation of violence and war.

   The Great Jubilee is inseparably linked to this message of love and reconciliation, a message which gives voice to the truest aspirations of humanity today.

2. Looking to a year so filled with meaning, I once more offer everyone my good wishes for peace. To everyone I affirm that peace is possible. It needs to be implored from God as his gift, but it also needs to be built day by day with his help, through works of justice and love.
To be sure, the problems which make the path to peace difficult and often discouraging are many and complex, but peace is a need deeply rooted in the heart of every man and woman. The will to seek peace must not therefore be allowed to weaken. This seeking must be based on the awareness that humanity, however much marred by sin, hatred and violence, is called by God to be a single family. This divine plan needs to be recognized and carried out through the search for harmonious relationships between individuals and peoples, in a culture where openness to the Transcendent, the promotion of the human person and respect for the world of nature are shared by all.

This is the message of Christmas, this is the message of the Jubilee, this is my hope at the beginning of a new Millennium.

War is a defeat for humanity

3. In the century we are leaving behind, humanity has been sorely tried by an endless and horrifying sequence of wars, conflicts, genocides and “ethnic cleansings” which have caused unspeakable suffering: millions and millions of victims, families and countries destroyed, an ocean of refugees, misery, hunger, disease, underdevelopment and the loss of immense resources. At the root of so much suffering there lies a logic of supremacy fuelled by the desire to dominate and exploit others, by ideologies of power or totalitarian utopias, by crazed nationalisms or ancient tribal hatreds. At times brutal and systematic violence, aimed at the very extermination or enslavement of entire peoples and regions, has had to be countered by armed resistance.

The twentieth century bequeaths to us above all else a warning: wars are often the cause of further wars because they fuel deep hatreds, create situations of injustice and trample upon people’s dignity and rights. Wars generally do not resolve the problems for which they are fought and therefore, in addition to causing horrendous damage, they prove ultimately futile. War is a defeat for humanity. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed.[1]

4. Against the backdrop of war in the twentieth century, humanity’s honor has been preserved by those who have spoken and worked on behalf of peace.
We cannot fail to remember the countless men and women who have contributed to the affirmation and the solemn proclamation of human rights, and who have helped to defeat the various forms of totalitarianism, to put an end to colonialism, to develop democracy and to establish the great international organizations. Those who built their lives on the value of non-violence have given us a luminous and prophetic example. Their example of integrity and loyalty, often to the point of martyrdom, has provided us with rich and splendid lessons.

Among those who have acted in the name of peace we should not forget those men and women whose dedication has brought about great advances in every field of science and technology, making it possible to overcome dreadful diseases and to enhance and prolong human life.

Nor can I fail to mention my own venerable Predecessors who have guided the Church in the twentieth century. By their lofty teaching and their tireless efforts they have given direction to the Church in the promotion of a culture of peace. Emblematic of this many-sided effort was the timely and prophetic intuition of Pope Paul VI, who on 8 December 1967 instituted the World Day of Peace. With the passing of the years, the World Day of Peace has become more firmly established as a fruitful experience of reflection and shared vision for the future.

Called to be one family

5. “Peace on earth to those whom God loves!” The Gospel greeting prompts a heartfelt question: will the new century be one of peace and a renewed sense of brotherhood between individuals and peoples? We cannot of course foresee the future. But we can set forth one certain principle: there will be peace only to the extent that humanity as a whole redisCOVERs its fundamental calling to be one family, a family in which the dignity and rights of individuals — whatever their status, race or religion — are accepted as prior and superior to any kind of difference or distinction.

This recognition can give the world as it is today — marked by the process of globalization — a soul, a meaning and a direction. Globalization, for all its risks, also offers exceptional and promising opportunities, precisely with a view to enabling humanity to become a single family, built on the values of justice, equity and solidarity.
6. For this to happen, a complete change of perspective will be needed: it is no longer the well-being of any one political, racial or cultural community that must prevail, but rather the good of humanity as a whole. The pursuit of the common good of a single political community cannot be in conflict with *the common good of humanity*, expressed in the recognition of and respect for human rights sanctioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. It is necessary, then, to abandon ideas and practices — often determined by powerful economic interests — which subordinate every other value to the absolute claims of the nation and the State. In this new perspective, the political, cultural and institutional divisions and distinctions by which humanity is ordered and organized are legitimate in so far as they are compatible with membership in the one human family, and with the ethical and legal requirements which stem from this.

**Crimes against humanity**

7. This principle has an immensely important consequence: *an offense against human rights is an offense against the conscience of humanity as such*, an offense against humanity itself. The duty of protecting these rights therefore extends beyond the geographical and political borders within which they are violated. *Crimes against humanity cannot be considered an internal affair of a nation.* Here an important step forward was taken with the establishment of an International Criminal Court to try such crimes, regardless of the place or circumstances in which they are committed. We must thank God that in the conscience of peoples and nations there is a growing conviction that human rights have no borders, because they are universal and indivisible.

8. In our time, the number of wars between States has diminished. This fact, albeit consoling, appears in a very different light if we consider the armed conflicts taking place within States. Sadly these are quite numerous on practically every continent, and often very violent. For the most part, they are rooted in long-standing historical motives of an ethnic, tribal or even religious character, to which must be added nowadays other ideological, social and economic causes.
These internal conflicts, usually waged through the large-scale use of small-calibre weapons and so-called “light” arms — arms which in fact extraordinarily lethal — often have grave consequences which spill over the borders of the country in question, involving outside interests and responsibilities. While it is true that the extreme complexity of these conflicts makes it very difficult to understand and evaluate the causes and interests at play, one fact cannot be disputed: it is the civilian population which suffers most tragically, since neither ordinary laws nor the laws of warfare are respected in practice. Far from being protected, civilians are often the prime target of the conflicting forces, when they themselves are not directly involved in armed activity as a result of a perverse spiral which makes them both victims and assassins of other civilians.

All too many and horrifying are the macabre scenarios in which innocent children, women, and unarmed older people have become intentional targets in the bloody conflicts of our time; too many, in fact, for us not to feel that the moment has come to change direction, decisively and with a great sense of responsibility.

The right to humanitarian assistance

9. In every case, in the face of such tragic and complex situations and contrary to all alleged “reasons” of war, there is a need to affirm the preeminent value of humanitarian law and the consequent duty to guarantee the right to humanitarian aid to suffering civilians and refugees.

The recognition of these rights and their effective implementation must not be allowed to depend on the interests of any of the parties in conflict. On the contrary, there is a duty to identify all the means, institutional or otherwise, which can best serve in a practical way to meet humanitarian objectives. The moral and political legitimacy of these rights is in fact based on the principle that the good of the human person comes before all else and stands above all human institutions.

10. Here I wish to restate my conviction that, in the face of modern armed conflicts, negotiation between parties, with appropriate attempts at mediation and pacification by international and regional bodies, is of the greatest importance. Negotiation is necessary in order to prevent such
conflicts and to end them once they have broken out, restoring peace through an equitable settlement of the rights and interests involved.

This conviction concerning the positive role played by mediation and pacification agencies should be extended to the non-governmental humanitarian organizations and religious bodies which, discreetly and without ulterior motives, promote peace between opposed groups and help to overcome age-old rivalries, reconcile enemies, and open the way to a new and shared future. While honoring their noble dedication to the cause of peace, I wish to remember with profound esteem all who have given their lives so that others might live: I lift up my prayers to God for them and I invite other believers to do the same.

‘Humanitarian intervention’

11. Clearly, when a civilian population risks being overcome by the attacks of an unjust aggressor and political efforts and non-violent defense prove to be of no avail, it is legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures to disarm the aggressor. These measures however must be limited in time and precise in their aims. They must be carried out in full respect for international law, guaranteed by an authority that is internationally recognized and, in any event, never left to the outcome of armed intervention alone.

The fullest and the best use must therefore be made of all the provisions of the United Nations Charter, further defining effective instruments and modes of intervention within the framework of international law. In this regard, the United Nations Organization itself must offer all its Member States an equal opportunity to be part of the decision-making process, eliminating privileges and discriminations which weaken its role and its credibility.

12. This opens a new field of reflection and discussion both for politics and for law, a field which we all hope will be earnestly and wisely cultivated. What is needed without delay is a renewal of international law and international institutions, a renewal whose starting-point and basic organizing principle should be the primacy of the good of humanity and of the human person over every other consideration. Such a renewal is all the more urgent if we consider the paradox of contemporary warfare in which,
as recent conflicts have shown, armies enjoy maximum security while the civilian population lives in frightening situations of danger. In no kind of conflict is it permissible to ignore the right of civilians to safety.

Beyond legal and institutional considerations, there remains a fundamental duty for all men and women of good will, called to commit themselves personally to the cause of peace: that of educating for peace, setting in place structures of peace and methods of non-violence, and making every possible effort to bring parties in conflict to the negotiating table.

*Peace in solidarity*

13., “*Peace on earth to those whom God loves!*” From the problem of war, our gaze naturally turns to another closely related issue: the question of solidarity. The lofty and demanding task of peace, deeply rooted in humanity’s vocation to be one family and to recognize itself as such, has one of its foundations in the principle of the universal destination of the earth’s resources. This principle does not delegitimize private property; instead it broadens the understanding and management of private property to embrace its indispensable social function, to the advantage of the common good and in particular the good of society’s weakest members.\[2\] Unfortunately, this basic principle is widely disregarded, as shown by the persistent and growing gulf in the world between a North filled with abundant commodities and resources and increasingly made up of older people, and a South where the great majority of younger people now live, still deprived of credible prospects for social, cultural and economic development.

No one should be deceived into thinking that the simple absence of war, as desirable as it is, is equivalent to lasting peace. There is no true peace without fairness, truth, justice and solidarity. Failure awaits every plan which would separate two indivisible and interdependent rights: the right to peace and the right to an integral development born of solidarity. “Injustice, excessive economic or social inequalities, envy, distrust and pride raging among men and nations constantly threaten peace and cause wars. Everything done to overcome these disorders contributes to building up peace and avoiding war.”\[3\]
14. At the beginning of a new century, the one issue which most challenges our human and Christian consciences is the poverty of countless millions of men and women. This situation becomes all the more tragic when we realize that the major economic problems of our time do not depend on a lack of resources but on the fact that present economic, social and cultural structures are ill-equipped to meet the demands of genuine development.

Rightly then the poor, both in developing countries and in the prosperous and wealthy countries, “ask for the right to share in enjoying material goods and to make good use of their capacity to work, thus creating a world that is more just and prosperous for all. The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity.”[4] Let us look at the poor not as a problem, but as people who can become the principal builders of a new and more human future for everyone.

The urgent need to rethink the economy

15. In this context we also need to examine the growing concern felt by many economists and financial professionals when, in considering new issues involving poverty, peace, ecology and the future of the younger generation, they reflect on the role of the market, on the pervasive influence of monetary and financial interests, on the widening gap between the economy and society, and on other similar issues related to economic activity.

Perhaps the time has come for a new and deeper reflection on the nature of the economy and its purposes. What seems to be urgently needed is a reconsideration of the concept of “prosperity” itself, to prevent it from being enclosed in a narrow utilitarian perspective which leaves very little space for values such as solidarity and altruism.

16. Here I would like to invite economists and financial professionals, as well as political leaders, to recognize the urgency of the need to ensure that economic practices and related political policies have as their aim the good of every person and of the whole person. This is not only a demand of ethics but also of a sound economy. Experience seems to confirm that economic success is increasingly dependent on a more genuine appreciation of individuals and their abilities, on their fuller participation, on their
increased and improved knowledge and information, on a stronger solidarity.

These are values which, far from being foreign to economics and business, help to make them a fully “human” science and activity. An economy which takes no account of the ethical dimension and does not seek to serve the good of the person — of every person and the whole person — cannot really call itself an “economy,” understood in the sense of a rational and constructive use of material wealth.

**Which models of development?**

17. The very fact that humanity, called to form a single family, is still tragically split in two by poverty — at the beginning of the twenty-first century, more than a billion four hundred million people are living in a situation of dire poverty — means that there is urgent need to reconsider the models which inspire development policies.

In this regard, the legitimate requirements of economic efficiency must be better aligned with the requirements of political participation and social justice, without falling back into the ideological mistakes made during the twentieth century. In practice, this means making solidarity an integral part of the network of economic, political and social interdependence which the current process of globalization is tending to consolidate.

These processes call for rethinking international cooperation in terms of a new culture of solidarity. When seen as a sowing of peace, cooperation cannot be reduced to aid or assistance, especially if given with an eye to the benefits to be received in return for the resources made available. Rather, it must express a concrete and tangible commitment to solidarity which makes the poor the agents of their own development and enables the greatest number of people, in their specific economic and political circumstances, to exercise the creativity which is characteristic of the human person and on which the wealth of nations too is dependent.[5]

In particular it is necessary to find definitive solutions to the long-standing problem of the international debt of poor countries, while at the same time making available the financial resources necessary for the fight against hunger, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy and the destruction of the environment.
18. Today more than in the past there is an urgent need to foster a consciousness of universal moral values in order to face the problems of the present, all of which are assuming an increasingly global dimension. The promotion of peace and human rights, the settling of armed conflicts both within States and across borders, the protection of ethnic minorities and immigrants, the safeguarding of the environment, the battle against terrible diseases, the fight against drug and arms traffickers, and against political and economic corruption: these are issues which nowadays no nation is in a position to face alone. They concern the entire human community, and thus they must be faced and resolved through common efforts.

A way must be found to discuss the problems posed by the future of humanity in a comprehensible and common language. The basis of such a dialogue is the universal moral law written upon the human heart. By following this “grammar” of the spirit, the human community can confront the problems of coexistence and move forward to the future with respect for God’s plan.\[6\]

The encounter between faith and reason, between religion and morality, can provide a decisive impulse towards dialogue and cooperation between peoples, cultures and religions.

**Jesus, gift of peace**

19. “*Peace on earth to those whom God loves!*” Looking to the Great Jubilee, Christians throughout the world are committed to the solemn commemoration of the Incarnation. Listening again to the proclamation of the Angels in the heavens above Bethlehem (cf. *Lk* 2:14), they commemorate the Incarnation in the knowledge that Jesus “is our peace” (*Eph* 2:14), the gift of peace for all people. His first words to the disciples after the Resurrection were: “Peace be with you”(*Jn* 20:19, 21, 26). Christ came to unite what was divided, to destroy sin and hatred, and to reawaken in humanity the vocation to unity and brotherhood. Therefore, he is “the source and model of that renewed humanity, imbued with brotherly love, sincerity, and a peaceful spirit, to which all aspire.”\[7\]

20. During this Jubilee Year, the Church vividly remembers her Lord and intends to confirm her vocation and mission to be in Christ a “sacrament” or *sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world.* For
the Church, to carry out her evangelizing mission means to work for peace. “The Church, then, God’s only flock, like a standard lifted high for the nations to see, ministers the Gospel of peace to all mankind as she makes her pilgrim way in hope towards her goal, the fatherland above.”[8]

For the Catholic faithful, the commitment to build peace and justice is not secondary but essential. It is to be undertaken in openness towards their brothers and sisters of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, towards the followers of other religions, and towards all men and women of good will, with whom they share the same concern for peace and brotherhood.

**Working generously for peace**

21. It is a sign of hope that, despite many serious obstacles, initiatives for peace continue to spring up day by day, with the generous cooperation of many people. Peace is a building constantly under construction. The building up of peace involves:

- parents who are examples and witnesses of peace in their families, and who educate their children for peace;

- teachers who are able to pass on the genuine values present in every field of knowledge and in the historical and cultural heritage of humanity;

- working men and women, who are committed to extending their age-old struggle for the dignity of work to those present-day situations which, at the international level, cry out for justice and solidarity;

- political leaders who put at the heart of their own political activity and of that of their countries a firm and unwavering determination to promote peace and justice;

- those in International Organizations who, often with scarce resources, work in the front lines where being “peace-makers” can involve risking their own personal safety;

- members of Non-Governmental Organizations who, in different parts of the world and in the most varied situations, are dedicated to preventing and resolving conflicts through research and activity;
• believers who, convinced that authentic faith is never a source of war or violence, spread convictions of peace and love through ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

22. I am thinking particularly of you, dear young people, who experience in a special way the blessing of life and have a duty not to waste it. In your schools and universities, in the work-place, in leisure and sports, in all that you do, let yourselves be guided by this constant thought: peace within you and peace around you, peace always, peace with everyone, peace for everyone.

To the young people who, unfortunately, have known the tragic experience of war and who harbor sentiments of hatred and resentment I address this plea: make every effort to rediscover the path of reconciliation and forgiveness. It is a difficult path, but it is the only one which will enable you to look to the future with hope for yourselves, your children, your countries and all humanity.

I will have an opportunity to return to this dialogue with you, dear young people, when we meet in Rome next August for the Jubilee celebration of World Youth Day.

Pope John XXIII in one of his last public addresses spoke once more to “men of good will,” asking them to commit themselves to a program of peace based on “the Gospel of obedience to God, mercy and forgiveness.” He went on to say: “without a doubt the bright torch of peace will run its course, igniting joy and pouring light and grace into the hearts of people throughout the world, helping them to discover beyond all frontiers the faces of brothers and sisters, the faces of friends.”[9] May you, young people of the Year 2000, see in others, and help them to see, the faces of brothers and sisters, the faces of friends!

In this Jubilee Year, when the Church will commit herself to prayer for peace through solemn intercessions, we turn with filial devotion to the Mother of Jesus. Invoking her as the Queen of Peace, we ask that she generously bestow on us the gifts of her maternal goodness and help the human race to become one family, in solidarity and peace.

From the Vatican, December 8, 1999
Letter to the Elderly (October 1, 1999)

To my elderly brothers and sisters!

“Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty if we are strong, and most of them are fruitless toil, for they pass quickly and we drift away” (Ps 90:10)

1. Seventy years was an advanced age when the Psalmist wrote these words, and few people lived beyond it. Nowadays, thanks to medical progress and improved social and economic conditions, life expectancy has increased significantly in many parts of the world. Still, it remains true that the years pass quickly, and the gift of life, for all the effort and pain it involves, is too beautiful and precious for us ever to grow tired of it.
As an older person myself, I have felt the desire to engage in a conversation with you. I do so first of all by thanking God for the gifts and the opportunities which he has abundantly bestowed upon me up to now. In my memory I recall the stages of my life, which is bound up with the history of much of this century, and I see before me the faces of countless people, some particularly dear to me: they remind me of ordinary and extraordinary events, of happy times and of situations touched by suffering. Above all else, though, I see outstretched the provident and merciful hand of God the Father, who “cares in the best way possible for all that exists”[1] and who “hears us whenever we ask for anything according to his will” (1 Jn 5:14). With the Psalmist, I say to him: “You have taught me, O God, from my youth, and till the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds. And now that I am old and grey, O God, forsake me not, till I proclaim your strength to every generation that is to come” (Ps 71:17-18).

My thoughts turn with affection to all of you, dear elderly people of all languages and cultures. I am writing this letter to you in the year which the United Nations Organization has appropriately wished to dedicate to the elderly, in order to direct the attention of society as a whole to the situation of all those who, because of the burden of their years, often have to face a variety of difficult problems.

In this regard the Pontifical Council for the Laity has offered some helpful points for reflection.[2] In this Letter I wish simply to express my spiritual closeness to you as someone who, with the passing of the years, has come to a deeper personal understanding of this phase of life and consequently feels a need for closer contact with other people of his own age, so that we can reflect together on the things we have in common. I place all this before the eyes of God who embraces us with his love and who sustains us and guides us by his providence.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, at our age it is natural to revisit the past in order to attempt a sort of assessment. This retrospective gaze makes possible a more serene and objective evaluation of persons and situations we have met along the way. The passage of time helps us to see our experiences in a clearer light and softens their painful side. Sadly, struggles and tribulations are very much a part of everyone’s life. Sometimes it is a matter of problems and sufferings which can sorely test our mental and physical
resistance, and perhaps even shake our faith. But experience teaches that daily difficulties, by God’s grace, often contribute to people’s growth and to the forging of their character.

Beyond single events, the reflection which first comes to mind has to do with the inexorable passage of time. “Time flies irretrievably,” as the ancient Latin poet put it. Man is immersed in time; he is born, lives and dies within time. Birth establishes one date, the first of his life, and death another, the last: the “alpha” and the “omega,” the beginning and end of his history on earth. The Christian tradition has emphasized this by inscribing these two letters of the Greek alphabet on tombstones.

But if the life of each of us is limited and fragile, we are consoled by the thought that, by virtue of our spiritual souls, we will survive beyond death itself. Moreover, faith opens us to a “hope that does not disappoint” (cf. Rom 5:5), placing us before the perspective of the final resurrection. It is no coincidence that the Church, at the solemn Easter Vigil, uses the same two Greek letters in reference to Christ who lives yesterday, today and for ever: He is “the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega. All time belongs to him and all the ages.” Human experience, although subject to time, is set by Christ against the horizon of immortality. He “became a man among men, in order to join the beginning to the end, man to God.”

A complex century towards a future of hope

3. In speaking to the elderly, I know I am speaking to and about people who have made a long journey (cf. Wis 4:13). I am speaking to my contemporaries, and so I can readily draw an analogy from my own personal experience. Our life, dear brothers and sisters, has been situated by Providence in this twentieth century, which arrived with a complex inheritance from the past and has witnessed many extraordinary events.

Like so many other times in history, our own has registered lights and shadows. Not all has been bleak. Many positive aspects have counterbalanced the negative, or have emerged from the negative as a beneficial reaction on the part of the collective consciousness. Yet it is true too — and it would be both unjust and dangerous to forget it! — that unprecedented sufferings have affected the lives of millions and millions of
people. We need but think of the conflicts which erupted on different continents as a result of territorial disputes between States or inter-ethnic hatred. Nor should we consider any less serious the conditions of extreme poverty afflicting broad segments of society in the Southern Hemisphere, or the shameful phenomenon of racial discrimination and the systematic violation of human rights found in many nations. And what are we to say of the great global conflicts?

In the first part of the century there were two of them, with casualties and destruction never previously known. The First World War killed millions of soldiers and civilians, cutting off so many human lives in adolescence or even childhood. And what of the Second World War? Breaking out after a few decades of relative peace in the world, especially in Europe, it was even more tragic than the first, with enormous consequences for the lives of nations and continents. It was all-out war, an unheard-of mobilization of hatred, which struck brutal blows even against defenseless civil populations and which destroyed entire generations. The toll paid on various fronts to the madness of war was incalculable; equally terrifying was the slaughter which took place in the death camps, which truly remain the Golgothas of our time. The second half of the century was burdened for long years by the nightmare of the cold war, the conflict between the two great opposing ideological blocs, East and West. This was accompanied by an insane arms race and the constant threat of an atomic war capable of bringing humanity to extinction. Thank God, that dark page of history was closed with the fall in Europe of oppressive totalitarian regimes as the result of a peaceful struggle, which relied on the weapons of truth and justice. This in turn initiated a difficult but fruitful process of dialogue and reconciliation aimed at establishing a serene and fraternal coexistence between peoples.

But all too many nations are still very far from enjoying the benefits of peace and freedom. In recent months great concern has been caused by the outbreak of violent conflict in the Balkans, which had earlier been the theatre of a terrible war with ethnic undertones. Further blood was shed, further destruction took place, further hatred was nourished. Now that the clash of arms has at last ceased, thought is being given to reconstruction as the new millennium approaches. But meanwhile, on other continents too,
numerous hotbeds of war continue to erupt, at times with massacres and acts of violence which are all too soon forgotten by the world press.

4. While these memories and these painful happenings sadden us, we cannot forget that our century has also seen the appearance of many positive signs which represent so many sources of hope for the Third Millennium. There has been a growing consciousness — albeit amid numerous inconsistencies, especially where respect for the life of each human being is concerned — of universal human rights, proclaimed in solemn and binding international declarations.

Moreover, there has been a continuing development of a sense of the right of peoples to self-government in the context of national and international relations, inspired by an appreciation of cultural identity together with respect of minorities. The fall of totalitarian systems, like those of Eastern Europe, has led to growth in the universal perception of the value of democracy and of the free market, although the great challenge of uniting freedom and social justice still remains.

We must also consider it a great gift of God that the world’s religions are striving with ever greater determination to carry on a dialogue which would make them a fundamental factor of peace and unity in the world.

Then too, there has been an increasing recognition of the dignity of women. Undeniably there is still far to go, but the trail has been blazed. A further reason for hope is the rapid expansion of communications which, thanks to present-day technology, have made it possible to reach beyond established borders, making us feel that we are citizens of the world.

Another important area of growth is the new ecological awareness which deserves encouragement. Another source of hope is the great progress made in medicine and the contribution of science to human well-being.

There are many reasons, then, for giving thanks to God. All things considered, these final years of our century present immense potential for peace and progress. From the very adversities which our generation has experienced there comes a light which can brighten the years of our old age. Here we see the confirmation of a principle central to the Christian
faith: “Tribulations not only do not destroy hope; they are its foundation.”[8]

It is appealing, then, that, as this century and this millennium approach their twilight and the dawn of a new season for humanity can already be seen on the horizon, we should stop to meditate on how quickly time flies, not in order to resign ourselves to an inexorable fate, but rather to make full use of the years we still have before us.

The autumn of life

5. What is old age? At times it has been referred to as the autumn of life — so Cicero calls it[9] — following the analogy suggested by the seasons and the successive phases of nature. We need but look at the changes taking place in the landscape over the course of the year, on the mountains and in the plains, in the meadows, valleys and forests, in the trees and plants. There is a close resemblance between our human bio-rhythms and the natural cycles of which we are a part.

At the same time however man is set apart from all other realities around him, precisely because he is a person. Made in the image and likeness of God, he is conscious and responsible. Even in his spiritual dimension, though, he experiences the succession of different phases, all equally fleeting. Saint Ephrem the Syrian liked to compare our life to the fingers of a hand, both to emphasize that its length is no more than a span, and to indicate that each phase of life, like the different fingers, has its particular character, and “the fingers represent the five steps by which man advances.”[10]

Consequently, whereas childhood and youth are the times when the human person is being formed and is completely directed towards the future, and — in coming to appreciate his own abilities — makes plans for adulthood, old age is not without its own benefits. As Saint Jerome observes, with the quieting of the passions, it “increases wisdom, and brings more mature counsels.”[11] In a certain sense, it is the season for that wisdom which generally comes from experience, since “time is a great teacher.”[12] The prayer of the Psalmist is well known: “Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart” (Ps 90:12).

The elderly in Sacred Scripture
6. “Youth and the dawn of life are vanity,” observes the Preacher (Eccles 11:10). The Bible does not hesitate to point out, at times with blunt realism, the fleeting nature of life and the inexorable passage of time: “Vanity of vanities..., vanity of vanities, all is vanity” (Eccles 1:2). Who is not familiar with this stern warning of the ancient Sage? Those of us who are older, schooled as we are by experience, understand it in a special way.

Despite such wry realism, Scripture maintains a very positive vision of the value of life. Man remains for ever made “in the image of God” (cf. Gen 1:26), and each stage of life has its own beauty and its own tasks. Indeed, in the word of God, old age is so highly esteemed that long life is seen as a sign of divine favor (cf. Gen 11:10-32). In the case of Abraham, in whom the privilege of old age is stressed, this favor takes the form of a promise: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great. I will bless those who bless you and him who curses you I will curse; in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3). At Abraham’s side is Sarah, a woman who sees her body growing old, yet experiences within the limitations of her aging flesh the power of God who makes good every human shortcoming.

Moses too was an old man when God entrusted him with the mission of leading the Chosen People out of Egypt. It was not in his youth but in his old age that, at the Lord’s command, he did mighty deeds on behalf of Israel. Among other examples of elderly people in the Bible, I would mention Tobit, who humbly and courageously resolved to keep God’s Law, to help the needy and to endure blindness patiently, until the angel of God intervened to set his situation aright (cf. Tob 3:16-17). There is also Eleazar, whose martyrdom bore witness to an exceptional generosity and strength (cf. 2 Mac 6:18-31).

7. The New Testament, filled with the light of Christ, also contains eloquent examples of elderly people. The Gospel of Luke begins by introducing a married couple “advanced in years” (1:7): Elizabeth and Zechariah, the parents of John the Baptist. The Lord’s mercy reaches out to them (cf. Lk 1:5-25, 39-79). Zechariah, already an old man, is told that a son will be born to him. He himself makes the point: “I am an old man and my wife is well on in years” (Lk 1:18). During Mary’s visitation, her elderly kinswoman Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaims: “Blessed
are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Lk 1:42),
and when John the Baptist is born, Zechariah gives voice to the
Benedictus. Here we see a remarkable older couple, filled with a deep spirit
of prayer.

In the Temple at Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to offer him
to the Lord, or rather, in accordance with the Law, to redeem him as their
first-born son. There they meet the aged Simeon, who had long awaited
the Messiah. Taking the child in his arms, Simeon blesses God and
proclaims the Nunc Dimittis: “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace”
(Lk 2:29).

At Simeon’s side we find Anna, a widow of eighty-four, a frequent
visitor to the Temple, who now has the joy of seeing Jesus. The Evangelist
tells us that “she began to praise God and spoke of the child to all who
were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38).

Nicodemus too, a highly-regarded member of the Sanhedrin, was an
elderly man. He visited Jesus by night in order not to be seen. To him the
Divine Teacher reveals that he is the Son of God who has come to save the
world (cf. Jn 3:1-21). Nicodemus appears again at the burial of Jesus, when,
bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, he overcomes his fear and shows
are all these examples! They remind us that at every stage of life the Lord
can ask each of us to contribute what talents we have. The service of the
Gospel has nothing to do with age!

And what shall we say of Peter in his old age, called to bear witness to
his faith by martyrdom? Jesus had once said to him: “When you were young
you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old,
you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you
where you do not wish to go” (Jn 21:18). These are words which, as the
Successor of Peter, touch me personally; they make me feel strongly the
need to reach out and grasp the hands of Christ, in obedience to his
command: “Follow me!” (Jn 21:19).

8. As if to recapitulate the splendid images of elderly people found
throughout the Bible, Psalm 92 proclaims: “The just will flourish like the
palm-tree, and grow like a Lebanon cedar..., still bearing fruit when they
are old, still full of sap, still green, to proclaim that the Lord is just” (vv. 13, 15-16). Echoing the Psalmist, the Apostle Paul writes in his Letter to Titus: “Bid the older men be temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in patience. Bid the older women likewise to live in a way appropriate to believers...; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children” (2:2-5).

Thus the teaching and language of the Bible present old age as a “favorable time” for bringing life to its fulfillment and, in God’s plan for each person, as a time when everything comes together and enables us better to grasp life’s meaning and to attain “wisdom of heart.” “An honorable old age comes not with the passing of time,” observes the Book of Wisdom, “nor can it be measured in terms of years; rather, understanding is the hoary crown for men, and an unsullied life, the attainment of old age” (4:8-9). Old age is the final stage of human maturity and a sign of God’s blessing.

Guardians of shared memory

9. In the past, great respect was shown to the elderly. “Great was once the reverence given to a hoary head,” says Ovid, the Latin poet.[13] Centuries earlier, the Greek poet Phocylides had admonished: “Respect grey hair: give to the elderly sage the same signs of respect that you give your own father.”[14]

And what of today? If we stop to consider the current situation, we see that among some peoples old age is esteemed and valued, while among others this is much less the case, due to a mentality which gives priority to immediate human usefulness and productivity. Such an attitude frequently leads to contempt for the later years of life, while older people themselves are led to wonder whether their lives are still worthwhile.

It has come to the point where euthanasia is increasingly put forward as a solution for difficult situations. Unfortunately, in recent years the idea of euthanasia has lost for many people the sense of horror which it naturally awakens in those who have a sense of respect for life. Certainly it can happen that, when grave illness involves unbearable suffering, the sick are tempted to despair and their loved ones or those responsible for their care feel compelled by a misguided compassion to consider the solution of
“an easy death” as something reasonable. Here it should be kept in mind that the moral law allows the rejection of “aggressive medical treatment”[15] and makes obligatory only those forms of treatment which fall within the normal requirements of medical care, which in the case of terminal illness seeks primarily to alleviate pain. But euthanasia, understood as directly causing death, is another thing entirely. Regardless of intentions and circumstances, euthanasia is always an intrinsically evil act, a violation of God’s law and an offense against the dignity of the human person.[16]

10. There is an urgent need to recover a correct perspective on life as a whole. The correct perspective is that of eternity, for which life at every phase is a meaningful preparation. Old age too has a proper role to play in this process of gradual maturing along the path to eternity. And this process of maturing cannot but benefit the larger society of which the elderly person is a part.

Elderly people help us to see human affairs with greater wisdom, because life’s vicissitudes have brought them knowledge and maturity. They are the guardians of our collective memory, and thus the privileged interpreters of that body of ideals and common values which support and guide life in society. To exclude the elderly is in a sense to deny the past, in which the present is firmly rooted, in the name of a modernity without memory. Precisely because of their mature experience, the elderly are able to offer young people precious advice and guidance.

In view of all this, the signs of human frailty which are clearly connected with advanced age become a summons to the mutual dependence and indispensable solidarity which link the different generations, inasmuch as every person needs others and draws enrichment from the gifts and charisms of all.

Here the reflections of a poet dear to me are pertinent: “It is not the future alone which is eternal, not the future alone!... Indeed, the past too is the age of eternity: Nothing which has already happened will come back today as it was... It will return, but as Idea; it will not return as itself.”[17]

“Honor your father and mother”

11. Why then should we not continue to give the elderly the respect which the sound traditions of many cultures on every continent have prized
so highly? For peoples influenced by the Bible, the point of reference through the centuries has been the commandment of the Decalogue: “Honor your father and your mother,” a duty which for that matter is universally recognized. The full and consistent application of this commandment has not only been a source of the love of children for their parents, but it has also forged the strong link which exists between the generations. Where this commandment is accepted and faithfully observed, there is little danger that older people will be regarded as a useless and troublesome burden.

The same commandment also teaches respect for those who have gone before us and for all the good which they have done: the words “father and mother” point to the past, to the bond between generations which makes possible the very existence of a people. In the two versions found in the Bible (cf. Ex 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21), this divine commandment is the first of those inscribed on the second Tablet of the Law, which deals with the duties of human beings towards one another and towards society. Furthermore, it is the only commandment to which a promise is attached: “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you” (Ex 20:12; cf. Deut 5:16).

12. “Rise in the presence of one with grey hair; honor the person of the older man” (Lev 19:32). Honoring older people involves a threefold duty: welcoming them, helping them and making good use of their qualities. In many places this happens almost spontaneously, as the result of long-standing custom. Elsewhere, and especially in the more economically advanced nations, there needs to be a reversal of the current trend, to ensure that elderly people can grow old with dignity, without having to fear that they will end up no longer counting for anything. There must be a growing conviction that a fully human civilization shows respect and love for the elderly, so that despite their diminishing strength they feel a vital part of society. Cicero himself noted that “the burden of age is lighter for those who feel respected and loved by the young.”[18]

Furthermore, while the human spirit has some part in the process of bodily aging, in some way it remains ever young if it is constantly turned towards eternity. This experience of enduring youthfulness becomes all the more powerful when to the inner witness of a good conscience is joined the
sympathetic concern and grateful affection of loved ones. Then, as Saint Gregory of Nazianzus writes, a man “will not grow old in spirit, but will accept dissolution as the moment fixed for the freedom which must come. Gently he will cross into the beyond, where there is neither youth nor old age, but where all are perfect in spiritual maturity.”[19]

We are all familiar with examples of elderly people who remain amazingly youthful and vigorous in spirit. Those coming into contact with them find their words an inspiration and their example a source of comfort. May society use to their full potential those elderly people who in some parts of the world — I think especially of Africa — are rightly esteemed as “living encyclopedias” of wisdom, guardians of an inestimable treasure of human and spiritual experiences. While they tend to need physical assistance, it is equally true that in their old age the elderly are able to offer guidance and support to young people as they face the future and prepare to set out along life’s paths.

While speaking of older people, I would also say a word to the young, to invite them to remain close to the elderly. Dear young people, I urge you to do this with great love and generosity. Older people can give you much more than you can imagine. The Book of Sirach offers this advice: “Do not disregard what older people say, because they too have learned from their parents” (8:9); “Attend the meetings with older people. Is there one who is wise? Spend time with him” (6:34); for “wisdom is becoming to the elderly” (25:5).

13. The Christian community can receive much from the serene presence of older people. I think first of all in terms of evangelization: its effectiveness does not depend principally on technical expertise. In how many families are grandchildren taught the rudiments of the faith by their grandparents! There are many other areas where the elderly can make a beneficial contribution. The Spirit acts as and where he wills, and quite frequently he employs human means which seem of little account in the eyes of the world. How many people find understanding and comfort from elderly people who may be lonely or ill and yet are able to instill courage by their loving advice, their silent prayers, or their witness of suffering borne with patient acceptance! At the very time when their physical energies and
their level of activity are decreasing, these brothers and sisters of ours become all the more precious in the mysterious plan of Providence.

In addition to the obvious psychological need of the elderly themselves, the most natural place to spend one's old age continues to be the environment in which one feels most “at home,” among family members, acquaintances and friends, where one can still make oneself useful. As the number of older people increases, keeping pace with the rise in average life expectancy, it will become more and more important to promote a widespread attitude of acceptance and appreciation of the elderly, and not relegate them to the fringes. The ideal is still for the elderly to remain within the family, with the guarantee of effective social assistance for the greater needs which age or illness entail.

On the other hand, there are situations where circumstances suggest or demand that they be admitted to “homes for the elderly” where they can enjoy the company of others and receive specialized care. Such institutions are indeed praiseworthy, and experience shows that they can provide a valuable service when they are inspired not only by organizational efficiency but also by loving concern. Everything becomes easier when each elderly resident is helped by family, friends and parish communities to feel loved and still useful to society. How can we fail to mention here, with admiration and gratitude, the Religious Congregations and volunteer groups specifically devoted to the care of the aged, especially the poor, the abandoned and those in difficulty?

Dear elderly friends who feel insecure because of ill health or other circumstances, I assure you of my closeness and affection. When God permits us to suffer because of illness, loneliness or other reasons associated with old age, he always gives us the grace and strength to unite ourselves with greater love to the sacrifice of his Son and to share ever more fully in his plan of salvation. Let us be convinced of this: he is our Father, a Father rich in love and mercy!

My thoughts turn in a special way to you, widows and widowers, who find yourselves alone in the final part of your lives; to you, elderly men and women Religious, who for long years have faithfully served the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven; and to you, dear brother Priests and Bishops, who,
for reasons of age, no longer have direct responsibility for pastoral ministry. The Church still needs you. She appreciates the services which you may wish to provide in many areas of the apostolate; she counts on the support of your longer periods of prayer; she counts on your advice born of experience, and she is enriched by your daily witness to the Gospel.

“You show me the path of life, in your presence there is fullness of life” (Ps 16:11)

14. It is natural that, as the years pass, we should increasingly consider our “twilight.” If nothing else, we are reminded of it by the very fact that the ranks of our family members, friends and acquaintances grow ever thinner; we become aware of this in a number of ways, when for example we attend family reunions, gatherings of our childhood friends, classmates from school and university, or former colleagues from the military or the seminary. The line separating life and death runs through our communities and moves inexorably nearer to each of us. If life is a pilgrimage towards our heavenly home, then old age is the most natural time to look towards the threshold of eternity.

And yet, even we elderly people find it hard to resign ourselves to the prospect of making this passage. In our human condition touched by sin, death presents a certain dark side which cannot but bring sadness and fear. How could it be otherwise? Man has been made for life, whereas death — as Scripture tells us from its very first pages (cf. Gen 2-3) — was not a part of God’s original plan but came about as a consequence of sin, as a result of “the devil’s envy” (Wis 2:24). It is thus understandable why, when faced with this dark reality, man instinctively rebels. In this regard it is significant that Jesus, “who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15), also experienced fear in the face of death: “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Mt 26:39). How can we forget his tears at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, despite the fact that he was about to raise him from the dead (cf. Jn 11:35)?

However rationally comprehensible death may be from a biological standpoint, it is not possible to experience it as something “natural.” This would contradict man’s deepest instincts. As the Council observed: “It is in the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute.
Not only is man tormented by pain and by the advancing deterioration of his body, but even more so by a dread of perpetual extinction.”[20] This anguish would indeed be inconsolable were death complete destruction, the end of everything. Death thus forces men and women to ask themselves fundamental questions about the meaning of life itself. What is on the other side of the shadowy wall of death? Does death represent the definitive end of life or does something lie beyond it? 15. Human history, from the most ancient times down to our own day, has provided a number of simplistic answers which limit life to what we experience on earth. In the Old Testament itself, certain passages in the Book of Ecclesiastes seem to present old age as a building in ruins and death as its final and utter destruction (cf 12:1-7). But precisely against the backdrop of these pessimistic attitudes there shines forth the hope-filled outlook present in revelation as a whole and particularly in the Gospel: “God is not God of the dead, but of the living” (cf. Lk 20:38). The Apostle Paul affirms that God, who gives life to the dead (cf. Rom 4:17), will also give life to our mortal bodies (cf. ibid., 8:11). And Jesus says of himself: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (Jn 11:25-26).

Christ, having crossed the threshold of death, has revealed the life which lies beyond this frontier, in that uncharted “territory” which is eternity. He is the first witness of eternal life; in him human hope is shown to be filled with immortality. “The sadness of death gives way to the bright promise of immortality.”[21] These words, which the Church’s Liturgy offers as a consolation to believers as they bid farewell to their loved ones, are followed by a proclamation of hope: “Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”[22] In Christ, death — tragic and disconcerting as it is — is redeemed and transformed; it is even revealed as a “sister” who leads us to the arms of our Father.[23]

16. Faith thus illuminates the mystery of death and brings serenity to old age, now no longer considered and lived passively as the expectation of a calamity but rather as a promise-filled approach to the goal of full maturity. These are years to be lived with a sense of trusting abandonment into the hands of God, our provident and merciful Father. It is a time to be
used creatively for deepening our spiritual life through more fervent prayer and commitment to the service of our brothers and sisters in charity.

Most commendable then are all those social programs enabling the elderly to continue to attend to their physical well-being, their intellectual development and their personal relationships, as well as those enabling them to make themselves useful and to put their time, talents and experience at the service of others. In this way the capacity to enjoy life as God’s primordial gift is preserved and increases. Such a capacity to enjoy life in no way conflicts with that desire for eternity which grows within people of deep spiritual experience, as the lives of the saints bear witness.

Here the Gospel reminds us of the words of the aged Simeon, who says he is ready to die now that he has held in his arms the long-awaited Messiah: “Lord, now you let your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation” (Lk 2:29-30). The Apostle Paul felt torn between the desire to continue living in order to preach the Gospel, and the desire “to depart and be with Christ” (Phil 1:23). Saint Ignatius of Antioch, joyfully going to his martyrdom, said that he could hear within him the voice of the Spirit, like living “water” welling up inside of him and whispering the invitation: “Come to the Father.” These examples could be multiplied. They cast no doubt whatsoever on the value of earthly life, which is beautiful despite its limitations and sufferings, and which ought to be lived to its very end. At the same time they remind us that earthly life is not the ultimate value, in such a way that the twilight of life can be seen — from a Christian perspective — as a “passage,” a bridge between one life and another, between the fragile and uncertain joy of this earth to that fullness of joy which the Lord holds in store for his faithful servants: “Enter into the joy of your master” (Mt 25:21).

An encouragement to live life to the full

17. In this spirit, dear elderly brothers and sisters, as I encourage each of you to live with serenity the years that the Lord has granted you, I feel a spontaneous desire to share fully with you my own feelings at this point of my life, after more than twenty years of ministry on the throne of Peter and as we await the arrival, now imminent, of the Third Millennium. Despite the limitations brought on by age, I continue to enjoy life. For this I thank
the Lord. It is wonderful to be able to give oneself to the very end for the sake of the Kingdom of God!

At the same time, I find great peace in thinking of the time when the Lord will call me: from life to life! And so I often find myself saying, with no trace of melancholy, a prayer recited by priests after the celebration of the Eucharist: In hora mortis meae voca me, et iube me venire ad te — at the hour of my death, call me and bid me come to you. This is the prayer of Christian hope, which in no way detracts from the joy of the present, while entrusting the future to God’s gracious and loving care.

18. “Iube me venire ad te!": this is the deepest yearning of the human heart, even in those who are not conscious of it.

Grant, O Lord of life, that we may be ever vividly aware of this and that we may savor every season of our lives as a gift filled with promise for the future.

Grant that we may lovingly accept your will, and place ourselves each day in your merciful hands.

And when the moment of our definitive “passage” comes, grant that we may face it with serenity, without regret for what we shall leave behind. For in meeting you, after having sought you for so long, we shall find once more every authentic good which we have known here on earth, in the company of all who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith and hope.

Mary, Mother of pilgrim humanity, pray for us “now and at the hour of our death.” Keep us ever close to Jesus, your beloved Son and our brother, the Lord of life and glory.

Amen!

From the Vatican, 1 October 1999.


Liturgy of the Easter Vigil.


Cf. *Cato Maior, seu De Senectute*, 19, 70.

On "All is vanity and affliction of spirit", 5-6.

"Auget sapientiam, dat maturiora consilia": *Commentaria in Amos*, II, prol.


"Magna fuit quondam capitis reverentia cani": *Fasti*, V, 57.

*Sententiae*, XLII.


Cf. *ibid.*


"Levior fit senectus, eorum qui a iuventute coluntur et diliguntur," *Cato Maior, seu DeSenectute*, 8, 26.

*Discourse upon Returning from the Country*, 11.


*Roman Missal*, Preface of Christian Death I.


Cf. Saint Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of the Creatures*.

*Letter to the Romans*, 7, 2.
The Roman Curia

The Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. Response to a question regarding the safeguarding of the Eucharist (July 3, 1999)

The Fathers of the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, at their plenary session on 4 June 1999, decided to respond in the following way to the dubium:

Q. Whether or not the word “abicere” in canons 1367 CIC and 1442 CCEO should be understood only as the act of throwing away.

R. Negative and “ad mentem.”

The “mind” is that the word “abicere” should be considered to include any voluntarily and gravely contemptuous action towards the Sacred Species.

The Supreme Pontiff John Paul II, at the audience granted on July 3, 1999 to the undersigned President, was informed of the aforementioned decision, confirmed it and ordered it to be published.

@ Julián Herranz

Titular Archbishop of Vertara

President

@ Bruno Bertagna

Titular Bishop of Drivastum

Secretary

Regarding the authentic interpretation of canons 1367 CIC and 1442 CCEO, the following points should be kept in mind:
1. In an expression as lapidary as it is rich and pregnant, the Second Vatican Council said: “In the most blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church” (Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis, no. 5). And the Code of Canon Law summarizes the Council’s abundant teaching on the subject and the Church’s perennial doctrine, asserting: “The most august sacrament is the blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows” (can. 897); therefore “Christ’s faithful are to hold the blessed Eucharist in the highest honor...; they should receive the sacrament with great devotion and frequently, and should reverence it with the greatest adoration” (can. 898).

Therefore we can understand the care and efforts of the Church’s Pastors to see that this priceless Gift is deeply and devoutly loved, safeguarded and surrounded with that worship which expresses in the best way humanly possible our faith in Christ’s real presence — body, blood, soul and divinity — under the Eucharistic Species, even after the Holy Sacrifice has been celebrated.

2. Just as believers are asked to express this faith with actions, prayers and objects of noble dignity, so it is also advisable that any kind of carelessness or negligence, the sign of a diminished sense of the Eucharistic divine presence, be carefully avoided in the behavior of sacred ministers and the faithful. Indeed, in our age, marked by haste even in one’s personal relationship with God, catechesis should reacquaint the Christian people with the whole of Eucharistic worship, which cannot be reduced to participation in Holy Mass and to receiving Communion with the proper dispositions, but also includes frequent adoration — personal and communal — of the Blessed Sacrament, and the loving concern that the tabernacle — in which the Eucharist is kept — be placed on an altar or in a part of the church that is clearly visible, truly noble and duly adorned, so that it is a center of attraction for every heart in love with Christ.

3. In contrast to such profound veneration for the true Bread come down from heaven, not only can deplorable disciplinary abuses occur, sometimes have occurred and still occur, but even acts of contempt and profanation on the part of individuals who, under almost diabolical
inspiration, dare to oppose in this way whatever the Church and the faithful hold, adore and love as most sacred.

In order to deter those who let themselves be misled by such sentiments, the Church not only urges the faithful to avoid any form of disgraceful carelessness and negligence, but also considers the most unfortunate case of deliberate acts of hatred or contempt for the Blessed Sacrament. These actions certainly constitute — by reason of their matter — a very grave sin of sacrilege. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says in fact that sacrilege “is a grave sin especially when committed against the Eucharist, for in this sacrament the true Body of Christ is made substantially present for us” (no. 2120).

4. Moreover, in certain cases these sacrileges constitute true and real offenses, according to the canons of both Latin and Eastern Church law, to which a penalty is attached. This is determined in can. 1367 of the *Code of Canon Law*, corresponding to can. 1442 of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, with the variations proper to that legislation.

Here is the text of can. 1367: “*Qui species consecratas abicit aut in sacrilegum finem abducit vel retinet, in excommunicationem latae sententiae Sedi Apostolicae reservatam incurrit, clericus praeterea alia poena, non exclusa dimissione e statu clericali, puniri potest.*”

5. Given the various translations made of the *Code of Canon Law*, with the different nuances resulting from the expressions of each language, a *dubium* was submitted to this Pontifical Council as to whether the word “*abicit*” should be understood only

in its proper — but limited — sense of “to throw away” the Eucharistic Species, or in the overly generic sense of “to profane.” Therefore, while the two cases of offense consisting in taking away (*abducit*) or in keeping (*retinet*) the Sacred Species — in both cases “for a sacrilegious purpose” — are clear, an authentic interpretation was requested of the first case, expressed in the word *abicit*. After careful study, this Pontifical Council has given the following authentic interpretation, confirmed by the Holy Father, who ordered it to be promulgated (cf. CIC, can. 16, 2; CCEO, can. 1498, 2).

The verb *abicit* should not be understood only in the strict sense of
throwing away, nor in the generic sense of profaning, but with the broader meaning of to scorn, disdain, demean. Therefore, a grave offense of sacrilege against the Body and Blood of Christ is committed by anyone who takes away and/or keeps the Sacred Species for a sacrilegious (obscene, superstitious, irreligious) purpose, and by anyone who, even without removing them from the tabernacle, monstrance or altar, makes them the object of any external, voluntary and serious act of contempt. Anyone guilty of this offense incurs, in the Latin Church, the penalty of excommunication latae sententiae (i.e., automatically), the absolution of which is reserved to the Holy See; in the Eastern Catholic Churches he incurs a major excommunication ferenda sententiae (i.e., to be imposed).

6. It is helpful to remember, as was mentioned above, that the sin of sacrilege should not be confused with the offense of sacrilege; in fact, not all sins committed in this area are offences. Canonical doctrine teaches that an offense is an external and imputable violation of an ecclesiastical law, to which a penal sanction is ordinarily attached. Therefore, all the norms and attenuating or excusing circumstances given in the Latin and Eastern Codes apply here. In particular, it should be noted that the offense of sacrilege we are discussing also involves an external, but not necessarily public, act.

7. Even when the Church is forced, as it were, to impose penalties, she is also moved by the need to safeguard the moral integrity of the ecclesiastical community and to seek the spiritual good and correction of the offenders, but in this case she does so, also and primarily, in order to safeguard the greatest Good she has received from the divine mercy, i.e., Christ the Lord himself, who has become “the bread of eternal life” (cf. Jn 6:27) in the most blessed Eucharist.

@ Julián Herranz

Titular Archbishop of Vertara

President

Pope John Paul II: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia (November 6, 1999).
Pope John Paul II: Apostolic Letter in the form of a motu proprio proclaiming St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) as co-patrons of Europe (October 1, 1999).


Apostolic Penitentiary: Decree for the publication of the fourth edition of Enchiridion Indulgentiarum (July 16, 1999)

“Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (October 31, 1999), signed by representatives of the Catholic Church and the World Lutheran Federation.
PRELATE

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Decrees

Some Decrees

Decree of December 8, 1999 on the Jubilee in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia Prælatus
Sanctæ Crucis et Operis Dei
DECRETO

Assidua meditatione verborum a Romano Pontifice Ioanne Paulo II in Litt. Ap. Tertio millennio adveniente scriptorum, parare nos sategimus ad rite celebrandum Iubilaeum, iam prope imprendens, quod in «novam in gratiae missionisque aetatem introducit Ecclesiam totam» (Bulla Incarnationis mysterium, n. 3), quoque ab universis hominibus mulieribusque postulat ex imo animo conversionem et paenitentiam, ut, renovata fide, responsabilitatem suscipiant, qua debent «lucem veram Christum Dominum in mundum inferre» (ibid., n. 2).

Eodem spiritu fidei ac pietatis, una cum Romano Pontifice universaque Dei Ecclesia, vos hortor ut vehementer vivatis magnum hoc Iubilaeum anni bismillesimi, cuus initium Romanus Pontifex faciet in nocte Nativitatis Domini per aperitionem Portae sanctae in Basilica Petriana in Urbe Vaticana.

Perspectis iis, quae praescribuntur in Decreto lato a Sacra Paenitentiaria, die 29 nov. 1998

STATUO

2. Attento titulo huius ecclesiae Sanctae Mariae de Pace dicatae, rogo insuper ut, recitatione antiphonae Salve Regina, arcta in coniunctione cum Romani Pontificis precibus, intercessio invocetur Beatae Virginis Mariae pro mundi pace et pro pace omnium cordium.

3. Hoc modo exopto quoque memoriam venerari Beati Ihosephmariae, qui Sanctae Mariae de Pace hanc ecclesiam dicatam voluit, ubi sacrae eius exuviae conditae sunt.


Datum Romae, ex Aedibus Curiae Praelatitiae, die 8 mense decembri, anno 1999, in sollemnitate Immaculatae Conceptionis B. V. Mariae.

@ Xaverius Echevarría

Thomas G. Bohlin

Curiae Praelatitiae Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. lib. V pag. 84

Activities of the Prelate

Participation in the Synod of Bishops' Second Special Assembly for Europe

Bishop Echevarría participated, as a member designated by the Holy Father, in the Synod of Bishops’ Second Special Assembly for Europe, which was held in Rome from October 1 to 23. Its theme was “Jesus, Alive in his Church, a Fount of Hope for Europe.”
The Prelate of Opus Dei intervened in the fourth general session, on October 4. A synopsis of his address was published by L’Osservatore Romano with the title: “Showing Europe the Church’s true face.”

The text which appeared in the English-language edition of the same publication was as follows:

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life and we believe; we have come to know that you are the Holy One of God (Jn 6:68). Today we have to stress this great message of faith and hope with renewed effort, before all men and women who live in Europe. For this, the Church must offer first of all a clear example of full communion in faith, in worship and in discipline.

“As the General Report underlined with force and clarity, only from faith and a moral acceptance without reservations can one undertake the new evangelization that our continent is waiting for. As a result, our pastoral responsibility becomes greater in relation to the credibility of the Church, where innate and indelible theological qualities must stand out, expressing that intimate sacramental condition: unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity.

“Church unity requires the bonds of communion to be manifest; that is to say, the profession of the same faith, the common celebration of the sacraments, and the apostolic succession through the sacrament of Orders. The evidence of unity without shadows in each local Church, of the local Churches amongst themselves, and of all of these with the Church of Rome, attracts people of good will and promotes an even more intense unity. Unfortunately, the contrary is also true, and this must stimulate our feeling of responsibility.

“The sanctity of the Church must show itself in its determined fight against personal sin and its individual and social consequences. Helping the lay faithful in this struggle is of great pastoral importance, since if the meaning of sin is weak in their consciences, the whole evangelizing testimony of the Church itself before society is weakened. In addition, special importance should be given to the pastoral care of the sacrament of penance.

“The Catholicity and apostolicity of the Church, which clearly refer to
the mission of the Church and its basis in the succession, must show themselves also as “Romanness” — if I may be allowed to express myself in this way — intended as a profound feeling of orientation and of respectful attention towards the See of Peter. The more that this “Romanness” is felt in the daily lives of priests and of the other lay faithful, the more effective will be our contribution towards the building up of the Church in Europe and, from Europe, in the whole world.”

Pastoral Trips

On June 27 the Prelate of Opus Dei traveled from Rome to Pamplona, Spain.

He spent four days in the capital of Navarre. Among other activities he visited a number of sick people in the University Hospital and presided over a meeting with the hospital’s Board of Directors at the University’s administrative building.

On Thursday, July 1, Bishop Echevarría traveled to the Shrine of Torreciudad, where three days later he conferred the diaconate on a group of 24 faithful of the Prelature from 12 countries. On his trip from Pamplona, he stopped off in Saragossa to pray at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar.

On the day of his arrival in Torreciudad, he met with a group of faithful of the Prelature who work at the shrine. He encouraged them to “take care of our Lady’s house,” and asked them “to base everything on prayer” and to dream about the growing apostolic fruit that, “if we are faithful, our Lady will foster at the shrine.”

On the 2nd he went to greet Bishop Ambrosio Echebarría of Barbastro-Monzón. The two of them visited the construction site of the church dedicated to Blessed Josemaría that the bishop is building in the city of Barbastro.

On the morning of Saturday, July 3, the Prelate of Opus Dei met with some three hundred boys taking part in various formational activities
promoted by Centers of the Prelature in a number of countries. Those taking part asked many questions, and Bishop Echevarría stressed the importance of human virtues and study. He also urged them to pray for the Holy Father and the apostolate.

In the afternoon he received a number of families, and later met again with young people, this time with girls who participate in the Prelature’s apostolic activities.

On Sunday morning he celebrated a Mass during which he conferred the diaconate on 24 faithful of Opus Dei. At the end of the ceremony he greeted the many people gathered on the esplanade of the shrine. A little later he received, among others, the Board of Directors of the Torreciudad Foundation and some families. In the afternoon he met with the deacons and their families. In the evening he met once again with the people who work in Torreciudad, who told him various anecdotes connected with the shrine. Bishop Echevarría expressed his joy at the approach of the 25th anniversary of the shrine and referred to Blessed Josemaría’s great love for our Lady.

Bishop Echevarría returned to Torreciudad two months later, on September 4. There he celebrated Holy Mass as the principal act of the Eleventh Marian Family Congress, attended by some forty thousand participants.

Pope John Paul II sent a message to the Congress urging participants to “untiringly promote human and Christian virtues in the heart of the family,” since these values “not only make it a place where life is generously accepted, but also the primary and indispensable school of harmony, sharing and solidarity, where the faith is transmitted and the Christian meaning of life fostered.”

In his homily during the Mass,[1] Opus Dei’s Prelate referred to the history of the shrine, urged forward by Blessed Josemaría and inaugurated in 1975: “The Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving. Today our hearts are also raised in thanksgiving to God the Father, rich in mercy, because in the course of these twenty-five years he has poured forth lavishly his forgiveness
at this shrine, allowing a great number of men and women to experience the joy of returning to God.” Bishop Echevarría also commented on some of the riches that Christian life brings to the family, for example, the priceless assistance of the Mother of God: “If you abandon yourselves trustingly to Mary, she will see to it that your home is at all times a loving refuge for every member of the family, where there can always be found a spirit of generous self-giving to the others, thus forging the soul for great human and divine ideals.”

In the afternoon, Bishop Echevarría met with the families who were present. In replying to their questions, the Prelate asked God to grant them the supernatural faith and vision needed to accept the children with which He wants to bless each family. He also referred to couples who cannot have children: “at times our Lord blesses families by not giving them children... those without children also have a very holy matrimonial vocation.” Then he spoke words of admiration for large families, which he described as “a very great treasure.”

Speaking of the rearing of children, Bishop Echevarría recalled the clarity with which Blessed Josemaría stressed the need to give them a good formation: “He insisted that parents had to invest their time and affection in the best business of the family, in their children.” He reminded them that the founder of Opus Dei encouraged many parents to undertake apostolic initiatives in the field of education.

On the following day the Prelate traveled to Madrid, where on the afternoon of the sixth, he conferred priestly ordination on two faithful of the Prelature[2] in the Pontifical Basilica of St. Michael. During his homily[3] he urged those attending to thank God for his providence and to pray every day for priests.


Participation in the opening of the Great Jubilee by the Roman Pontiff

Bishop Javier Echevarría took part, together with other bishops, in the opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica, and in the midnight Mass that Pope John Paul concelebrated with 38 cardinals immediately afterwards. With this celebration the Holy Father inaugurated the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

Establishment of new Centers of the Prelature

The Vicars of the Prelate have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following locations:

Chihuahua, Mexico; Dallas, Texas; Murcia, Spain; Perugia, Italy; Rome, Italy; San Juan, Puerto Rico; São Paulo, Brazil; Torrent, Spain; Valencia, Spain; and Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Priestly Ordinations

The Prelate of Opus Dei conferred priestly ordination on 26 deacons of the Prelature:

• on December 6, in the Basilica of St. Michael in Madrid, 2 faithful of Opus Dei were ordained as priests.

• on December 12, in Rome, Bishop Javier Echevarría ordained an additional 24 faithful of Opus Dei in the Basilica of St. Eugene.

The 26 new priests come from 12 countries: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Italy, Ivory Coast, Mexico, Peru, The Philippines, Portugal, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United States.
In addition, on December 11, Bishop Echevarría conferred the diaconate on eleven faithful of the Prelature at the parish of Blessed Josemaría in Rome.

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**Mass inaugurating the Jubilee Year in the Prelatic Church**

On the morning of December 25, the Prelate of Opus Dei inaugurated the Holy Year in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace in Rome. During the Eucharist, Bishop Echevarria invited the faithful present to give thanks “to Jesus who did not disdain to become one of us, so that we might become consortes divinae nature, sharers in his divine nature,” and to pray “that God’s goodness and peace be extended throughout the whole world and that He be born and live for all men.”

**Homilies**

**Torreciudad (September 4, 1999)**

On the occasion of the Eleventh Marian Family congress at the Shrine of Our Lady of Torreciudad, Spain.

1. Holy Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah. These words show our Lady undertaking a pilgrimage to the home of her cousin Elizabeth. Our Holy Father John Paul II has emphasized that Mary’s entire life was a “pilgrimage of faith,” which only ended when she
was glorified bodily in heaven. We too are on the way towards our definitive dwelling place, heaven, which we will reach if we are faithful here on earth to our Christian vocation.

Every pilgrimage to a shrine is an eloquent symbol of the faith that unites us to Christ. As we join together today at Torreciudad for this Marian Family Congress, we anticipate in some way the happiness that awaits us after our passage through this world: our encounter forever with the Blessed Trinity, with our Lady, the angels and the saints. In the prayer composed by the Pope for this final year of preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, we ask: “Grant that all your children as they journey towards you, our ultimate goal, may experience the loving protection of Mary, icon of fair love, chosen by you to be the Mother of Christ and of the Church.”[3] We pray with the confidence of children invoking a Father who is all-powerful and merciful.

As the text of the second reading proclaims,[4] the effusion of the Holy Spirit in Baptism makes us truly sons and daughters of God, who can exclaim Abba, Father. Grafted into Jesus Christ, we share in the divine filiation of the Word, who is our elder Brother, since he took on our human nature in the most pure womb of Mary. Being children of God in Christ brings with it inseparably the reality of being, like Jesus, sons and daughters of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Eleventh Marian Family Congress is taking place during the celebrations commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of this Shrine of Our Lady of the Angels, which owes its existence to Blessed Josemaría. In the 25 years that have transpired, an immense number of pilgrims have heard here our Lady’s call, Come to me,[5] following in the footsteps of the pilgrims who journeyed to this Marian shrine over the course of almost a thousand years.

2. The statue of Our Lady of Torreciudad represents our Lady as a throne for the Word incarnate. She is the Seat of Wisdom, the throne of grace and of glory.

Adeamus cum fiducia ad thronum gratiae, ut misericordiam consequamur! [6] These words were a motive of grateful meditation for Blessed Josemaría, who repeated from his heart: “Adeamus cum fiducia ad thronum gloriarum ut
misericordiam consequamur!” Let us go then to the throne of grace, of glory, to receive mercy. Pope John Paul II recommends to us that, in a special way, we go this year to the mercy of God the Father. And this will be easy for us, if we have recourse to the Queen and Mother of mercy, who encourage us: *I am the mother of fairest love, of fear, and of wisdom, and of holy hope; in me, every grace of the way and of truth; in me is every hope of life and of virtue.*[7]

In the apostolic letter preparing for the Jubilee, the Pope exhorts us to undertake “a journey of authentic conversion.”[8] As a preparation, he invites each of us to “a renewed appreciation and more intense celebration of the sacrament of penance.”[9] This was the type of divine prodigy that Blessed Josemaría hoped for here at Torreciudad. On one occasion, he wrote: “I look for an outpouring of spiritual fruit that our Lord will grant to those who come to visit his Blessed Mother before this small statue, so venerated for centuries. Therefore I would like to have many confessionals, so that the people can purify themselves in the holy sacrament of penance, and, with their souls renewed, strengthen or renew their Christian life.”[10]

We have gathered here, in this solemn celebration of Holy Mass, to show our gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity. The Eucharist is an act of thanksgiving. Today there also arises from our heart thanksgiving to God the Father, so rich in mercy. Over the course of twenty-five years his forgiveness has been poured out abundantly at this shrine, with a multitude of men and women experiencing the joy of returning to God. Among these souls each and every one of us is included. We have to recognize that perhaps, without abandoning our Lord altogether, we have distanced ourselves from God at times by our lack of love. That is why we frequently go to the sacrament of Forgiveness.

When pride or self-love, vainglory or envy, threaten to submerge us in loneliness and resentment, darkening our mind and heart, let us ask our Lady to enkindle light in our soul. Let us go confidently to the Throne of grace, to Mary!

When sensuality and a disordered hunger for material goods try to blind our eyes, may our Lady clean the house of our soul. Let us go confidently to the Throne of grace, to Mary!
When we resign ourselves to our own defects and miseries and our struggle to be saints grows lukewarm, hiding behind the excuse of a sad mediocrity, may our Mother seek us out and guide us. Let us go confidently to the Throne of grace, to Mary!

3. While entrusting to the Church the Bull convoking the Jubilee of the Year 2000, the Pope stressed that “we cannot go alone to meet the Father. We have to go in the company of all those who form part of ‘God’s family.’”[11]

Pope John Paul II, as early as the beginning of his pontificate, prayed that our Lady “who is the mother of the Church, also be the mother of the ‘church of the home.’ Thanks to her motherly aid, may each Christian family truly become a “little church” in which the mystery of Christ’s Church is mirrored and given new life.”[12]

The Pope explains that the Jubilee also offers an opportunity to meditate upon “the problems connected with respect for women’s rights and the promotion of the family and marriage.”[13] Today in the presence of Our Lady of Torreciudad, we have recourse with filial urgency to her powerful intercession for all the intentions of the Holy Father. But in this Marian Family Congress, it is only logical that we place at our Lady’s feet the intentions more closely tied to the family and to marriage: both for our own families and for those throughout the world, who so often are in need of help.

We Christians have an important role to play in today’s world, seeking the sanctity that Blessed Josemaría set forth when he spoke of Christian families as homes “full of light and joy.”[14] Every one of your families should be, with the grace of God and your own efforts, a reference point, a focus of light for many other families and for the whole of society. Certainly obstacles are not lacking. It is true that the family is suffering strong attacks. But we have in our favor the divine plan, which wants to make use of Christian homes as an efficacious source of regeneration for mankind and for society.

Therefore don’t give in to discouragement. Don’t think that your efforts here are insignificant. Confront the challenge with generosity. Fight with initiative on those fronts where the future of the family is at stake.
Make use of the means of communication that today’s civilization offers to spread your ideals. Participate with courage and optimism in initiatives that take up this challenge with a Christian spirit. Encourage unity with other families, for example through associations that give strength to voices which alone will not be heard. Finally, don’t fail to make use of any honorable means to ensure that those in government and the legislature recognize in practice the central role of the family in society, that they respect and protect it. And all of this, why? For love of God? Yes, certainly and in first place. But also for love of men and women, our equals. Convince them that happiness on this earth can only found when one strives to make one’s own conduct conform to God’s plans. If we want families to be a focus of peace, harmony, and joy, let us help make them truly Christian families.

4. I referred earlier to the spiritual fruit which Blessed Josemaría hoped for from Torreciudad: in the first place, personal conversions, sealed with the sacrament of Reconciliation; and, as an immediate consequence, peace for families and homes, through the peace and joy of Christ.

Thus, Opus Dei’s Founder said, Christian spouses “receive with gratitude the children that heaven sends them, using married love in a noble way, which makes them participate in the creative power of God.”[15] Don’t fear the children that God wants to send you! Cooperate generously and responsibly with the Creator in the transmission of human life! Then, as Blessed Josemaría assured, “God will not fail in those homes, when he honors them by choosing souls who can dedicate themselves with a personal and free dedication to divine concerns.”[16]

Also go to our Lady for help in your family’s concerns. Every Christian family has to be an image of the one in Nazareth. Thus, even in the midst of the trials you may have to undergo, you will find joy and peace in your homes. If you abandon yourselves trustingly in Mary, she will see to it that your home is always a loving refuge for every member of the family, where there reigns an atmosphere of generous self-giving to others, which forges the soul for great human and divine ideals.

If selfishness ever threatens the unity of your family or tries to introduce into your heart feelings that could sully the fair love of which
Mary is mother, *adeamus cum fiducia*...! Turn immediately to the throne of grace and of glory, to obtain mercy!

If weariness or routine creeps into your life, perhaps with the passage of years, and tries to weaken your joyful solicitude for your family; or if a human outlook makes it difficult for you to understand the honor that God bestows when He chooses for himself one of your sons or daughters, call on Mary forcefully, to obtain mercy!

Be certain you will receive that mercy, because never was it known that any who has fled to our Lady’s maternal protection has ever been turned away. *Come to me*, she urges with motherly concern. Fill yourselves with my fruit. And the greatest of these, which includes all the others, is Jesus, *the blessed fruit of your womb*, whom we will receive in the Holy Eucharist in a few moments.

The Blessed Virgin Mary brings us to God. We have come to her shrine of Torreciudad, and she invites us to adore the Blessed Trinity in the Eucharist Sacrifice we are about to offer, as well as in our whole life. Amen.


Dear Brothers and Sisters:

1. In every priestly ordination we see fulfilled those words of the prophet Jeremiah: *I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.*[1]

In his faithful and merciful love, God the Father constantly provides the Church with men who, through the ministerial priesthood, make Christ the supreme Shepherd present in the midst of the faithful. John Paul II teaches that “in the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ, the Head and Shepherd, authoritatively proclaiming his Word, repeating his acts of forgiveness and his offer of salvation, particularly in Baptism, Penance and the Eucharist, showing his loving concern to the point of a total gift of self for the flock, which they gather into unity and lead to the Father through Christ and in the Spirit. In a word, priests exist and act in order to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to build up the Church in the name and person of Christ the Head and Shepherd.”[2]

Today, once again our Lord’s promise is fulfilled among us. By means of the imposition of the Bishop’s hands and the prayer of consecration,
these deacon brothers of ours will be configured with Christ, the High Priest. And they will be able to say with Him the words we heard in the first reading: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me.[3] Thanks to the priest’s ministry, the Christian people can sing with confidence: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness.... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.[4]

Let us thank our Father God for the care he lavishes on his Church. And let us renew our determination to speak with Him more often in personal prayer and to approach frequently the “tranquil fountains” of Christian life: the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist, where his Son Jesus, through each priest, preeminently exercises his role as Good Shepherd.

2. I now direct myself especially to those about to receive priestly ordination. My sons, keep always in mind that, in order to be good and efficacious instruments in our Lord’s hands, it is necessary to identify yourselves more and more closely with Him. The sacrament imprints on your souls an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which configures you with Jesus as Head and Shepherd, and confers on you a “spiritual power” that is a participation in the authority with which Christ himself, through his Spirit, builds up and governs the Church.[5] How clear is Blessed Josemaría’s teaching: “The priest’s identity consists in being a direct and daily instrument of the saving grace which Christ has won for us.”[6] It is your mission, helped by the prayers of all of us, to make this sacramental identification more clearly visible each day in your life, to be an image, the most perfect image possible, of Christ the Good Shepherd to all the faithful.

The driving force of this long process, which will last your entire life, is pastoral charity, which is “a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.”[7] “Pastoral charity,” explains Pope John Paul II, speaking of the ministerial priesthood, “is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ’s love for his flock. Pastoral charity
determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people.”[8] Thus the priest is transformed, as the Founder of Opus Dei says, into “a man of Love, the representative among men of Love made man. He lives through Jesus Christ, for Jesus Christ, with Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ.”[9]

We have in Blessed Josemaría a close and accessible example of how to grow in our identification with Christ. He was not ashamed to acknowledge, even in the presence of many people, that he was in love, with a Love that never grew old. Through the strength of pastoral charity the priest lives by Christ and for Christ; he lives, therefore, for the Church and for souls. As our Father said: “It is a divine reality that moves my heart deeply when each day, holding in my hands and raising the Chalice and the Sacred Host, I slowly repeat those words of the Canon, savoring them: per Ipsum, et cum Ipso et in Ipso... Through Him, and with Him and in Him, for Him and for souls: that is my life. I live by his Love and for his Love, despite my personal miseries. And despite these miseries, perhaps because of them, my Love is a love which is renewed each day.”[10]

Let us consider, in light of these words, whether we too, each in accord with our particular situation in the world and in the Church, try to live by Christ and for Christ, whether our life is centered on the Sacrament of the Altar, whether we spend ourselves in the service of mankind, our brothers and sisters, trying to bring them to God.

3. What are the characteristics of pastoral charity? Let us turn our eyes to Jesus, the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.[11] From him we have to learn to be deeply concerned for other Christians and for all souls.

The shepherd, as his first task, gathers the flock that has been entrusted to him. “The priest has the mission of gathering Christians, not only for the Eucharist, or for prayers over which he presides, but by showing constant care for their unity.”[12] In this portion of the Church which is the Prelature of Opus Dei, for whose immediate service you are being ordained, you have to be zealous servants of unity. Blessed Josemaría used to say that Christ’s disciples have to be distinguished by their zeal to be
builders of unity, both in the Church and in civil society. And in Opus Dei, he added, this has to be, for all of its faithful, a “dominant passion.”

Like Christ, the good shepherd also walks at the head of his flock, that is to say, “he has to clearly mark out the path, giving fearless witness in word and in deed to the faith and to a Christian life.”[13] You have to be the first ones to untiringly traverse the path of the Christian vocation, being an example and an encouragement to the others. Keep always in mind our Father’s teaching: “There are two kinds of shepherd. The shepherd who stays behind the sheep and leads them by loosing the dog on them, throwing rocks at those who stray, shouting at those which straggle behind. And there is the shepherd who goes in front, opening up a path and removing obstacles, encouraging the flock with his whistles.”[14] This is the lovable but demanding task our Lord has entrusted to you: to go in front of the others, leading by your dedication and sacrifice.

Finally, the shepherd is concerned about each of his sheep, and shows special care for those who most need it, without being discouraged by the difficulties or surrendering to fatigue. Meditate on these words of Blessed Josemaría: “We priests do not have rights. I like to consider myself a servant of all, and I am proud of this title. We only have duties, and this brings us joy: the duty of teaching catechism to children and adults, of visiting the sick and the healthy; the duty of bringing Christ to the rich and the poor, of not abandoning the Blessed Sacrament, Christ truly present in the tabernacle beneath the appearance of bread; the duty of being a good shepherd for souls, who cures the sick sheep and searches out the one that has gone astray, without heeding the hours that have to be spent in the confessional.”[15]

4. How much we should thank our Father God for his providence, and specifically for the care that he shows in providing the Church with shepherds according to his heart! Without priests, the Church would not be able to exist: above all because it would not be able to renew in an unbloody manner the Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, who offered himself for the whole world on the Cross. Nor would it be able to give supernatural life back to souls who are dead through sin, in the sacrament of Penance.
Let us renew our certainty that ministers of Christ will never be lacking in the Church: God cannot abandon the beloved Spouse of his Son. But it is undoubtedly true that there is a need for many more priests. As our Lord himself said, *the harvest is great and the laborers are few.*[16] And what better moment could there be to intensify our prayer than an ordination of priests? Let us pray every day that God’s mercy be shown with greater abundance. As the Pope has written, “the Church must never cease to pray to the Lord of the harvest that he send laborers into his harvest (cf.*Mt* 9:38). She must propose clearly and courageously to each new generation the vocational call, help people to discern the authenticity of their call from God and to respond to it generously.”[17]

I would like to express my warmest felicitations to the relatives and friends of the new priests, while at the same time asking all to continue to pray for them. Pray especially for our Holy Father John Paul II, for the Cardinal Archbishop of Madrid and for all of my brother bishops. Let us present our prayers to God through the hands of the Most Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Christians and especially of priests. And let us have recourse to the intercession of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, who loved the priesthood so much and who helped foster so many priestly vocations for the service of the Church and souls. Amen.


Rome (September 12, 1999)

At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, in the Basilica of St. Eugene, in Rome, Italy.

Dear brothers and sisters!

1. The Lord has anointed me, on me his spirit has fallen; he has sent me to bring good news to men that are humbled, to heal broken hearts, promising the release of captives, the opening of prison doors... Comfort for every mourner; Sion's mourners, what decree should I make for them, what gift offer them? Heads shall be garlanded, that once were strewn with ashes; bright with oil, the faces that were marred with grief; gaily they shall be clad that went sorrowing.\[^{[1]}\]

Jesus Christ, sent by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit, has come to renew the earth. The Fathers of the Church affirm that the Redemption carried out by Christ may be in some way compared to a new divine intervention of creation; even more, it surpasses it abundantly. Indeed, through the gift of divine filiation, man has been called to the greatest intimacy with God, made partaker of the very Life of the Blessed Trinity. The Lord, who won us this dignity on the Cross, has confided to His Church the task of carrying out His saving mission, and for this He conferred principally on priests the power of irrigating souls with His grace, through the word and the sacraments.
To renew the earth with the merciful power of the saving love of Christ: this is the task which is given today with Holy Orders to these faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, candidates for the priesthood. They will have to bring with them the hope of a holy life, the gift of peace to hearts, freedom from the bonds of sin, the certainty of the prize which gives relief in times of trial. God wishes that from people’s hearts may be raised up, not the lament of sadness, but rather a perennial *song of praise*. This is a marvellous and immense task, a task which it is impossible to limit. This is so not only because the work of Redemption recommences in each man and woman who comes to life and asks the Church for the means to meet Christ and to live from Him, but also because there are many places—entire countries—which the Gospel still has to reach, as Jesus Christ Himself proclaims: *I have other sheep too, which do not belong to this fold; I must bring them in too; they will listen to my voice; so there will be one fold, and one shepherd.*[2]

2. I direct myself to you now, dear deacons. On receiving priestly ordination today, you manifest your clear will to dedicate your entire life—freely and joyfully, without holding anything back—to the service of souls, to lead them to meet Christ, so that they are reborn in Him and live through Him. You will be living instruments of Jesus Christ, Who through you will draw hearts to Himself with the same force that is seen in the miracles in the Gospels. As Blessed Josemaría said on one occasion, the Lord will restore sight to “blind men, who had lost the ability to look up to heaven and contemplate the wonderful works of God;”[3] he will give back hearing to the deaf, to many “who did not want to know God.”[4] When you administer the Sacrament of Penance, you will see how the lame “who were bound by their passions”[5] suddenly recuperate the capacity to walk joyfully towards Heaven; the dumb will regain the power of speech and will announce the marvels of God; the dead, “in whom sin had destroyed life”[6] will return to being living and fruitful members of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The efficacy of the priestly ministry reaches infinitely beyond human capacities. Each day the priest witnesses, in real life, authentic miracles of grace. He is a witness of the love of the Saviour for all creatures. And this reality obliges him, in turn, to be a bearer of the charity of Christ. The
priest acts in the person and in the name of Christ, in a special way in administering the sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation; but it is necessary that he let his entire being be imbued by the Lord, to the extent of converting himself into a living image of the love of Jesus Christ for souls.

Let us read a paragraph of a homily of the Founder of Opus Dei: “Jesus’ heart, filled with a desire to redeem, does not want anyone to be able to say that he has not been called. He goes out to meet those who do not seek Him. That is love! There is no other explanation for it. When it comes to speaking of Christ’s Love, we are lost for words. He has so abased Himself that He accepts everything; He exposes Himself to everything — to sacrilege, to blasphemy and to the cold indifference of so many people — in order to offer even one man the chance of hearing the beating of his Heart in his wounded side.”

Even though it be one single person! every soul is worth all the Blood of Christ. And, like Jesus, the priest is called to give himself for each person. The Holy Father has written: “In virtue of their consecration, priests are configured to Jesus the Good Shepherd and are called to imitate and live His same pastoral charity.” This is a “free gift of the Holy Spirit and, at the same time, a duty and call for the free and responsible response of the priest.” Pastoral charity constitutes an essential dimension of the priest’s spiritual life and ministry. It is, certainly, a gift of God, but it is also a daily commitment to let the Holy Spirit fill him with zeal for the salvation of souls. The Pope defines it thus: “The essential content of pastoral charity is the giving of self, the total giving of self to the Church, sharing the gift of Christ, and sharing it in His image.” Only by making of your lives, day after day, a complete giving of yourselves; only by letting the love of souls always determine your way of thinking and acting, your way of relating with others in all circumstances; only thus will you convert yourselves into living images of Jesus Christ.

The priestly service requires then, a total dedication, which is only possible for one who lives from love. We have listened to what Jesus says of Himself: for these sheep I am laying down my life. Later on, in the same Gospel of St. John, the Lord comments: This is the greatest love a man can show, that he should lay down his life for his friends. The Lord showed love
to the Church when He gave Himself up on its behalf.\footnote{14} The priesthood is a free choice of love; in it, souls constitute the principal interest and one comes to love the universal Church, and the portion of the Church one has in one's care, with all the intensity of which one is capable. You are receiving priestly ordination to serve, in the first place, the faithful of the Prelature and to help them in their apostolates. In this way, united to the Prelate and —through him — to the Pope and to all the Pastors of the Church, you will serve the entire Church. Your self-giving for love will obtain for you the grace to live its dynamism even in its most radical demands.

3. I wish to refer to just one of these demands: humility. The call to be an epiphany of the love of God for men requires from the priest the profound determination to forget himself. All his personal interests — plans, legitimate ambitions, even his rights — have to remain subject to the demands of the ministry. The priest is of Christ — moreover, he is Christ — and he must announce Christ, faithfully presenting the doctrine of the Church, and not his personal opinions. On the other hand, the priest belongs to souls, and to all souls: he has to understand the demands of each one and adapt himself to the ways of being and sensibility of each one; he must proclaim in an integral way the truths of faith and morals, heal error, denounce sin, but always with an enormous respect for persons. He will only manage to do this if he is capable of renouncing the agreement of others and his own possibility to shine, if he seeks as the only end of his life, to make others happy. I am referring, as is obvious, to true happiness, to that spiritual peace which is only experienced in union with Christ. He will achieve it only if he doesn't forget, even for an instant, that souls are thirsty for Christ, not for more or less convincing communicators; and that only in the Gospel — announced with the authority of the Church — is the saving truth to be found.

Only the humble person knows how to serve and to accept his own limitations; only he is capable of persevering in the effort and being docile to grace, without becoming proud in successes or discouraged in failures. Only the humble person is fruitful. Blessed Josemaría wrote: “Dear Jesus: if I have to be an apostle, you need to make me very humble. Everything the sun touches is bathed in light. Lord, fill me with your clarity, make me
share in your divinity so that I may identify my will with your adorable Will and become the instrument you wish me to be. Give me the madness of the humiliation you underwent, which led you to be born poor, to work in obscurity, to the shame of dying sewn with nails to a piece of wood, to your self-effacement in the Blessed Sacrament. May I know myself: may I know myself and know you. I will then never lose sight of my nothingness.”[15]

Dearest candidates for the priesthood: I wish to remind your parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, that your call is a gift also to them. The Lord shows Himself to be closer to you today than ever, as He gathers the fruits of what you have sown over such a long time in the hearts of the new priests. Give thanks to Him and listen to what He is asking each one of you through this priestly ordination: He appeals to you to support, by your fidelity to your Christian vocation, the path of your son, of your brother, of your friend, in the service of the Church.

Let us pray for the Church, for the Pope, for the Cardinal-Vicar of the diocese of Rome, for all the Bishops and priests of the world. We pray in a special way for you, who are about to receive the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Let us implore the Lord of the harvest — in a more intense way today — to send many priestly vocations to His Church.

As we beg the Lord to fill you with love and humility, we go to the intercession of Blessed Josemaría, so that he may entrust our prayers to the most Blessed Virgin, Mother of all priests. So be it.

[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
Rome (December 8, 1999)

*On the occasion of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, in the Basilica of St. Eugene, in Rome, Italy.*

1. The archangel Gabriel, when sent to announce to the Blessed Virgin the mission God had destined her for, exclaimed as though in awe at her holiness: *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!* [1] Today, the Church joins him in praising the Blessed Virgin’s perfection, her total absence of sin, the fullness of grace with which God adorned his Mother from her conception. We too exult, following Blessed Josemaría’s invitation: “Sing to Mary Immaculate, reminding her: —Hail Mary, daughter of God the Father! Hail Mary, Mother of God the Son! Hail Mary, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit! Greater than you—no one but God!” [2]

In these years of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee, we have sought with growing eagerness communion with each of the three divine Persons. This union will be even greater if we draw closer to our Lady, the mother of God the Son, specially beloved daughter of the Father and temple of the Holy Spirit. [3] Pope John Paul II has reminded us that “this privileged relationship” of Mary with the Trinity, “confers upon her a dignity which greatly surpasses that of all other creatures.... Nevertheless, such exalted dignity does not prevent Mary from being united in solidarity with each one of us.” [4]
St. John tells us: *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us... And from his fullness—from the fullness of Christ—have we all received, grace upon grace.*[5] When we respond generously to God’s wishes, sanctifying grace grows in our soul and configures us more and more with his Son. All of this was realized perfectly in Mary who, filled with grace from the first moment of her existence, always united herself with her whole being to God’s will. The contemplation of her extraordinary stature overwhelms us; but at the same time we are consoled to know that she who is so high, so close to the Blessed Trinity, is also our Mother! As St. Maximus wrote “she who is light, splendor and sweetness, totally without stain, as though coming from Heaven, has brought nourishment sweeter than honey for all the members of the Church.”[6]

2. Mary’s motherhood towards the men and women of all times stems from the bonds uniting her to the Trinity, which converge in her mission as Mother of Christ. From the moment she carried our Lord in her womb, Mary was filled with the knowledge of the salvific mission entrusted to Jesus, in which she was called to play a decisive role. Mary supported his first steps on earth; she followed his growth as an infant, adolescent and young man; she sensed and made her own the yearnings for salvation that beat in the heart of her Son.

Jesus came to give his life, in obedience to the Father, for the redemption of sinners, and Mary, day after day, offered herself with Him in a holocaust to the Father. The miracles the crowds marveled at were the sign, worked in those suffering bodies, of the effusion of the Holy Spirit, the gift of divine love that heals souls.

Jesus’ compassion for the blind, the lepers, the sick, the paralytics, and his solicitude for the poor, became the source and nourishment of the maternal love that our Lady extends to us.

*To every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away.*[7] Jesus asks man to freely accept salvation; he requires our correspondence. Our Lady exhorts us: *Do whatever he tells you.*[8] The servants at the marriage feast of Cana responded readily to that invitation, voiced with such complete assurance. There shined forth in those words the personal experience of a life
dedicated entirely to fulfilling God’s will. And they filled the jars to the brim.[9] During the novena in preparation for today’s feast, we have renewed our resolution to give a Marian tone to our Christian existence. The first manifestation of this disposition should be our determination to always fulfill, with both joy and sacrifice, God’s holy will. Let yourself be won over by Mary; welcome the hope that our Lady has enkindled in your heart.

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.[10] “Isn’t that marvelous? The Blessed Virgin, our teacher in all we do, shows us here that obedience to God is not servile, does not bypass our conscience. We should be inwardly moved to discover the ‘freedom of the children of God’ (cf. Rom 8:21).”[11] This is the freedom of a person who is impelled by the force of love and, receiving grace for grace,[12] feels growing within his soul the incomparable reality of the divine filiation Christ won for us on the Cross.

3. Next to the cross of Jesus stood his Mother,[13] pierced by an immense sorrow, while at the same time calm, even joyful, because she already saw the fruits of her Son’s passion: the souls that he, when raised above the earth, was drawing towards himself.[14] In the Cenacle, Mary remained united to the still fearful apostles.[15] Her motherly presence imbued the first steps of the infant Church, and therefore should also inspire the conduct of those who are and who feel themselves to be the Church. It was she who kept the apostles united. It will always be Mary who unites Christians around the Pope and the shepherds in communion with Christ’s Vicar.

But always remember that if a Christian lets resentment creep into his heart, fostering grudges and memories that separate him from relatives and friends, that means that every remnant of our Lady’s presence has been removed from his heart. The Jubilee of the Year 2000, now imminent, should be for us and our families an occasion for an authentic reconciliation with our neighbor. We are approaching Christmas. On the night of December 24, the Holy Father will solemnly open the Jubilee Holy Year. Let us prepare ourselves with effective resolutions of conversion, seeking God’s forgiveness and forgiving anyone who has offended us. Let us prepare ourselves by rejecting sin, which breaks the bond of charity with
God and others. Only then will we savor the joy of being Christians, sons and daughters of God and of Mary. “Charity,” the Pope teaches, “has its source in the Father; it is fully revealed in the Passover of the Son, crucified and resurrected; and it is infused in us by the Holy Spirit. Through charity, God makes us sharers in his own love. A person who truly loves with God’s love also loves his brother as God loves him. This is the root of Christianity’s great newness.”[16]

Let us entrust to the Blessed Virgin, to her delicate, discreet, sure intercession, the steps that we still have to take to prepare ourselves for the Great Jubilee. The best way to honor our Lady is to struggle to imitate her. We have tried to sketch some features of the model that God sets forth for us in her. Let us ask her to help us to follow her example of correspondence to grace, of love for souls, of service to unity. In this way Jesus will once again be born in us and He will give us the peace that the world cannot give.[17] Amen.


[10] Lk 1:38.


Rome (October 25, 1999)

On the occasion of the opening of academic year 1999–2000 of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, in Rome, Italy.

Dear faculty, students and all who work at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Now that the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe has ended just two days ago, I am happy to be able to be with you once more, especially in these last months of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. However, before stopping to consider this event, let me direct a brief look at the year that has just gone by.

I still keep very present in my memory the affection that our Holy Father John Paul II showed us during the audience he granted on the occasion of our University’s fifteenth anniversary. When he expressed his affectionate wish to personally greet many of the participants, we responded with extended applause, by which we tried to show both our filial gratitude and our complete adherence to his person and to his teachings. I want to invite everyone, professors, students and non-teaching personnel, to frequently renew their union with St. Peter’s successor,
knowing that this is an essential condition for ecclesiality and a fruitful source of inspiration for your work.

Fifteen years is not a long time for a university. Nevertheless, we can be very thankful for the many good results that we have already seen. In the first place, there comes to mind the figure of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. The reality that we see today is due to his broad vision and magnanimity. I give thanks to our Lord for having given us such a faithful servant of the Church and of souls.

I also call to mind the numerous persons who have been instructed in our classrooms during these years, who are now spread throughout many countries around the world, as well as the growth of the University itself in its intellectual and organizational work. The latter is shown, to only give two examples, in the beginning of new specializations in various fields and the annual celebration of symposia in the different schools.

A consideration of the goals already achieved should stimulate us to cultivate a great eagerness for improvement in professional formation and in university life, because we are taking part in a great enterprise: that of being present in all environments to give reasoned witness to our faith in Christ. This endeavor will be the fruit of God’s grace and the work of all of us, carried out with depth and perseverance. We have very much present those words Blessed Josemaría wrote in The Way: “That work—humble, monotonous, small—is prayer expressed in action, which prepares you to receive the grace of that other work—great and broad and deep—of which you dream.”[1]

We Christians are called to undertake great projects precisely because Christ has wanted them for humanity. During this academic year, we will cross the threshold of the year 2000 of the Christian Era, towards which the Holy Father has been guiding us since the beginning of his pontificate. In the Bull convoking the Great Jubilee, the Pope wrote: “Jesus is the genuine newness which surpasses all human expectations and such he remains for ever, from age to age. The Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation which he has accomplished by his Death and Resurrection are therefore the true criterion for evaluating all that happens in time and every effort to make life more human.”[2] These are the great projects that we
nurse in our heart: to bring the newness of the Gospel to all humanity, to bring back to their source, in the Wisdom and Love of God, all mankind’s activities and all created realities.

These considerations, which can help guide your work in the University, place upon us a great personal and collective responsibility. They show us that we cannot be satisfied with the goals so far attained. We must go much further, pursuing with great effort an intellectual formation that is ever more firmly anchored in Sacred Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church. The Holy Father’s words encourage us to contemplate temporal realities in the light of

the mystery of the Incarnate Word. Therefore, they invite us to explore new paths for understanding the faith, to dialogue with the efforts of the human sciences and modern culture, to interest ourselves in the challenges evangelization must confront in order to take root in the various cultures.[3]

Within a few weeks the Jubilee Year will begin, a special time of grace and conversion to God’s love, of gratitude to the Savior who has become flesh, of a sinful creature’s humility before God’s greatness. The Jubilee’s grace stems from the Incarnation, thanks to which the unchanging fullness of divine Love has entered into time and established itself here forever. Thereby time itself, which had become sterile and empty through sin, has been filled with the salvation of God. Even more, as the Pope has pointed out, it has become in Christ “a dimension of God, who is himself eternal.”[4] Therefore every moment in time can be filled with meaning and grace, because it brings with it the unmerited offering of an encounter with God.

Through the Incarnation of the Word, God not only comes to dwell among us. He gives himself without holding anything back, to the point of sacrificing the human life assumed by his divine Person. By his redeeming death, God introduced into time a new dimension of love: that of mercy and pardon. These dimensions, present in God’s eternity, enter time and fill it. Therefore, drawing on the grace of Christ’s redemptive passion, this time of the Jubilee also asks us to become a messenger of God’s call to conversion, the opening of the human heart to God’s merciful love.
This is why I spoke to you of the gratitude and humility that this Jubilee should arouse in us, two spiritual attitudes that I propose to you this year for your personal lives and for all the activity at the university. A humility open to the light of God and to the voice of others, to listening to advice and to rectification whenever necessary. A gratitude founded on faith, capable of truly appreciating all that God has given us and of bearing fruit each day in optimism and prayer.

This humility and this gratitude characterized the life of the Mother of God, the protagonist, with her Son, of the event whose two thousandth anniversary we are preparing to celebrate. How can we fail to recall her inspired words, faced with the inestimable gift of the Incarnation: Magnificat anima mea Dominum... quia respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ?16

Therefore, as we declare the new academic year inaugurated, today more than ever we go trustingly to Mary Most Holy and commend to her in a special way all of the work at the University.


[5] Lk1, 46.48.

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Articles and Interviews

Turin 1999
“One, holy, catholic and apostolic,” replies to questions posed for the book *Sopravviverà la Chiesa nel terzo millennio? (Will the Church Survive the Third Millennium?)*. Pier Michele Girola — Gian Luca Mazzini, Paoline Editoriale libri.

1. I believe because...

*Tertullian believed “because it is absurd,” St. Augustine, “in order to understand.” Why do you believe? Is it necessary to abandon the world to live one’s faith?*

I believe “through Christ our Lord,” as St. Paul taught. And I also believe because I need to. Faith is God’s light for the intellect. With this light we can know the truth about God that he reveals and the truth about the world and about man. The one who, by God’s grace, has experienced the security, the warmth and the light of faith, ends up needing it: without faith everything turns cold, dark, frightening.

To live one’s faith, there is no need to abandon the world. For most Catholics it is precisely the world that is the path they must follow to reach God. We find his hand in nature, in man, in work, in all of creation. I dare to say that the world is a book written by God for man and, at the same time, a book that man writes by his work to speak with God. My faith doesn’t take me out of the world but impels me to love the world passionately.

2. *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus?*

*“Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.” Is this affirmation still valid in the Third Millennium?*

The Church is the sacrament of salvation that Christ wanted for all mankind. This is a truth that doesn’t have any “expiration date” and that therefore continues to be valid at the end of this millennium. It is, of course, true, as Pope John Paul II has reminded us in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, that a morally upright life, that is, a sincere search for the truth, is a means of salvation for those who have not received the gift of faith. But even for these men and women salvation always comes, in a way that is invisible and incomprehensible to us, from Christ himself and from the Church in its reality as a salvific mystery.
Thanks to the Church, man knows his origin and his destiny. Thanks to the Church he finds the path to eternal life and the relative happiness that one can achieve on this earth. Outside of the Church, on the other hand, man is confronted by serious difficulties that make the search for truth and the discovery of the path to salvation quite complicated.

3. The gnostic temptation

At least in the Christian West, the 20th century has reached its end under the powerful influence of the “New Age.” Man feels himself to be God, part of a vast cosmic energy that he is asked to become conscious of. This offers a salvation gained by one’s personal efforts, without the need of grace. We are in the same 20th century in which Bernanos concluded his Diary of a Country Priest with the often quoted phrase “Everything is grace.” What has happened in the intervening years?

It seems to me that Western man at the end of the century, more than feeling himself to be God, feels himself to be a free master of himself, and, at the same time, the prisoner of a complex set of circumstances that he doesn’t dare to confront. Behind it all lies a type of “conformist” freedom: an easy, but at times cynical conformism, since it renounces the encounter with the true and the good. It seems to me that, in the West at the end of this century, the only challenge to the ruling conformism comes from the voices of those who have taken Christ seriously. They are a minority, certainly, but they are the hope of those who want to free themselves from the conformism that is sustained by multiple interests, including economic ones.

The gnostic movements today are trying to offer a rational response to mankind’s concerns about salvation and life’s meaning, so it is not strange that they find an audience. The faith requires a consistent response that is “materialized” in one’s daily life. And one is always free to refuse to accept the moral demands that the faith entails. In other words, it is always possible to neutralize in one’s conscience the message of the saving cross of Christ and to deny the reality of sin, a recurrent device of the gnostic temptation.

In these circumstances, the announcement of a “salvation” attained merely by the acquisition of previously hidden knowledge could make
headway in some poorly formed minds. The New Age phenomenon does not find an audience among those who have not forgotten that faith in Jesus “works through love” (Gal 5:6) and that “faith apart from works is dead” (Jas 2:26).

The last Council referred to the rupture between faith and life as “one of the gravest errors of our time” (Gaudium et Spes, 43). To overcome this rupture it is very important that the Christian faithful are taught the genuine meaning of salvation and encouraged to approach the sources of grace, in order to renew in an effective way the conversion of life to which they are committed by baptism.

I think that at all levels we should continue developing, as the core of the new evangelization, a constant catechesis on redemption and grace. In pastoral work we need to foster with renewed vigor devotion to the Eucharist and participation in the Eucharistic sacrifice, as the center and root of Christian life, which encapsulates all the Catholic faith’s teaching about our Divine Redeemer and his work of salvation. Pastoral teaching about the sacrament of penance, where a Christian experiences the divine mercy that forgives and moves one to forgive in turn, is also of vital importance. From his very first encyclical, the Pope has reminded us that the Church in our time has to be “the Church of the Eucharist and of penance” (Redemptor Hominis, 20).

4. Alter Christus, ipse Christus

Everywhere we see a multiplication of sects and movements where people are rediscovering a spiritual dimension in life, but at the same time society is becoming more and more secular. People are going ever less frequently to Mass. Young people often say that they believe in a God conceived as an abstract entity. Christ and the Church are notable for their absence. Many holy places have been transformed into tourist attractions; and even in religious marriages, the sacred aspect has become marginal. How can the Church resist this tendency?

Unfortunately, we see many of our contemporaries drifting aimlessly as far as religious and spiritual values are concerned. But we should not lose sight of other positive aspects of the present moment such as, for example, the universal regard for the Holy Father, whose generous commitment to his ministry has attracted so many people to God, especially young people.
We should also consider the evident signs that, together with the “desacralizing” tendencies, there is no lack of efficacious efforts in the opposite direction. For example, the impressive witness of solidarity and dedication to others for love of Jesus that can be seen today in so many and such varied examples of the practice of Christian charity. This spirit of service, so moving on many occasions; this Christian and self-sacrificing love for others, beginning with the weakest and most needy; this love for the cross that is essential to Christianity, are an unequivocal sign of God to people today, reminding us of the dignity of each person called to be a child of God. One can see, therefore, many positive elements alongside the wave of paganism that afflicts large sectors of contemporary society.

It is clear, nevertheless, that not a few Christians have deserted their religious duties. Some of the signs of Christian identity that should shine forth most clearly have become obscured. Although one should never try to give brief explanations of complex problems, nor oversimplify things, I think that behind the giving in to secularism and the indifferent attitude of some believers, besides ignorance, there lies — and I think it is good to emphasize it here — a lack of courage on the part of those of us who know ourselves to be children of God to make a personal commitment to the truth and to its ethical demands.

What can be done about this? Today, as always, true Christian witness demands grasping once again that sanctity is the real goal of personal commitment. We have to show men and women today the great attractiveness of Christian sanctity, of a sincere following of Jesus in the midst of the circumstances of their own life. We need to be convinced that the proclamation of sanctity, to which God has called all of us, is capable of awakening, with the help of grace, many lethargic consciences.

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá said it in these words: “This can be done; it is not an empty dream... We must, each of us, be alter Christus, ipse Christus: another Christ, Christ himself. Only in this way can we set about this great undertaking, this immense, unending task of sanctifying all temporal structures from within, bringing to them the leaven of Redemption” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 183).

5. Unity of life
The Church’s “confrontation” with the modern world begins with Pope Pius XII and is fully carried out in the Second Vatican Council. But after this event, according to some, the Church was invaded by secularization, as had already been the case some time earlier in the great Protestant denominations. Do you share this diagnosis? And, in any case, what should we do to prevent this from happening?

The Church, since its very beginnings, has been “confronting” the world in every age. You know the letters of that famous convert, Paul, as well as the life of Peter, and Augustine, and Thomas More, John Henry Newman, and Edith Stein. These are people who, faithful to the Church, have been deeply involved in the society of their time, giving clear witness to the Truth and Life that is Jesus Christ. And thus in every moment of history, the multitude of saints (canonized or not), the mass of the “faithful,” have been in the world, being of Christ and bearing the spirit of Christ in the weakness of their own flesh. There is only one formula to counteract the secularization of which you speak: realizing that Christianity is not a sum or abstract dogmatic or moral truths, but the astounding event of God made man, who lived among us and who calls us, who is calling everyone to share in his life and to continue fulfilling the mission for which he came to this earth and died and rose from the dead: that of redeeming man from the solitude into which he is plunged by sin. It is in this encounter with Christ, which is offered to us in the Church, that man finds the great perennial newness which gives a fullness of meaning to his daily life and enkindles with new light all of his earthly doings, from the most outstanding to the most modest.

The key to the Christian’s relationship with the world, in one’s daily life, can be expressed with a concept that is very characteristic of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s teachings: unity of life. The Christian should not be following two parallel paths, those of his spiritual life and that of his professional activity. Instead he should be following only one path, in which he seeks holiness by ordering earthly realities to God.

6. Piety of children

Some people complain at times of the separation between the religion “of the people” and that of the theologians. Popular religion tends to be devotional,
especially devotion to our Lady, while the religion of theologians seems to be more centered on the Protestant themes of distinguishing between grace and nature, between faith and nature. How can this breach be repaired, if it exists?

Popular religious devotion, which is so similar and yet so varied throughout the Catholic world, is of great importance no matter how you look at it, whether from the viewpoint of reason or from the simple but no less profound viewpoint of the heart.

How does the Catholic theologian look at it? As it exists: as a manifestation, at times multicultural, of a religious faith converted into a living expression, into a source of meaning for one’s own life, into an “inculturated” faith. Behind popular devotion there often lies a great deal of doctrine and theology. It is an expression of the mysteries of the faith, which the Christian people believe and express in these manifestations of piety, approved, of course, by the authority of the Church. We must not forget that the Church gives an extraordinary value to the sensus fidei of the people of God, which, in the words of a Father of the Church, is defined as what has been believed “semper, ubique et ab omnibus.” The perseverance in the faith seen in people in countries where an attempt has been made to uproot Christianity is a wonderful thing.

Pope John Paul II has spoken of the renaissance or rediscovery of the authentic values of popular religious piety and has emphasized its role in the context of the new evangelization (cf. Crossing the Threshold of Hope, p. 116). We can recall, for example, the popular manifestations of Eucharistic piety in the Church, which has developed so greatly in the millennium now coming to a close. It has been said, and I agree, that Eucharistic piety forms an important part of Europe’s cultural identity. For example, all over the continent the feast of Corpus Christi has given rise to important social attitudes and cultural and artistic expressions. These would have been impossible without the support of theological reflection.

Piety needs theological doctrine to give it solidity and a strong foundation; and theology should foster piety and be nourished by it in turn, for we cannot separate the knowledge and love of God. The greatest theologians have been great saints.

7. Never shut up in a ghetto
Catholic theologians are frequently accused of expressing their teachings in accord with the dominant culture. Don’t you think that Catholicism will continue being a force, a point of reference, precisely because it tries to avoid becoming identified with the prevailing cultural outlook?

The Church doesn’t have a “ghetto” mentality, since it exists precisely to extend itself as the Kingdom of Christ, continuing the priestly, prophetic and royal mission of its Lord.

The dialogue between faith and cultures is necessary to enable the Gospel to illuminate earthly realities from within, purifying them and converting them into an occasion for an encounter between man and God. For this reason, as Pope John Paul II has stressed, “a faith that does not become culture, is a faith that has not been fully accepted, nor deeply considered, nor faithfully lived.” For the faith to be accepted by men and for it to display its salvific power, it needs, with God’s grace, an intelligible proclamation that enlightens those who hear it, that penetrates in a natural way their spirit, their way of thinking, their habitual channels of communication.

In all of this, it is important to distinguish between the correct inculturation of the faith (“a faith that becomes culture”) and the falsification of the teachings of faith by submission to the reigning culture. A faith subordinated to the prevailing culture would be the antithesis of the Gospel proclamation.

8. Only one model

In the opinion of some people, today's circumstances demand new models of the Church. They speak of less hierarchy and more democracy, of decentralization of ecclesial institutions, of showing understanding towards all cultural traditions, of a theology at the service of the community and with absolute respect for freedom of research. Isn’t this democratic vision dangerous? How can one reconcile democratic principles with the ex cathedra power of the Vicar of Christ?

Just as there is only one Church of Jesus Christ, we can speak only of one “model of the Church.” This is the one that He willed to found in the Holy Spirit, following the plans of his Father. Therefore the only model of the Church is the one professed in the Creed: the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which has the Roman Pontiff as its visible head on earth.
Other “models” that might arise cannot be accepted.

And what is immutable in the mystery of the Church? Precisely that which is furthest from us and from our will: the nature and mission that Christ has given it. To express this idea better, we can cite a teaching of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8) regarding the profound analogy between Christ and the Church. Just as one cannot arbitrarily suppress the reality that Christ is both God and Man and his mission as Redeemer, so we can never eliminate from our perception of the Church its divine and human nature and its redemptive mission, manifested in the ecclesial image that we have seen realized in history from the beginning. This image contains some unchanging elements: the equality of all of the faithful as far as the dignity of baptism is concerned, a community of mission, a distinction established by the Holy Spirit among the faithful through the diversity of gifts that he distributes and the functions of service to the common mission for which they are capacitated. A basic structural element is the existence of a common priesthood of all the baptized and a ministerial priesthood, essentially distinct from one another and complementary and mutually ordered to one another.

That there is in the Church a common priesthood shared in by all the faithful, and, at the same time, inseparable from this reality, an ecclesiastical hierarchy linked to the reception by some of the faithful of the ministerial priesthood and, by it, a specific teaching, pastoral and sanctifying function, is not one among other possible models of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is simply the exact and immutable expression of the one Church founded by Him.

As Blessed Josemaría said, “Hierarchy means holy government and sacred order, and never human arbitrariness or inhuman despotism. Our Lord set up in the Church a hierarchical order which must not transform itself into tyranny, because authority itself is a service, as is obedience.” The Pope, the head of the hierarchy and of the whole Church, is often called the “Servant of the Servants of God.” To view the nature of the Church as similar to democratic societies would be senseless.

9. Not only *ex cathedra*

*The infallibility of the Pope. An obstacle in the way of ecumenism or a great*
treasure of the Catholic tradition? Will the Pope be a little less infallible in the Third Millennium? And if we go in this direction, what will remain of the Church as we know it?

The infallibility of the Pope in the case of *ex cathedra* dogmatic definitions is only one aspect of his ministry as successor to the Apostle Peter as visible head of the Church: an aspect of his office (*munus*) of teaching, of his universal magisterium. The primacy of the Pope refers also to his mission of sanctifying, as Supreme Pontiff, and of governing, as Supreme Pastor of the Church.

In virtue of this primacy, which our Lord conferred on the apostle Peter and his successors, as the Church’s tradition has transmitted to us from the very first moment, the Roman Pontiff is the “perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity” of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 23). We can never see an obstacle to unity in the person who is precisely its source and foundation.

Efforts to foster ecumenism will benefit by considering this truth in depth, not by obscuring it. Specifically, it is very important to understand that the universal Church and its visible head are not something external to the particular Churches, but something internal, that is, a constitutive element of their reality. The universal Church is not a federation of Churches, but a *body* of Churches. A body in which it is essential that there be union with the head. If there is a wound in that union, it will not have a full life, and if the rupture with the head is total, its life could disappear. Communion with the Roman Pontiff is what constitutes the life of the particular Churches. As our Lord said in his prayer to the Father at the Last Supper: “That they may all be one... so that the world may believe.” (*Jn* 17:21).

10. Dangerous short cuts

*A synodal government for the Church, eliminating the sacred from worship, secularization of the priesthood, ordination of women. These are “temptations” which are presented with the argument that they would promote the unity of Christians and overcome historical obstacles. Don’t you think that to see Catholicism as a historical figure is to risk leading it to ruin?*

The points that you suggest are, indeed, “temptations” that arise in the
course of the search for Christian unity. But unity will never come by way of this path. These are attitudes which differ profoundly from the authentic Catholic sense of the mystery of the Church, and, within that treasure, of the conception of the priestly ministry.

Her teaching on the priestly ministry is so central to the faith of the Church that any defect or grave error in its proclamation (as would happen, for example, with the acceptance of a feminine priesthood) would generate complete doctrinal confusion. Equally central is the teaching about the common priesthood of the faithful, which has undergone important developments in the Second Vatican Council and in the post-conciliar Pontifical magisterium.

If the Holy Spirit has led the Church to a greater degree of self-knowledge, helping it to make progress in its theological understanding of the sacred ministry and the lay state — not to mention now the consecrated life — it would be unreasonable to think that the unity of Christians will be attained by abandoning these paths of growth. Now that we are preparing to enter a new millennium, we must continue working on the theology of the priesthood and the laity, and also on the practical application of the ecclesiological teaching of the Council, which is firmly based on the mutual relationship between the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood.

11. “Disjointed” man

The Church has fought against materialism and rationalism in all its forms and harmful manifestations. Today, both veins of thought are in a state of crisis throughout the world, but the orphans of one or the other don’t show signs of being attracted by the Good News. They seem to be disoriented. Could it be that Christ is no longer speaking to people through his shepherds?

Some forms of materialism and some aspects of the way of thinking that you mentioned that were very influential in the past have entered into crisis. But other forms of those same errors have not ceased to be present and to influence individuals and society. Can one really say that the influence of materialism on people’s behavior and attitude at the end of this century has diminished? The fall of the Berlin Wall, if we consider for a moment this symbolic event, did signify the crumbling of many intellectual
myths, many pseudoscientific social and political constructions, many lies. But not all of this is in the past: their practical effects did not disappear with the collapse of the Wall. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that part of these errors also had their origin in a practical materialism spawned by liberalism.

Today we often find men who are interiorly divided, or to put it even more forcefully, as Blessed Josemaría Escrivá used to say, “disjointed.” One only needs to consider the pathetic attempts of many to combine “a good name with indecency, a slavery to vice with a good image.” Isn’t it pathetic to see the effort of so many to try to convince themselves and others that public life is one thing and “my private life” something completely separate? Perhaps here one finds the key to so many “deviations,” not only moral ones, of mankind at the end of this century.

The practical crisis of ideologies and the consequent weakening of their cultural hegemony has left many people without a point of reference. But this does not mean that the vacancy will be filled automatically by the proclamation of the Gospel. The Church’s teaching is not an ideology that can simply flow into the vacuum left by others. It is the wisdom of God and a gift of God. And it requires first of all a conversion and interior change, without which there is no room for a living faith. This is why the new evangelization, which is so necessary, is primarily a call to a spiritual conversion, a fearless opening of one’s heart to Christ.

Rather than orphans, I think all of the contemporary materialisms have left many people wounded, blind to Christ’s light, or rather, enclosed in a region of darkness, of rejection of the truth. Therefore, this is a time for re-evangelization, for a new proclamation of the Gospel with one’s word and with the eloquence of one’s deeds, both on the part of the ordinary faithful and their shepherds.

The Church — and I am referring, I repeat, not only to the hierarchy but to all the baptized — has no other path but that of two thousand years ago: Christians have to learn how to set forth and make known, with the witness of our own lives and words, the great permanent “novelty” that is Jesus Christ, true God and true man, alive and present among us. We face the immense challenge of making men discover that only in Christ can they
find the doctor and the medicine for their illnesses. If the Church — that
is, all Catholics — is content to be “modern,” it will find itself immediately
“out of date,” like a decorative museum piece. The Church, faithful to
Christ, is and always will be something new for all stages of history. And
therefore it will always be, on the one hand, a sign of contradiction for the
conformists, and on the other hand, a sign of hope for those who
understand the deep meaning of their life and recognize their own
weakness.

12. Guiding, without giving ready-made solutions

The fall of Communism and Marxism has opened a path for a greater
influence of the market economy, at least in theory. The Church, which was one of
the principal rivals of Communism, and in the pontificate of Pope John Paul II
also one of the determining factors in its collapse, appears uncertain. It condemns
the “excesses” of capitalism in the name of solidarity, but one does not see an
economic model being held up as an alternative. Does such an alternative exist?
Is it the task of the Church to intervene in these matters? If so, how, and to what
extent?

The Church, although it will never cease to condemn errors, does not
consider itself anyone’s rival. The Church announces the truth of Christ
and defends it for the good of humanity. For this reason it does not have
an economic model of its own, just as it does not have one in any other
field that God has left to man’s freedom and responsibility. The
Magisterium’s interventions in this area are directed towards guiding men
and women, fostering justice, defending the dignity of the person,
exhorting all to charity and solidarity, rejecting and combating theoretical
and practical errors, etc. It is not its role to give specific solutions or provide
technical criteria. The scope of its teaching in this area is determined by the
nature of its magisterial function; that is to say, by its transcendent goal
and finality.

13. Christians and politics

Do you think that in regard to politics Christians should see themselves, as
“the salt of the earth,” scattered throughout every corner of society, or rather would
some form of unity be desirable, common points in debate, battles waged together?
To what extent should the Church direct, counsel, and intervene?
Within the ambit of the Catholic faith transmitted by the Church and, therefore, within the Christian conception of man and the world, we have to proclaim and defend the full freedom of Christ’s disciples in matters of opinion. And therefore we have to affirm the freedom of each one to intervene in politics in the way that seems best to each, working to build up society, always respecting, of course, the fundamental truths about man that Christ has revealed.

Given these presuppositions, it is logical that Catholics be present in many sectors of political life — there is no reason why there should only be one position — in accord with their personal convictions and with respect for those of others: especially those of other Catholics, who within the same faith, hold opinions that differ from theirs in economic, social or political matters that are open to the free and upright choice of individuals.

This should be the normal situation in a healthy social body. But there are, of course, situations that cannot be considered normal nor healthy, for there are societies with profound wounds. For example, when a nation does not recognize and protect the human right to life from its conception, or the indissolubility of marriage, or does not facilitate the practical exercise of the right of parents to educate their children, or the creation of schools that respond to their legitimate convictions, or does not protect the conditions of justice and public morality required by human dignity and freedom, then not only Christians but all morally upright people should unite to cure these wounds.

In other words, while respecting the legitimate diversity of personal choices, the efforts of Christians in social and political life should be unanimous in everything pertaining to the natural law, and which therefore may not be contradicted by human laws. So when a Christian insists that it can never be legal to kill an innocent person, because this is never morally licit, he is not trying to impose his faith on others, but is simply stating what it means to be human.

Therefore, unanimity among Catholics should be fostered in regard to the fundamental rights and duties of the human person, even though specific individuals may uphold very different political views. It should not seem strange to us, the opposite would be strange, if the hierarchy of the
Church, in the exercise of its own pastoral responsibility, should intervene publicly, when circumstances require it, calling for a common position by Catholics on specific points (in regard to objectives or, more rarely, in regard to means).

14. The temptation of integralism

Why is it that while religious integralism and fundamentalism are spreading everywhere throughout the world, with grave consequences in the political sphere, this is not seen among Catholics? Is this a credit to the Church or a symptom of weakness?

Any kind of religious-political fundamentalism tends to impose forms of political organization and social life of an absolute and unquestioned nature, which extends sacred realities and attitudes of faith into the terrain of the opinionable, confusing the sacred with the secular.

In the Christian vision of man and society there is no room for a religious-political fundamentalism. For this is incompatible with the dignity of the person and with the profound love and respect for freedom of consciences taught by the Second Vatican Council (Gaudium et Spes, Dignitatis Humanae...). Nor is it compatible with the distinction between nature and grace, between natural and supernatural realities which are fused in a harmonious unity but without confusion in man — invited by God to participate in his nature and made a child of God in Christ. The absence of fundamentalism fostered by Catholic teaching is, then, a credit to the faithfulness of the Church to the Gospel, that is to say, to the teachings transmitted to us by Jesus Christ, true God and true man, in a unity of Person but without confusion of natures. He who is the teacher of truth, Truth himself, is also the teacher of freedom, of understanding, of friendship, of community, of giving “to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22:21). To my way of understanding, another of the profound lessons that Jesus has engraved on the Church’s memory in regard to the unity without confusion between the human and the divine, and the autonomy of created realities, is that provided by his years of work in Nazareth. This lesson of the Son of God incarnate, who showed himself to be a good worker and a good citizen
alongside his fellow men and women, an exemplary fulfiller of the Law and of the civil laws, should be for us a cause for deep reflection.

The Christian is called to proclaim salvation in Christ and to make Christ’s kingdom present in the world, sanctifying it and sanctifying himself there. We Christians know that we have been entrusted with the task of undauntedly carrying out the mission of salvation. And we know that we have to carry this out with an openness to dialogue, with the deepest respect for each person’s freedom, beginning with respect for religious freedom, and for the value of creation: something completely foreign, therefore, to a fundamentalist approach.

15. When the Son of Man returns

Cardinal Ratzinger has written: “In the present stage of history, we do not see a massive movement towards the faith... It would be a mistake to think that there will be a radical change in the direction of history, and that the faith will come to be a mass phenomenon, a phenomenon that dominates history.” In the light of this reflection, how should we respond to St. Luke’s question: “When the Son of Man returns, will he find any faith on earth?”

Our Lord himself promised the apostles: “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20); and to Peter, in particular, he said: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18). According to these words, we can be sure that the faith, in the sense of the deposit of revealed truths, will always be faithfully guarded by the Church. But whether our Lord, when he comes at the end of time, will find in Christians an adhesion to his teaching, alive and operative through charity, depends on each of us, on how well we correspond to God’s gift and transmit it to many other people, making it something alive and not just a theory.

And what can we say about the possibility of a massive conversion to the faith? The Gospels recount various occasions when large crowds followed Jesus, attracted by him and by his teachings. These scenes have been repeated in history every time that a Christian has endeavored to identify himself with Christ, letting his message be manifested in himself, as St. Paul was able to say: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Such a Christian naturally attracts and wins over others:
not by himself, but Christ by means of him. I saw this from close up become a reality in the life of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, who brought thousands of souls to God, trying “to hide and disappear, so that only Jesus would shine forth,” as he used to say. And we are seeing it in Pope John Paul II who, in so many different countries and by being demanding, not by giving in, wins over the multitudes. Whether the scenes of the Gospel, when multitudes of men and women followed Christ, are to be repeated today depends on the grace of God and on our freedom, our union with him. This was proclaimed by Christ himself when he said: “He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (Jn 15:5). If this does not happen, we cannot lay the blame on the times that we are living in. “If we are living well, in a Christian manner, the times will be good. We are the times: as we are, so will the times be,” said St. Augustine (Sermon 80, 8). And St. John Chrysostom declared: “There would not be a single pagan if we were really Christians” (Hom. in I Tim., 10, 3). We have to make up our mind to resolutely seek sanctity, identification with Jesus Christ.

Madrid (September 30, 1999)

“An appeal to live the faith with the vitality of the earliest days,” an interview published in Alfa and Omega, a supplement of the newspaper ABC, Madrid.

1. What are the priorities in connection with the evangelization of Europe and what is the role of the Synod for Europe in this regard?

First of all, I should explain that it is not my job to point out these priorities. The work of the Synod is precisely an opportunity to reflect about the evangelization of Europe. During these days we will pray, work, and listen to one another, with an openness of spirit and a desire to learn. And always with confidence that the Holy Spirit will show us the path to illuminate Europe with Christ’s light. In this sense, the Synod is not only a vivid experience of the communion of the Church, but also a manifestation of faith. We believe that this communion and unity will bring us light for our apostolic task in the coming years.
After this clarification, I think I can comment on some aspects that, in my opinion, it would be good to confront, moved by the desire that a Christians spirit renew our continent, as the Church has always done. It seems very important to me to practice the faith with the vitality of the beginnings. We will also focus our attention on the multicultural dimension of evangelization, within its overall unity. And I think that the responsibilities of women will also be an important topic.

A central concern is the need to present our faith in a genuine way, with a consistency of life and the enthusiasm of Christ’s first disciples. We have to put Christ in first place, the One whom we believe in, whom we follow, and whom we are called to speak about. The Catholics of this continent have no reason to consider ourselves as representatives of an outworn lifestyle that has lost its original attractiveness. We have to “dust off” our way of practicing the faith, purify it, connect it more deeply with the spring, the source, our Lord Jesus Christ. And Christ is eternally young, perennially new. Thus our hope will be strengthened; we will recover and communicate with ever greater conviction the joy of knowing ourselves to be Christians, sons and daughters of God.

The Holy Father, in an address to the Latin American bishops’ conference in 1983, said that evangelization had to be “new in its zeal, new in its methods, new in its expression.” I think that we could very well apply to Europe this requirement of newness which the Christian message bears within itself. And, I repeat, this newness is the living Christ, who continues to walk at our side and who calls us to share in the great newness that is his life.

I also think that there is an urgent pastoral need, because it concerns many of our countries, with regard to the “new Europeans” who come here from many other parts of the world, suffering from hunger, violence and poverty. Europe is once more faced by the challenge of integration. A challenge which has a social and economic dimension, but also a moral dimension. This is certainly a complex question and one that is difficult to solve, demanding a capacity for openness towards others, towards those who are very different from us.
In these circumstances, Christians, as so often in the course of history, encounter a demanding task that can be summed up in three words: respect, accept, proclaim. We need to respect, that is to love, all these people who are arriving in Europe by waves, often in material conditions of extreme indigence. Their poverty does not diminish their dignity. We need to accept them, opening our ears and our hearts to those words that must be rediscovered: “feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty....” And we need to proclaim our faith, because many of those “new Europeans” have never heard of Jesus, and we have the joyous duty of making him known to them.

I think that all of us pastors are looking forward joyfully to the possibility of taking part in a discussion of what we might call the “new responsibilities” of women in the Europe of the future. To put it succinctly, in the century that is now ending women have gone from playing a very limited role in public life to occupying posts of great importance. This is a very profound process of transformation that has not yet ended. The change has at times been complicated and painful, with good aspects and bad. The growing influence of women has new facets that are quite positive, and her responsibilities call for the mature reflection that we all desire. In this context, the Church has a lot to say about the dignity of women and the greatness of their mission in society, on the importance of paternity and maternity, on the role of the family, etc. And when stressing that “the Church has a lot to say,” I am referring especially to the Catholic women of Europe. I dare say that the future of all of us depends to a great extent on their talent and holiness.

2. How do you see the future of the Church in Spain?

First, don’t forget that I have spent the last fifty years outside of Spain. Nevertheless, I receive a lot of news, and I have the opportunity of speaking with many Spanish bishops, especially when they come to Rome, and I frequently meet with Spaniards, both individually and in groups.

I can say that I detect, especially among young people, a feeling of optimism and a desire to take part in the Church’s apostolic mission. Perhaps this is due to the fact that I live in Rome, but I have noticed that a great number of these Spaniards are sincerely in harmony with the universal dimension of the Church, with the challenges of evangelization in
Africa, in Asia, in countries where Jesus is not yet known. This is not of course something new or exclusive to Spain. I have noticed it also in other countries. I have come to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit is very active, much more so than some statistical data that is published might seem to indicate.

3. **What is the current state of the apostolic work of Opus Dei, in the world, in Europe and in Spain?**

Your question reminds me of some words of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá regarding Opus Dei’s first steps. He used to speak of “the early times, when we never slowed down.” With God’s grace, we will never slow down. Seventy years have gone by, and each of the Prelature’s faithful feels as much urged on as at the beginning. New undertakings are springing up on all sides; we are beginning in new countries, although we are unable to go to all the places where the bishops are calling for us. The work of Opus Dei is developing, and growth requires, in a certain sense, being born again. For example, on September 12 I ordained the first priests from the Ivory Coast and from Trinidad-Tobago incardinated in the Prelature. As you can understand, that was a motive of particular joy for me and a marvelous feeling of a new beginning.

In Europe, the reality of Opus Dei has been established for many years, except in the countries of the East. More than half of the Prelature’s faithful are in Europe. Opus Dei was born in Spain and its growth there, thanks be to God, has been great. But I am convinced that even in Spain, as in other nations, we are just beginning. There is so much to be done.

I must confess that when I consider how the apostolic work of the Prelature is going, I use other instruments of measurement. The Prelature is going well when every one of its faithful is praying, working, and serving others in the place where he or she is, with a desire to be a good son or daughter of the Church, to sow the peace and joy of Christ in one’s family and among one’s colleagues and friends. These are realities that are difficult to measure, but they are what is really important.

4. **What criteria do you recommend for the public activity of Christians?**
My practice, which I learned from Blessed Josemaría, is to abstain from giving advice in these matters, beyond reminding people of the need to follow the ethical demands and inspiration of our Christian faith. One cannot hide one’s light beneath the bed for fear of clashing with a de-Christianized environment or with what some try to impose as “politically correct” even though it is not morally acceptable, or in order to safeguard selfish personal interests. Christians share with all citizens of good will the desire to serve the common good of society.

Recently Pope John Paul II received the Lithuanian bishops in Rome for their ad limina visit. Among other things, he reminded them that “the laity cannot be passive subjects in the Church.” Those words should serve to remind us of a basic criterion for the public activity of Catholics. A Catholic cannot be a passive subject in the public life of his country and of the world. We Christians are citizens of the society in which we live and we feel ourselves just as responsible as the rest, that is to say, protagonists, with all our fellow citizens, in the political, cultural, economic life of the country, as well as in public opinion and in all that configures, transforms and makes a human community move ahead.

A Christian should not be inhibited, nor limit himself to complaining. And, above all, he does not feel that the fullness of his Christian vocation is realized only in the private and individual realm. He is sensitive to problems, seeks solutions, tries to be generous, commits himself. Each one, I insist, shows his faith in whatever he does, with the freedom proper to a son or daughter of God. Blessed Josemaría says in Furrow that “if Christians really lived in conformity with our faith, it would be the greatest revolution of all times.” A revolution of justice, of charity, of peace.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Italian presentation of the book "IL Fondatore dell' Opus Dei"

The Italian edition of the first volume of Il fondatore dell'Opus Dei, by Andrés Vázquez de Prada, was formally introduced in Rome, Palermo, Turin, L'Aquila and Cortina d'Ampezzo during the past half year, after its initial presentation in Milan in June.

In the presentation ceremony for the book held in Rome on September 21 at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Leonardo Mondadori, the publisher, explained why he decided to publish the Italian edition of the book. “At the beginning of the twentieth century, few people of historical stature were alive, and at the end of the century there are even fewer, with the exception of Pope John Paul II. Therefore, an editorial house such as ours, which is not directly involved in publishing religious books, has decided to publish a series of volumes that will help public opinion to reflect on topics that entail substantial values.”

At the same gathering, Archbishop Dionigi Cardinal Tettamanzi of Genoa referred to the timeliness of this book published just before the beginning of the third millennium.

“In the encyclical Tertio Millennio Adveniente, the Pope pointed out the main objective of the Jubilee in the following simple yet demanding terms: the Jubilee’s goal is to awaken a true yearning for holiness in people. I think that reading a book that recounts the path of a saint will help to introduce all of us to his path, which was traced out by his interior life even before the foundation of Opus Dei. And I think that the great challenge of the present day world, particularly as regards our own continent, which the recent Synod of Bishops on Europe defined as deeply de-Christianized and paganized, is precisely the challenge of holiness.”

Also taking part in the discussion was Andrea Riccardi, professor of Christian history at the Terza University of Rome and the founder of the Community of St. Egidio. Professor Riccardi noted especially the meticulousness of the historical research carried out by the author and the richness of documentary sources employed. “Those precious personal notes and other direct testimonies cast light on the 2nd of October, 1928:
Madrid has been my Damascus, because it is here that the scales have fallen from the eyes of my soul... Faced with the marginalization of God in the contemporary world, Opus Dei’s Founder responded by holding up the goal of reaching the reality of God in the heart of ordinary life: The extraordinary thing for us is the ordinary: the ordinary done with perfection.”

The search for truth

In Palermo, the presentation of the book took place on October 15 in the auditorium of the School of Educational Sciences. One of the speakers, the writer Marta Brancatisano, focussed on the literary aspect of the writings of Blessed Josemaría used in this biography. “Josemaría Escrivá wrote a great deal from a very early age, but without any professional ambitions or pretensions. His first writings are marked by a real literary innovation, “the Catalinas” (Catherines[1]), brief thoughts set down on paper to express an interior experience, striving to clarify clues to a path that was still obscure to him. There are no stylistic pretensions or self-congratulations. The style is that of a diary; the ideas come without adornment, in their inescapable truth, as someone who is seeking within himself the path to recognize, in God, the truth about himself, his own goal. The authenticity of the search makes a powerful impact on the reader. The “Catherines” are not maxims or precepts that seek to dazzle anyone, but only the outlines of steps taken by the author—with his head lowered, like a donkey’s—in search of the truth. These are deeply sincere sketches of the life of a soul with only one passion: love for holiness. The fears, the sufferings, the desires, the falls, the defeats of a saint are consoling to the reader. And he is a special saint, since he has received the mission to show everyone precisely that it is possible to be a saint. In the face of this vocation, which is his life’s true vocation, his writings had a purely instrumental role. His literary skills are a secondary factor, at the service of a much more important objective.

If these and others can, why can’t I?

This was a question asked at the ceremony of presentation held in June at the Ambrosiana Library of Milan by Rev. Ennio Apeciti, the director of Milan’s Diocesan Office for the Causes of the Saints: “This book was the result of careful historical research that recreates effectively the social,
political, cultural, and even ecclesiastical and spiritual context of Josemaría Escrivá’s human experience. The book accomplishes this by having recourse to abundant autobiographical material, and has produced what one might call a new model of hagiography, in the literal sense of ‘writings of the saints,’ of ‘holy writings.’ Recording the first part of the life of a saint, it presents abundant material to encourage any reader of good will to undertake the path of sanctity. This is a path of imitation, in the Augustinian sense of ‘If these and others can, why can’t I?’ And this is the basic reason behind Causes of beatification and canonization. These are not carried out for the purpose of providing someone with a new celestial title, but so that the people of God, in whose midst a reputation for sanctity always arises, can have an example, a path—from among the infinite possible paths—of incarnating the Gospel.”

[1] The name is taken from St. Catherine of Siena.

Adamas publishing company of Cologne, Germany, has published a book entitled *Abba, Vater: Als Kinder Gottes leben nach der Lehre des seligen Josemaría Escrivá* (Abba, Father: Living as Children of God according to the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá), which includes contributions by various authors on the subject of divine filiation in the life and teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei.

*San José en la enseñanza del Beato Josemaría* (St. Joseph in the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría), by Laurentino María Herrán, has been translated into Polish and published in Krakow by W. Karmelitów Bosych.


Sat 2000, an Italian satellite television channel, dedicated a transmission of the program entitled “Vivendo parlando” (Speaking live) to Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. The broadcast included various segments taken from filmings of the Founder of Opus Dei.

A book entitled *Un mar sin orillas* (A Sea without Shores), by Antonio Rodríguez Pedrazuela, has been published by the Rialp publishing company of Madrid. It describes the beginnings and growth of the work of Opus Dei in the six countries of Central America.
News
Papal appointments of faithful of Opus Dei

The Holy Father has appointed:

Rev. Josep Ignasi Saranyana Closa: Member of the Pontifical Committee of Historical Sciences;

Msgr. Carlos José Errázuriz Mackenna: Consultor of the Congregation for Divine Cult and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Twentieth anniversary of La Sabana University

The twentieth anniversary of the founding of La Sabana University in Bogotá, Colombia, was celebrated on September 21. The university is a corporate apostolate whose Christian orientation is entrusted to the Prelature. In the presence of Archbishop Pedro Rubiano Saenz of Bogotá, the Papal Nuncio, Bishop Beniamino Stella, and the university’s Vicechancellor, Msgr. Hernan Salcedo Plazas, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei, a solemn Te Deum of thanksgiving was offered in the main oratory of the university campus.

Following the religious ceremony, in an academic convocation presided over by the Vice President of the Republic, Dr. Gustavo Bell Lemus, the Colombian Government awarded the Silver Cross of the National Order of Merit to the university and also the Order of Democracy in the degree of Commander. The Congress of the Republic also awarded the Congressional Order of Colombia to the university on September 27. In connection with the anniversary celebration, a number of cultural and sports events were organized in which other universities of Santa Fe de Bogotá also participated.

A few days earlier a new statue of Our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, a gift of the Chancellor of the University and Opus Dei’s Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarria, was installed in a shrine built on the campus. The statue of Mary, whose dress is in the traditional style of a region of Colombia
known as Cundiboyacense, appears seated with the child Jesus standing at her left side and supported by her. In her right hand Mary has an open book. The statue was carved in wood in the city of Santa Fe de Bogotá. The Chancellor wrote some words to the University on a picture of the new statue: “Mater pulchrae dilectionis, ora pro nobis! Sedes Sapientiae, adiuvans! I ask Blessed Josemaría to help everyone at La Sabana University to stay close each day to the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God and our Mother.”
INITIATIVES

- In Brief
Tradition and Growth in the "Social Action Program" of Kimbondo

On July 13, the Minister for Social Affairs of the Democratic Republic of the Congo presided over the presentation of a program of rural development for women in Kimbondo, a district adjacent to Kinshasa. The new program seeks to train

a large group of women as rural advisors so that they can contribute to improving the living standards of the other people in the area. This initiative is part of a broader project known as the Programme d’Action Sociale, which began in 1995.

Many of the participants in the new program are students of the Lycée Professionel Kimbondo, officially inaugurated in 1998 by the Minister of National Education.

Those living in Kimbondo are mostly people from rural areas who have been displaced to the capital in search of economic opportunities or means to educate their children. Unfortunately the situation they encounter in the city is not as bright as they had imagined. The grave economic and social problems provoked by the instability of the past decade have been aggravated by the recent war.

“We are especially moved by the situation of women in Kimbondo,” explains Nelly Tshela, a young Congolese lawyer who has worked in the Programme d’Action Sociale from its beginnings. “There’s an urgent need to help these women, living in such precarious conditions, and ruled by ancestral customs which put them in a position of inferiority. We have to do something to improve living conditions for the 12,000 people in the district.”

The women of Kimbondo are accustomed to spending their lives in the fields, and therefore at first often don’t see the need to learn new things and to spend time and effort in improving their skills. Most of them have never gone to school, and at best have received only the most rudimentary formation.
“We have very little in the way of means,” continued Tshela, “but we feel that we do have some ‘humanity,’ and what ‘humanity’ perhaps means is to apply a little common sense, so debased by all sorts of beliefs. Thus the transmission of a Christian vision of life, optimistic and enriching whatever is truly human, forms the backdrop of our project.”

Once the first group of students attending the courses of nutrition, hygiene, and French saw the importance of educating themselves, “they began to appreciate the idea of a higher quality of life,” says Nelly Tshela. “There are 6,000 women in the district. From the beginning our objective was to continually reach more and more of them. Since my first days at the university when I was becoming familiar with the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei, I became interested in learning more about the characteristics of women. Women need to be daring and dream of doing great things. ‘More’ is also an adverb frequently used by Blessed Josemaría.”

The initial group who began this activity was made up of only a few women. From the beginning they had the help of university students and others interested in taking part in this work, regardless of age or social class. “We tried to get them to understand,” explains the young lawyer, “that by helping people living in poverty, they would also enrich their own lives.”

“Our method?” Nelly Tshela asks rhetorically. “Waking up the women, one at a time. Only in this way, through dialogue, through learning to converse (to read and to write), do they learn to work, and horizons open up. Development in Kimbondo is possible, but it is necessary for the women to wake up. This has been our aim from the beginning. Development is not a matter of studying how to improve conditions but of doing, of giving oneself. At least this is how we see it. This optimistic “sporting spirit” is also something we owe to Blessed Josemaría. We try to teach these women to work, to work hard and well, with a Christian vision.”

“Today,” she concludes, “we can’t measure the impact that this social action is having. More than 100 women are taking part in the serious search for solutions. But I am sure that this searching is a sign that things are already improving.”
University of Navarre's School of Nursing

The University of Navarre’s School of Nursing began operations in 1954, at the same time as the University’s Medical School.

The Founder of Opus Dei encouraged the teaching of nursing at the university level and wanted the formation given to be on a high scientific, technical, and human level. Throughout his life, he often spoke of his great esteem for this profession, and of the great Christian influence nurses could have in society.

At that time, the Ministry of Education required that schools of nursing be integrated into medical schools. Therefore, the first Dean of the Medical School, Dr. Juan Jiménez Vargas, was also the first director of the School of Nursing. Three women formed the Board of Directors of the School: Dr. María Casal Wismer, María Jesús Domingo Casas and María Victoria Tabernero Palacios.

In 1961 the Clinica Universitaria (university hospital) of the University of Navarre was opened. The link between the School of Nursing and the university hospital was an important step forward since the responsibility for the care of the patients there permitted the development of the full array of human attitudes and skills that characterize the nursing professional and that acquire their deepest value and significance thanks to a Christian spirit of service and disinterested dedication to others.

The following years saw a growing development of the scientific formation of the nursing students, and a consolidation of the spirit that the University of Navarre always seeks to exemplify.

Profile of a profession

At the present time the School of Nursing has 612 students. The profile of those who graduate is that of a well-trained professional, highly sensitive to the human dimension of the patients, who shows initiative in detecting and resolving problems and in making decisions in the exercise of
her profession, together with a strong ethical background based on Christian principles.

An essential characteristic of the professional formation imparted is the recognition of the radical dignity of each human person, created by God and redeemed by Christ, and the view of work as a service to others. This service presupposes a demanding dedication to the patients’ medical care and a refined solicitude for all their needs.

Behind this outlook lie the teachings of Blessed Josemaría: “Children... the sick... As you write these words, don’t you feel tempted to write them with capitals? —The reason is that in little children and in the sick a soul in love sees Him!”[1]

Suffering, never far removed from the exercise of this profession, is a mystery which ultimately only has meaning and value in the light of Christ’s cross. Opus Dei’s Founder, the first Chancellor of this university, said on one occasion, “I think that being a nurse is a vocation especially well suited to a Christian. But for that vocation to be perfected, it is necessary that you be nurses who are well prepared scientifically, and that you have a great sensitivity to the patients’ needs and dignity.”[2]

Reflective practice

At present the plan of studies for the diploma in nursing provides for a three year course with obligatory core subjects and other optional subjects that enable students to shape their own studies.

A modular system is followed in which students alternate theoretical classes with practical sessions in the various hospital departments. The practical sessions are arranged so that the students are integrated in a natural way into the teams of nurses in each department. From the time that they arrive at the School, the students experience their professional field from within, participating actively. The course of studies is designed so that each student progressively acquires the level of practical competence that corresponds to their theoretical studies, developing ever more complex and specialized skills.

A special characteristic of the University of Navarre’s Nursing School is the emphasis it places on reflection as a part of the learning process. The
students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences in each part of the nursing program they are involved in, reflecting on and evaluating them. Thus the future nurses, with the help of personal tutoring, develop the competence and ethical criteria they will need in their profession.

The core of the practical rotation is carried out in the University Hospital, but it can also be done in other health institutions, both public and private, in the province of Navarre.

In addition, each student has the choice of voluntarily doing part of their work for credit in developing countries or in charitable institutions, thus exercising solidarity with and offering their expertise to more needy communities. This volunteer work is carried out in the summer with the financial aid of non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) and under the supervision of Nursing School faculty. These voluntary stints give them first hand experience of impoverished social situations and teach them to administer very limited resources.

Last summer, a group of Nursing School students did their volunteer practical work in two homes for the aged in Valpaços, in Portugal, and in a community in Chiclayo, Peru.

Specialized courses

The University of Navarre Nursing School organizes specialized courses for those who want to work in the following clinical areas: Cardiology, Surgery, Intensive Care, Pediatric Medicine, Psychiatry, Operating Room Procedures, Medical Hospitalization Units and Surgical Hospitalization Units.

In each of these specialties, each student receives between 200 and 300 hours of theory in the basics of the specialty and carries out up to 1800 hours of work in a hospital unit. The method of teaching continues to be individualized, which is why only a limited number of applications can be accepted each year.

The School, because of its inter-disciplinary character, has close relations not only with the Medical School, but also with the Schools of Pharmacy, Science (Biology, Nutrition and Dietetics, and Biochemistry), Philosophy, Education and Theology. These relationships facilitate the
integral formation of the students and help keep the faculty continually up
to date.


Some apostolic activities promoted by the faithful of the Prelature

The apostolic initiatives included in this section are educational, cultural, or social projects carried out by faithful of the Prelature and cooperators together with many other people, both Catholics and non-Catholics. Those carrying out these activities, with full personal (and financial) responsibility, are striving to provide answers to the needs of their country and society.

The Prelature, through agreements with the sponsors or through provisions of the statutes of the entity involved, helps provide a Christian outlook to these social initiatives, giving doctrinal guidelines and priestly attention, always with full respect for each one's freedom of conscience and without any discrimination in regard to race, religion or social condition.

In Brief

Macclesfield, England (Seminars on the Family)

*Maternity and Paternity: Complementary Vocations* was the theme of the last conference on the family held at Thornycroft Hall Conference Center in Macclesfield, Manchester, on October 10.
Ruth Liley, founding member of the “Full-Time Mothers” organization, and Louise Kirk, British delegate to the congress of the Pontifical Council for the Family which took place in Rome in May, chaired the meeting in which some fifty people took part.

Mrs. Liley, a journalist now dedicated to her family, gave a presentation in which she discussed the basic reasons for a re-evaluation of the role of women as full-time mothers. Among other reasons she pointed out that the mother is the best person to look after her own children. She stressed the need to encourage a more positive attitude among the public to promote legislation that protects the nucleus of the family represented by the mother.

Louise Kirk commented on some of the ideas dealt with at the congress of the Pontifical Council for the Family, which was centered on the principle that all fatherhood comes from God. The congress discussed the role of the father in the family, and specifically looked at the differences between maternal and paternal affection.

These family conferences have been held twice a year since 1993. Their objective is to promote the dignity of marriage and the family and to make known the love and concern that the Church feels for the family unit.

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Tallin, Estonia (Alfa Klubi)

In its second year of operation, Alfa Klubi in Estonia’s capital has forty active members. Almost a hundred boys, between the ages of ten and sixteen, have taken part in its regular and special activities.

Pluralism is a special characteristic of this initiative aimed at the formation of young boys. The club’s programs have attracted a mixture of Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian and Latvian students despite the fact that in Tallin, where only half of the population enjoys Estonian citizenship, it is unusual for young people to take part in joint activities with different linguistic and ethnic groups. The parents of club members are happy to see their sons enjoying friendships with boys of other ethnic backgrounds.
The regular activities of the club are classes in languages and computers. Weekends have been used for soccer training, which is done indoors given the harsh climate and the scarcity of daylight during the winter. At the same time each member has a tutor with whom he develops a systematic plan of academic counseling and personal development.

Thanks to the generous participation of parents, it was possible to organize a cross-country ski camp using the Mõedaku trails, a winter sport center near the city of Rakvere. In addition, a plan for the integration of ethnic minorities was developed.

Last summer, club members participated with the Finnish Club Kuunarikerho in an ecological camp. The meeting in the city of Vitasaari, only 120 miles from the Arctic Circle, allowed the members from Estonia to get a feel for the natural beauty of Finland and to take guided excursions to the national parks in the area. At the same time a plan of formation in human virtues was carried out.

Chicago, Illinois (Teens on the Scene '99)

On July 18, Concord Residence in Chicago was host for the second time to participants in the annual Teens on the Scene workshop. The Teens program offers young girls contact with the media and the opportunities of improving society offered by work in this field.

Teens is an initiative of Caroline Manalo, assistant animation producer in an Illinois company. Caroline says that it was some words of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá about the communications media that inspired the initiative. “I was very much encouraged and strengthened in my conviction that the communications media could contribute enormously to the improvement of society, if we professionals had a Christian vision of life. I hope that Teens is transmitting that vision and that optimism to the girls and encouraging them to dedicate themselves professionally to some aspect of the media.”

The participants meet daily with professionals in the world of
communication and visit a newspaper, the studios of a radio broadcasting company and a company that produces documentaries. The visit to a television studio is probably the most popular. There Jennifer Lyons, producer of a news program, explains how her Christian and moral convictions influence her work.

The program includes classes on marketing strategy, identification of audiences, promotional systems and ethics. The ethics classes deal with the right to information, respect for one’s private life, truth in the media and the influence of information on the human person.

Manila, Philippines (International Family Congress)

The First Asian and Pacific International Congress on the Family was held on August 13 and 14 in Manila. The congress, attended by 1300 people from ten countries around the world, was organized by the Educhild Foundation. Educhild was begun by a group of married couples to provide classes of family orientation based on the case study method.

 Speakers from the United States, France, Spain and the Philippines addressed the need for a regeneration of the family nucleus in order to reestablish values and virtues and to confront the crisis in today’s society. Dr. Bernardo Villegas, Dean of the School of Economics of the University of Asia and the Pacific, pointed out that the decline in population, with the consequent increase in the proportion of old people, is not a positive factor even in those countries with a high standard of living. Professor Jean-Didier Lecaillon, an economist from the University of Paris at Val de Varne, pointed out that the family is the best catalyst and producer of human capital. Professor Lecaillon also pointed out that the peace and welfare of the family should be a top priority of economists, politicians and government officials.

The congress, which was opened by Manila’s mayor, Jose Atienza Jr., concluded with the approval of a “Manila Declaration on the Family.”
members of the congress agreed in this declaration that family life must be
cultivated and enriched as an indispensable condition for personal and
collective development in society. One of the items in the declaration
encouraged the collaboration between parents and their children’s schools.

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Pamplona, Spain (Conference on Pope Paul VI)

“Modern man’s search for God according to the teachings of Pope Paul
VI” was the theme of a conference organized by the University of Navarre
and the Paul VI Institute of Brescia, Italy, which took place during the first
days of October at the University of Navarre.

The sessions were chaired by Cardinal Pio Laghi, Prefect of the
Congregation for Catholic Education. The Cardinal, after reading a
telegram sent by Pope John Paul II to those taking part, emphasized the
“exquisite sensitivity of soul of Pope Paul VI and his clear and accurate
perception of the suffering and unrest of modern man.” Other
presentations were made by Giuseppe Camadini, President of the Pope
Paul VI Institute; by Jose María Bastero, Rector of the University of
Navarre; and by Francisco Varo, Dean of the School of Theology of the
University of Navarre.

Fifty theologians, philosophers and historians took part in clarifying
how Pope Paul VI understood the difficulties faced by modern man in his
search for God and how he effectively communicated the truth and
nearness of the God who loves and saves us.

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Jerusalem (Social work and formation)

In July, a social development project was organized by Biranta Study
Center in Jerusalem and by the Aliseda Association of Madrid. The project
was carried out by university students from those two cities and took place simultaneously in three sites: a home for the aged, a hospital, and a Braille library for the blind. The work of the participants consisted of care for the fifty aged people in the home, repair work in the hospital, and remodeling and painting at the library.

Also, during the first months of the 1999-2000 academic year, Biranta began a course of family orientation and education of children which was attended by mothers of young families in the neighborhood. A course in fundamental questions of philosophy entitled *Dare to Know*, aimed at university women, was also organized. This initiative had as its objective to spread the teachings of the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* among both Christians and non-Christians.

**Posoltega, Nicaragua (International Work Camp)**

University students from Miravalles Student Center in Costa Rica, from Villa Fontana University Center in Nicaragua, and from Entremares University Center in Panama organized and carried out a work camp in Posoltega, Nicaragua, one of the areas most affected by Hurricane Mitch, in coordination with German, Italian and Spanish students. Almost a hundred students dedicated their summer vacation to this service project.

A group from Albalat University Residence in Valencia, Spain, took part in the construction of a school in the area known as “El Tanque.” Working with them were students from Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The latter took charge of staffing the school, which has seven classrooms constructed of wood with thatched roofs. The students from Costa Rica gave the classes prescribed by the children’s program of studies.

Students from Italy and the Canary Islands, with the help of Costa Ricans and Panamanians, worked in the village of “El Valle,” building houses for those left homeless and helping to enlarge a school. They also took charge of the school children, giving classes and organizing sports.
The German group worked on renovating a school in Valle Real that needed a lot of work.

During the work camp, an international university conference was held in which each group presented a report on social and academic activities carried out in their own country.

Campinas, Brazil (Pencil in Hand)

Vila Brandina is a slum area with several thousand residents in the western area of the city of Campinas. The ever-present poverty has an especially great impact on children, given the lack of basic hygiene and sufficient food.

The program entitled *Lápis na Mão* (Pencil in Hand) arose as a contribution to solving the educational problems of the area. The program provides supplementary classes and drills that increase the children’s capacity for thinking and for teamwork.

*Lápis na Mão* is run by students from the State University of Campinas who frequent the Castelo Cultural Center, in which these activities are organized. A large number of children attend the classes, which are held every Saturday. Catechism classes are also provided as well as recreational and sports activities.

In addition, a mobile medical clinic set up in connection with the *Lápis na Mão* program provides treatment to pupils and their families and gives classes in hygiene and first-aid to the people in Vila Brandina.

Barbastro, Spain (A Round-Table Discussion about Carmen Escriva de Balaguer)
On the occasion of the centenary of the birth of Carmen Escrivá de Balaguer, sister of the Founder of Opus Dei, the Entrearcos Cultural Center of Barbastro organized a round table on November 7. The participants provided a brief sketch of her personality and recalled biographical episodes of her life.

From the beginnings of Opus Dei, Carmen Escrivá participated in a very direct way in the mission which God had entrusted to her brother, fostering, with her dedication and work, the Christian family atmosphere that Blessed Josemaría saw as essential to Opus Dei. Carmen took charge of the beginnings of the domestic administration of the centers of Opus Dei, where she helped to provide the atmosphere of a home and of mutual service which is so helpful in the practice and development of Christian virtues.

Ana Sastre, a doctor specializing in nutrition and the author of a biography of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, recalled the family circumstances that surrounded the early years of Carmen's life: her birth in Barbastro, on July 16, 1899, and her later move to the cities of Logroño, where she studied for a career in teaching, and to Saragossa. Gloria Toranzo, a doctor in classic philology and a writer, described certain features of her character, emphasising her frankness, cheerfulness, faith and the courage that she showed in extraordinary moments during the Spanish civil war and throughout her whole life.

Margarita Valenzuela, a native of Madrid and mother of six children, explained how an acquaintance with the life of Carmen Escriva had enabled her to incorporate into her home a spirit of service and concern for others, and to provide, together with her husband, an atmosphere of loving participation in the various tasks of the home, which facilitated the education of her children.

The journalist Pilar Cambra moderated the session and recalled some stories about Blessed Josemaría's sister's good sense of humor and the joy that she experienced as a result of the apostolic spread of the Work.

The round table was attended by cooperators of Opus Dei, friends and their families.
Cologne, Germany (Priests Meeting of the Internationaler Priesterkreis")

The Thirtieth Meeting of Priests of the Internationaler Priesterkreis of Cologne, an initiative of a number of priests of the Prelature, took place from August 3 to 5 in the Maternushaus, a conference center in the diocese of Cologne. The theme of this year’s meeting was God the Father, which corresponded to the third year of the cycle on the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, in preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000.

Taking part, among others, were Professors Harald Wagner of Münster, Herbert Fendrich, of Essen, and Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz, of Dresden. Under the title “The Will of God,” the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Archbishop François Xavier Nguyên Van Thuân, gave a personal testimony of what his life had been like under the Communist regime in Vietnam. He was taken prisoner in 1975, when he was Auxiliary Bishop of Saigon. During thirteen years in prison, including periods of total isolation, he drew strength from his faith. In a press conference, he stated in connection with the events in Kosovo: “Neither arms nor threats, nor the communication media, but only the charity of Christ can change hearts. Only through dialogue, prayer and forgiveness can the ethnic conflicts be resolved.”

Some one hundred priests and seminarians took part in this annual meeting. They came from various dioceses of Germany, Austria, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. The get-togethers and personal exchanges helped to strengthen their own life of faith and their enthusiasm for an intense and optimistic pastoral work.

Santiago, Chile (The First Medical Building at the University of the Andes)
With more than two hundred people in attendance, the University Center for Medical Specialties, the first medical building at the University of the Andes, was opened on August 18.

The four story building of some 30,000 square feet includes forty medical offices and two pavilions for ambulatory surgery and medical procedures. On the top floor are class and study rooms for students and professors. The University Center for Medical Specialties is set up to provide care for 4,000 patients a month, at a low cost and with a high level of professional efficiency, combining university teaching with good quality treatment for the patient.
IN PACE
Suffrages for the Deceased

In the second half of 1999, 221 faithful of the Prelature and 17 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

The suffrages stipulated by Blessed Josemaria have been offered for these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example that they have left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work and all the ordinary circumstances of their lives into an occasion of loving God and of serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

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A study
The Example of the Early Christians in Blessed Josemaría’s Teachings

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Introduction

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s high regard for the first Christians is found even in his earliest writings. Already in his first book, Consideraciones Espirituales, he encouraged readers to become more deeply acquainted with the lives of the first faithful and to strive to adapt their conduct to those early models. He also had great esteem for the Fathers of the Church, as is apparent when reading his homilies. What is especially striking is that this interest in the early Christians is maintained, as we will see, throughout his whole life.

A first question to be clarified, although its answer might seem obvious, is the following: Who was Blessed Josemaría referring to when he spoke of “the early Christians”? From his writings we can see that he included in this term all those who lived in the period extending from the lifetime of “the Twelve,” the first followers of our Lord, up to the beginning of the fourth century, when the persecutions of Diocletian and Maximian took place. It can in fact be argued that the first three centuries of the Christian era represent a fairly clearly defined first stage in the life of the Church, which possessed specific characteristics of its own that changed significantly after the Edict of Milan in 313.

Another question to clarify is the social and cultural background of the Christians of the first centuries, keeping in mind that Christianity was born in the heart of the “oikoumene,” at a moment in history when Roman society was made up of very clearly delineated social strata. For the Founder of Opus Dei the answer is clear: “The reality of Opus Dei calls to mind that of the early Christians.... Each community of the faithful included people from all social levels and backgrounds: people converted to the faith of Christ, which was what joined them together. All the different professions were represented in those communities. There were doctors like Luke, lawyers like Zela, bankers like Erastus, teachers like Apollo,
artisans like Alexander, large and small-scale merchants, prison guards and their families, soldiers and government officials, a proconsul, Sergius Paulus, etc. There were rich and poor, slaves and freemen, civilians and soldiers like Sebastian.”[10]

The methodology we have adopted starts with looking at writings of the Founder of Opus Dei in which he mentions the early Christians, whether employing this particular expression or a similar one, or where he uses specific names of early Christians. We have also tried to provide a brief historical context for the period, without attempting to be exhaustive. Bibliographic references and clarifications are included in the notes.

We will begin by considering the sanctification of ordinary life among Christians of the first generations, viewed in light of Blessed Josemaría’s teachings. Special attention will be given to the main features of the universal call to sanctity in the midst of the world, followed by a consideration of the ordinary life of a Christian in the context of sanctifying one’s family and social life. Then we will briefly examine the apostolic dimension this entails.

1. Main characteristics of the vocation to holiness in the midst of the world

One of the most frequently repeated teachings of Blessed Josemaría is the call to holiness in the midst of the world. When asked about the vocation to Opus Dei, he explained this message very clearly. In an interview with an American journalist, he compared the vocation to Opus Dei to that of the first faithful. “If you want a point of comparison, the easiest way to understand Opus Dei is to consider the life of the early Christians. They lived their Christian vocation seriously, seeking earnestly the holiness to which they had been called by their baptism. Externally they did nothing to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens.”[11]

Of the many ideas this text suggests, we can focus our attention on the search for holiness.[12] But we have to understand this search as the response to God’s call. Blessed Josemaría kept very much in mind that holiness is a gift to God’s children,[13] to which one must correspond with humility. “It is not our own forces that save us and give us life; it is the grace of God. This is a truth which can never be forgotten. If it were, the
divinization of our life would be perverted and would become presumption, pride. And this would lead, sooner or later, to a breakdown of spiritual life, when the soul came face to face with its own weakness and wretchedness.”[14]

Holiness is not viewed as an abstract ideal, but as a reality incarnated in particular persons, each with his or her own name and way of acting. This is shown even in the fraternal behavior of the early followers of Christianity: “Greet all the saints. All the saints send you greetings. To all the saints who are at Ephesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Phillippi.’ What a moving name — saints! — the early Christians used to address one another!

“Learn how to treat your brothers.”[15]

We know the names of some of those “saints” and a number are even recognized as such by the Church.[16] But the immense majority are unknown to us, their fruitful lives having left no external mark in history.

a) The newness of Christianity

The newness of the Christian message was an important reality right from the start. It is not for nothing that the word “Gospel” (Evangelium), which has deep roots in primitive Christianity, has a connotation of newness.[17] This new life, stemming from the reception of baptism, is recognized as such not only by the early converts to Christianity, but also by the Jews and pagans.[18] The newness of Christianity can be understood better if we contrast it briefly with the contemporary religions of the first century. The religions of antiquity were closely attached to external cult, whether that of a particular ethnic group, as in the case of Israel, or that given to the gods of a polis (civitas), as was common in the Greek world. This cult entailed a close tie between the civil and the sacred.[19] Therefore Christianity, which also superceded many other aspects of pagan religiosity,[20] appeared to many as truly a nova religio (new religion).

Blessed Josemaría had a clear awareness of the newness of Opus Dei, which he compared to the novitas christiana of the first centuries: “This newness of ours, my children, is as old as the Gospel.... Thus the authentic spirituality of the Gospel was producing abundant fruits of holiness, in all the Christian environments of the early times.”[21]
On another occasion he did not hesitate to describe this newness, as an “old newness,”[22] since it shares in the perennial vitality of the divine: “This newness of the Work,” he wrote, “is not the newness of a mere human phenomenon. It is the newness of the things of God, who, like a good Father, provides his family with new things and old (cf. Mt 13:52). A newness, my daughters and sons, which does not grow old, because it is a participation in the only “good news” [buena-nueva ], and because it entails a marvelous return by the Christian faithful to the spirit with which the first Christians lived the message of salvation.”[23]

For Blessed Josemaría, the newness of Christianity stems from following Christ: “Jesus said that he is the Way and the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6), and invited everyone to follow him (cf. Mt 16:24). Thus there arose, from the earliest times of the Church, the desire to make a reality of the search for perfection traced out by the Gospel and practiced in an exemplary way by Jesus Christ himself: the life of personal holiness and of apostolic activity.”[24]

The above text shows clearly the close tie between following Christ and the pursuit of holiness. The early followers of our Lord carried this out in their lives, as can be seen in testimonies that have reached us, such as those of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna, among others.[25]

b) The radicalness of Christian life

Following Christ is also something new owing to the radicalness it entails, as we have pointed out in another article.[26] No one in either classic antiquity or among the Jews had ever dared to ask of his followers what our Lord demanded. Jesus asked his followers for great renunciation, even requiring that they give up home, brothers and sisters, father, mother, wife, children, lands.[27]

This radicality is pointed out by Blessed Josemaría, among other places, in his homily The Great Unknown: “In the Acts of the Apostles we find the early Christian community described in a single sentence, brief but full of meaning: ‘and they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the communion of the breaking of bread and in prayers’ (Acts 2:42).... This is a teaching that applies to any Christian, because we
are all equally called to sanctity. There are no second-class Christians, obliged to practice only a ‘simplified version’ of the Gospel.” [28] That is to say, the demands of the call to holiness affect every Christian; all are asked to strive for the perfection our Lord sets forth.[29] As he puts it in The Way: “You have the obligation to sanctify yourself. Yes, even you! Who thinks this is the exclusive concern of priests and religious?

“To everyone, without exception, our Lord said: ‘Be ye perfect, as my heavenly Father is perfect.’”[30]

To better understand the radical nature of the Christian vocation, we can consider the complete self-giving expressed by martyrdom. St. Ignatius of Antioch, on his way to Rome [to be martyred], wrote: “I am now beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible prevent me from reaching Jesus Christ.... Allow me to imitate the passion of my God.”[31] The Christians of the first centuries knew that the reception of baptism brought with it the duty of bearing witness, with their own lives, to the faith that they professed in Christ.[32]

The absolute self-giving of martyrdom helped foster, in turn, the ideal of a “spiritualized” or “unbloody” martyrdom, which also expresses the baptismal commitment lived to the full.[33] In this context, Blessed Josemaría, when asked about the vocation to Opus Dei, once said: “I can put it in very few words: to look for holiness in the middle of the world, ‘nel bel mezzo della strada’ as an Italian phrase has it. A person who receives from God the specific vocation to Opus Dei is convinced that he must achieve holiness in his own state in life, in his work, whether it be manual or intellectual, and he lives accordingly.... His vocation is the same as that which those fishermen, peasants, merchants or soldiers received in their heart as they sat at Jesus’ feet in Galilee and heard him say: ‘You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Mt 5:48).”[34]

This radical Christian commitment can be seen as a “spiritual” martyrdom, since it means identifying oneself with Christ in his perfect obedience to the will of God the Father. This is the key to understanding some points in The Way that speak of martyrdom: “How well you understand obedience when you write: ‘Always to obey is to be a martyr without dying!’”[35] “You want to be a martyr. I’ll place a martyrdom within
your reach: to be an apostle and not call yourself an apostle; to be a missionary — with a mission — and not call yourself a missionary, to be a man of God and to seem a man of the world: to pass unnoticed!”[36]

c) The central role of prayer

The sanctity to which each Christian is called, identifying ourselves with Christ, is not an inaccessible goal.[37] We can all attain it by putting into practice certain specific means, just as the early faithful did. This is the central focus of Blessed Josemaría’s teachings:

“To be holy isn’t easy, but it isn’t difficult either. To be holy is to be a good Christian, to resemble Christ. The more closely a person resembles Christ, the more Christian he is, the more he belongs to Christ, the holier he is.

“And what means do we have? The same means the early faithful had, when they saw Jesus directly or caught a glimpse of him in the accounts the Apostles and Evangelists gave of him.”[38]

Imitating and following Christ is the core of Christian asceticism. Therefore, the life of prayer holds a unique position among ascetical practices.[39] The Founder of Opus Dei once more directs our attention to our Lord himself and his early followers:

“Remember what the Gospels tell us about Jesus. At times he spent the whole night in an intimate conversation with his Father. The apostles were filled with love when they saw Christ pray;[40] and, after seeing this constant attitude in their master, they asked him: ‘Lord, teach us to pray’ (Lk 11:1) in this way. St. Paul spreads the living example of Christ everywhere when he urges the faithful to ‘be constant in prayer’ (Rom 12:12). And St. Luke portrays the behavior of the first Christians with a phrase that is like the touch of an artist’s brush: ‘they all, with one mind, continued steadfastly in prayer.”[41]

Blessed Josemaría wanted the example of the early Christians to be presented to young people. “Take special care to show them the life of prayer of the early Christians. The Acts are a delightful arsenal of anecdotes.”[42]

In his homily, “A Life of Prayer,” he says:
“The Acts of the Apostles describe a scene I love to contemplate because it gives us a clear, abiding example of prayer: ‘They persevered, all of them, in the apostles’ teaching, in their fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.’ We are told this time and again in the passage narrating the lives of the first followers of Christ. ‘All these, with one mind, gave themselves up to prayer’ (Acts 1:14). Again, when Peter was imprisoned because he had boldly preached the truth, they decided to pray. ‘There was a continual stream of prayer going up to God from the Church on his behalf’ (Acts 12:5).

“Prayer was then, as it is today, the only weapon, the most powerful means, for winning the battles of our interior struggle. ‘Is one of you sad?’ asks St. James. ‘Let him pray’ (Jas 5:13). St. Paul sums it up by saying, ‘Pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess 5:17). Never get tired of praying.”

This emphasis on the importance of a “life of prayer” is sometimes expressed as the need for “constant prayer,” or “prayer that becomes continual.” We are urged to strive for an uninterrupted conversation with God that leads a Christian to divine contemplation. Or as he also says: “Prayer then becomes continuous, like the beating of our heart, like our pulse. Without this presence of God, there is no contemplative life. And without contemplative life, our working for Christ is worth very little, for vain is the builder’s toil if the house is not of the Lord’s building.”

2. Ordinary life as the sphere of sanctification

There are many references to the sanctification of a Christian’s ordinary life in the writings and preaching of Blessed Josemaría. It is there, in the midst of one’s ordinary occupations, that one is called to strive for holiness. In his homily “Working for God,” he cites a well-known passage from the so-called Epistle to Diognetus: “Savor these words of an anonymous author of those times, who sums up the grandeur of our vocation as follows: Christians, he writes, ‘are for the world what the soul is for the body. They live in the world, but they are not worldly, like the soul is in the body, but is not corporeal. They live among all peoples, like the soul is in all parts of the body.... And it is not lawful for Christians to abandon their mission in the world, just as the soul may not separate itself voluntarily from the body.’” Thus it is in the sphere of one’s ordinary life
that a Christian has to put into practice the means that will enable him to carry out his sanctifying task.\[^{50}\]

a) *Sanctification in family life*

The early Christian families are seen by Blessed Josemaría as a model for families today.\[^{51}\] “There is perhaps no better model for a Christian couple than that of the Christian families of apostolic times: the centurion Cornelius, who obeyed the will of God and in whose home the Church was made accessible to the gentiles; Aquila and Priscilla, who spread Christianity in Corinth and Ephesus and who cooperated in the apostolate of St. Paul; Tabitha, who out of charity attended to the needs of the Christians in Joppa. And so many other homes and families of Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Romans, in which the preaching of our Lord’s first disciples began to bear fruit.”\[^{52}\]

When asked in an interview about the importance of teaching children to lead a life of piety, Blessed Josemaría answered: “I think it is precisely the best way to give children a truly Christian upbringing. Scripture tells us about those early Christian families which drew new strength and new life from the light of the Gospel. St. Paul calls them ‘the church in the household’ (1 Cor 16:19).”\[^{53}\]

He inculcated in his children the essential need for Opus Dei’s family spirit. “All of us who belong to Opus Dei, my children, form a single home. The reason that we constitute a single family is not based on the fact of living beneath a single roof. Like the early Christians, we are *cor unum et anima una* (Acts 4:32). No one in the Work should ever feel the bitterness of indifference.”\[^{54}\] This strong sense of unity is closely linked to understanding the Work as a part of the Church,\[^{55}\] which tries to be faithful to its specific vocation.\[^{56}\]

But at the same time that he vigorously stresses the unity of the Work, Blessed Josemaría points to the need to establish small Christian communities — the “church in the household” or “domestic churches” of St. Paul — around a few families. “In this way,” he wrote, “we will form small Christian communities at all levels of society, which are a true source of fraternal life and charity, of evangelical love.”\[^{57}\]

Virginity embraced as a state of life *propter regnum caelorum*.\[^{58}\] was also
found in the Christian families of the first centuries. The early Christians who lived as virgins did so in their own home surroundings, without separating themselves from the world. The Founder of Opus Dei referred to this precedent in an Instruction addressed to his children:

“Before they place us,” he said, “in this juridical mold, they have to realize, and we must too, that the first Christian faithful, including those ascetics and virgins who personally dedicated their lives to the service of the Church, did not close themselves up in a convent. They remained in the midst of the world like their fellow men and women. This is our case, since there is no reason to differentiate ourselves in anything from our companions and fellow citizens.”

And a little further on, in the same Instruction, he explains why some members of Opus Dei live celibacy: “Always remember that it is Love, the Love of loves, that is the reason for our celibacy. We are not bachelors, because the confirmed bachelor is a sad creature who knows nothing about love.” Celibacy, he says elsewhere, provides “greater freedom of heart and of movement, to dedicate oneself permanently to conducting and supporting apostolic undertakings. This is also true in the lay apostolate.”

There is abundant testimony that in the first centuries of Christianity the ordinary faithful undertook a life of celibacy and virginity for the same reasons that Blessed Josemaría mentions here.

b) Holiness in social life

Blessed Josemaría saw in the varied make-up of society rich possibilities of sanctity for Christians living in all epochs, beginning with the first Christians. He wrote in one of his Letters: “Just as among the first followers of Christ, all of current-day society is present in our Supernumeraries, and always will be. There are intellectuals and businessmen; professional people and craftsmen; entrepreneurs and workers; diplomats and people engaged in commerce, finance, journalism, agriculture, entertainment and sports. There are young and old, healthy and sick. It is a marvelous “unorganized” organization, like life itself. There is also true and authentic specialization
in apostolate because all honest and noble human occupations can become apostolic and divine."[65]

Those familiar with the writings of the Founder of Opus Dei will see in these words the central reality that has to be sanctified according to the spirit of Opus Dei: ordinary work.[66] As we read in Furrow: “You say it helps you a lot to wonder how many businessmen have become saints since the time of the early Christians. And you want to show that it is also possible today. Our Lord will not abandon you in that effort."[67]

We see here, as in many other areas, that Blessed Josemaría, after pointing to the example of the early Christians, immediately relates it to men and women of today. His interest in the first followers of Christ, much more than purely “theoretical,” is driven by his apostolic eagerness to reach as many souls as possible. “The man of faith sees life, in all its dimensions, from a new perspective: that which is given us by God.... That is the reason why you must strive for holiness... contributing at the same time to the sanctification of others, your fellow men; sanctifying your work and your environment.”[68]

Although we have already alluded to it, it is perhaps useful here to recall the immense difficulties the early faithful had to overcome in the cultural and political atmosphere of the Roman empire. These included persecution[69] and martyrdom[70] throughout a period of three centuries; attacks by the intellectual élite, especially by Fronton of Cirta, Celsus and Porphyry;[71] ridicule by authors such as Lucian;[72] condemnation by public opinion;[73] accusations of atheism, foreign cults, charlatanism, magic, cannibalism, etc.[74] The Christian response, although varied in its details, is unequivocal: to proclaim the truth, fulfilling Christ’s command,[75] even if this leads to death.

3. Apostolic expansion

Proclaiming Christ’s truth was the early Christians’ great mission. Therefore it was also one of the great attractions that Blessed Josemaría found in them. For him this apostolic zeal was an example for those of our time as well: “To follow in Christ’s footsteps, today’s apostle does not need to reform anything, but even less has he to take no part in the
contemporary affairs going on around him. He has only to act as the first Christians did, and give life to his environment.”[76]

The Founder of Opus Dei, as did the early Christians, saw in religious ignorance one of the greatest obstacles confronting the spread of the faith.[77] “In our life we are repeating the life of the early Christians. We too will often find on our way the most dismal religious ignorance, which demands of us a deep and constant apostolate of doctrine. And this not only among the pagans of our time, but also among more than a few who would be upset if we did not call them Catholics.”[78]

The apostolic efforts of the first Christians was based on the personal apostolate of each of our first brothers and sisters in the faith.[79]

“This is how the first Christians acted. Their supernatural vocation did not provide them with social or human programs to carry out. But they were penetrated by a spirit, by a conception of life and the world, that could not fail to have consequences in regard to the society in which they moved.

“With a personal apostolate similar to our own, they went about making converts. During his captivity, Paul was already sending greetings to the churches from the Christians who lived in Caesar’s household (Phil 4:22). Doesn’t St. Paul’s letter to Philemon move you? It is a living testimony of how the leaven of Christ, without directly intending it, had given a new meaning, through the influence of charity, to the structures of that society based on slavery? (cf. Philem 8-12; Eph 6:5ff; Col 3:22-25; 1 Tim 6:1 and 2; 1 Pet 2:18ff).

“Tertullian, a little more than a century later, wrote: We are of yesterday and already we fill the world and all your places: the cities, the islands, the towns, the municipalities, the councils, the very army camps, the tribunals, the assemblies, the palace, the senate, the forum. We have left you only your temples (Tertullian, Apologeticus, 37).”[80]

Although these words of Tertullian have to be taken with some caution, given the African writer’s vehementia cordis, it is beyond doubt that the expansion of Christianity by the end of the second and the beginning of the third century was very extensive, within the confines of the Roman Empire.[81] Blessed Josemaría sees in Tertullian’s words an example of the
efficacy of the personal apostolate practiced by our first brothers and sisters in the faith.

Personal apostolate means giving witness with one’s own life to the faith that one professes. This subject has deep biblical [82] and patristic roots,[83] and touches upon a capital point of the Christian message: the consistency between faith and practice in the life of Christ’s follower. As Blessed Josemaría wrote about his married children: “Thus, with a silent and almost invisible personal apostolate, they bring to all social sectors, public and private, the witness of a life similar to that of the first Christian faithful.”[84]

But we must not forget that Christian witness is nourished and fostered by charity. This is how Blessed Josemaría put it in his 1967 homily, *The Strength of Love*: “How well the early Christians practiced this ardent charity which went far beyond the limits of mere human solidarity or natural kindness. They loved one another, through the heart of Christ, with a love both tender and strong. Tertullian, writing in the second century, tells us how impressed the pagans were by the behavior of the faithful at that time. So attractive was it both supernaturally and humanly that they often remarked; ‘See how they love one another’ (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 39, 7 (PL 1,471)).”[85]

Nevertheless, witness has to be accompanied by words, as we see in the life of Christ himself. Inspired by his example, the first Christian generations learned to carry out a personal apostolate of dialogue.[86] As the Founder of Opus Dei told his children:

“We could continue turning the pages of the Gospel and consider so many conversations that Jesus had with men and women: his whole life was a continual dialogue in search of souls. The first Twelve, in preaching the Gospel, carried on a marvelous conversation with all the people that they met, that they sought out, on their journeys and apostolic travels. There would be no Church today if the apostles had not undertaken this supernatural dialogue with all those souls. For Christian apostolate comes down to this: *ergo fides ex auditu, auditus autem per verbum Christi* (Rom 10:17); faith comes from hearing, and hearing from preaching the word of Christ.
“How well the first Christian generations understood this, whom I like to speak about so much, because they are a model for our vocation!”[87]

Blessed Josemaría expresses his admiration for another example of the apostolic efforts of the first Christian generation in his homily That All May be Saved:

“This is a good moment to recall an event that shows the wonderful apostolic zeal of the early Christians. Scarcely a quarter of a century had passed since Jesus had gone up to heaven and his fame was already being spread in many cities and towns. In the city of Ephesus a man arrived, Apollo by name, ‘an eloquent man, well grounded in the Scriptures. He had had instruction in the name of the Lord; and, with a spirit full of zeal, used to preach and teach about the life of Jesus accurately enough, although he knew of no baptism except that of John’ (Acts 18:24-25).

“A glimmer of Christ’s light had already filtered into the mind of this man. He had heard about our Lord and he passed the news on to others. But he still had some way to go. He needed to know more if he was to acquire the fullness of the faith and so come to love our Lord truly. A Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla, hear him speaking. They are not inactive or indifferent. They do not think: ‘This man already knows enough; it’s not our business to teach him.’ They were souls who were really eager to do apostolate and so they approached Apollo and ‘made friends with him, and gave him a fuller explanation of the way of the Lord’ (Acts 18:26).”[88]

The Founder of Opus Dei’s commentary on this passage from the Acts of the Apostles shows his admiration for the vigorous and determined apostolic zeal of these two early Christians. The same determination is seen also in the martyrs, who take advantage of this ultimate moment to bring even their persecutors to Christ.[89]

Personal apostolate, since it is based on love, will also be marked by the enthusiasm proper to one who has discovered the immense riches of the Christian message. In this regard Blessed Josemaría writes: “I think so highly of your devotion to the early Christians that I will do all I can to foster it, so that you — like them — will put more enthusiasm each day into that effective apostolate of discretion and confidence.”[90]
One final question is that of the results of all apostolic endeavors. Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá answers with great realism, based on the assurance of his own experience: “The effectiveness of our apostolate always depends on our effort to be saints. And sanctity today requires the same means as in the time of the early Christians: there are no others.”[91]

Concluding summary

A first impression that arises from reading the above texts from Blessed Josemaría is their almost direct contact with Christ’s earliest followers. One has the sensation of having overcome the barrier of time. The freshness and warmth of his references shows that the Founder of Opus Dei has found a deep affinity between his own spiritual experiences and the model they represent. The same is true of his commentaries on Scripture passages, especially those from the Acts of the Apostles, that feature the apostolic steps of Christ’s first followers.

The witness of the early faithful regarding the sanctification of ordinary work shows a Christian life that combines the attractiveness of something newly born with the total response our Lord required of his followers. Blessed Josemaría was fully convinced that the call to sanctity in the first century was the same as in our days, not only in regard to its intrinsic nature, but also in regard to the means needed to attain it. The same is true of the demands of Christian life. The holiness lived by our first brothers and sisters in the faith was based on baptism, which brought with it a radical dedication that led them even to the point of martyrdom. Blessed Josemaría also stresses that the first Christians were called to holiness in the midst of the world, that is to say, in their ordinary life and among people of all social states, and often amid serious political and social upheavals. It is this fullness of Christian life that Msgr. Escrivá sees reflected in the faithful of Opus Dei.

In the early Christians’ apostolic efforts, Blessed Josemaría found a clear model for our own times, validated by the positive results attained in the first three centuries. We see in our first brothers and sisters in the faith the marvelous witness of people who lived Christ’s message in all its demands, and who communicated it from person to person in their own family and social environment.
This is how he put it in 1933: “Our highest ambition has to be to live as Jesus our Lord lived; as the first faithful did, without any division on the basis of blood, nationality, language or opinion” (Letter of July 16, 1933, no. 19).

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Consideraciones Espirituales, Imprenta Moderna, Cuenca 1934, p. 99. This point is repeated in its entirety in The Way, no. 925.


The last written reference that we have found is in a homily, “Marriage, a Christian Vocation,” given at Christmas, 1970 (in Josemaría Escrivá, Christ Is Passing By, Dublin 1985, nos. 29-30). Near the end of his earthly life, he once more reminded his children in Opus Dei: “They can say of you what was said of the first Christians: see how they love one another!” (Get-together, February 19, 1975 in Guatemala).


We can deduce the end-point of this period from the mention (cf. note 10 below) of St. Sebastian in the Instruction of December 8, 1941, no. 90, note 128. This saint suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Maximian, ca. 304.

Some authors, such as A. Hamman, limit the term “early Christians” to those who lived during the first two centuries, as is shown by the title of a well-known book of his: La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens (95/197), Hachette, Paris, 1971.


[32] St. Ignatius of Antioch himself noted this disposition of the Christian: “Unless it is our choice to die, through him, unto his passion, his life is not in us” (*Magnesians*, 5 *ibid.* cf. *Ephesians*, 10 *Ibid.*).

[33] This is how St. Clement of Alexandria expressed it in the second century: “If martyrdom consists in acknowledging God, the soul who lives purely in the knowledge of God, who obeys his commandments, is a martyr in life and in word... This man is blessed, because he does not undergo ordinary martyrdom, but a gnostic (spiritual) martyrdom, letting himself be guided in accord with the Gospel, for the love of the Lord” (*Stromata*, IV, 4, 15 [GCS 52,255]). We should explain that Clement uses the word “gnostic” here in the genuine sense of “Christian gnosis,” that is
“authentic knowledge of God.” This is something totally different from the heterodox gnostics, whom Clement himself had to battle against in his own city of Alexandria.

[34] Conversations, no. 62.


[36] Ibid., no. 848.


[38] J. Escrivá de Balaguer, The Forge, no. 10. One could also cite here The Way, no. 470; Letter March 19, 1967, no. 139.


[40] The iconographic representation of Christ at prayer had an enormous influence on Christian art of the early centuries (cf. H. Leclercq, s.v., “orante,” in Dictionnaire D’Archeologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie, 12, 2291-2322).

[41] Christ Is Passing By, no. 119.

[42] Instruction, January 9, 1935, no. 258.


A quick glance at his homilies published in *Christ Is Passing By and Friends of God* is sufficient to reach this conclusion.

*Friends of God,* no. 63. The quotation reproduced in the text is taken from the *Epistle to Diognetus,* 6 (*The Fathers of the Church: The Apostolic Fathers,* p. 362.).


*Christ Is Passing By,* no. 30. In another place he quotes a text from Tertullian (*Ad uxorem,* II,8,6 [CCL 1,393-394]) that describes the excellence of Christian marriage (*Ibid,* no. 29).

*Conversations,* no. 103. In the New Testament we find references to several “churches in the household” or “domestic churches”: the one that gathered in the house of Stephen (1 *Cor* 1:16); in the house of Philemon (*Philem* 2); in the house of Cornelius (*Acts* 16:15); that of Lydia (*Acts* 16:31); that of Onesiphorus (2 *Tim* 1:16). The activity of St. Ignatius of Antioch also must have been carried out house by house (cf. *Smyrneans,* XIII, 1 [Fpatr 1, 178-180]). This situation lasted throughout the second century, as Justin testifies. In the Acts of his martyrdom, when questioned
by the Prefect Rusticus about the place where Christians gather, Justin answered “Wherever each one prefers and is able to” (Acta Justini et soc, III, 1 [BAC 75,312]).

[54] Letter May 6, 1945, no. 23.

[55] The specific expression that the Founder of Opus Dei used to define the Work was: “Opus Dei is a small portion of the Church.” Pedro Rodriguez, “The Place of Opus Dei in the Church,” in Pedro Rodriguez, Fernando Ocariz, and Jose Luis Illanes, Opus Dei in the Church, (Scepter, Princeton, 1994), p. 1.


[57] Ibid., no. 85. This passage of the Instruction is supplemented by note 155 written by Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, which explains its meaning: “This is a question, really, of a return to the early times of Christianity, when the faithful were cor unum et anima una (Acts 4:32). Embued with this evangelical affection, they gathered in each others’ homes, to give praise and thanksgiving to God; to receive instruction, listening to the word of God, explained in a manner appropriate to each little community; and to make plans for apostolate and proselytism. These are precisely the purposes of the gatherings in the homes of our Supernumerary brothers, a true fountain of fraternal life and charity.


[59] Cf. Mt 19:12. Virginity and celibacy were very much esteemed in the early Church. We could mention some statements by Clement of Rome, Epístola Corintios, I, 38, 2 (Fpatr 4,120); Ignatius of Antioch, Smyrneans, XIII, 1 (Fpatr 1,176-180); Hermas, Pastor, Visiones I, 2, 4, II, 3, 2 (Fpatr. 6,66,78); Semblances, IX, 29, 1; IX, 31, 3 (Fpatr 6,274; 276-278); (CSEL 2,44-45); Cyprian, On the attire of virgins, 3-6 (CSEL 3/1, 189-192); Methodius of Olympus, The Banquet, The Hymn (SC 95, 310-321).

[60] The birth of monasticism, with its consequent separation from the world, is a later phenomenon which had its origin at the end of the 3rd

[61] *Instruction*, December 8, 1941, no. 81.


[63] *Conversations*, no. 92.

[64] As a sample we could cite what Athenagoras wrote in the second century: “It is even easy to find many men and women among us who have reached old age as celibates, in the hope of attaining a greater intimacy with God” (*Legation*, 33).


An echo of this condemnation is found in Tertullian, Apologeticum, III, 1 (CCL 1,91).


Mk 16: 15. We also have the witness of the Christian apologists of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. As an example of this we can cite a text from Aristides: “[The Christians] are ready to give their lives for Christ because they keep his commandments firmly, living justly and in a holy way according to what they were commanded by the Lord God, always giving thanks for food and drink and for all other goods.... This is indeed the way of truth which leads those who travel it to the eternal kingdom promised by Christ in the life to come.” (Apología, XV, 10-11 [BAC 116, 131]).

Furrow, no. 320. The same idea is expressed in The Way, no. 376.

St. Clement of Alexandria already realized in his epoch that “the only evil is ignorance” (Stromata, VI, 113, 3 [GCS 52,488]).

Letter of August 1953, no. 19. The need to teach doctrine also led him to consider the field of public opinion in this regard (Letter of April 30, 1946, no. 73).

Cf. G. Bardy, Conversion to Christianity During the First Centuries, cit., pp. 294-307.

Letter of January 9, 1959, no. 22.


[90] *The Way*, no. 971. An example of the zeal of the early Christians is that found in St. Luke’s story of Cleophas and his companion from Emmaus, which gave rise to point 917 of *The Way*: “Nonne cor nostrum ardens erat in nobis, dum loqueretur in via? ‘Was not our heart burning within us, while he spoke to us on the way?’

[91] “If you are an apostle, these words of the disciples of Emmaus should rise spontaneously to the lips of your professional companions when they meet you along the ways of their lives.”