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
A Centennial’s Meaning

The apostles had tried to cure an epileptic boy, but all their attempts met with failure. What Jesus could easily accomplish proved to be impossible for his disciples. Finally Christ arrived and expelled the demon, restoring the youth at once.

“Why could we not cast it out?” the disciples asked afterwards. “Because of your little faith,” Jesus replied. “For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move hence to yonder place,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.”[1]

Blessed Josemaria Escriva commented on this gospel passage in *The Way*, inviting each reader to make it a reality in his own life through the ideals of sanctity and apostolate. *Si habueritis fidem, sicut granum sinapis!* “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed!...”

What promises are contained in this exclamation of the Master!”[2]

Like those disciples, anyone at times can see resolutions and undertakings come to naught. One could even be tempted to think that it’s impossible to contribute positively to the progress of history, even in the small portion that each of us is called to live out. What can one person do in the face of history’s march and the inexorable laws of nature and society? Isn’t it naive to hope to positively shape the future, not to mention the world’s destiny?

“For freedom Christ has set us free.”[3] Aware of this, a Christian knows that his every choice either builds up or wears away the Christian orientation of his age. The temptation to lose heart betrays a weak faith, which yields the insipid fruit of mediocrity. “Many great things depend—don’t forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants,”[4] wrote Blessed Josemaria. The faith of Christ’s disciples, even if no bigger than a grain of mustard, enables divine grace to act through human actions, through the exercise of each one’s creative freedom, and to work miracles, to move mountains, to change the world.

The centennial of Blessed Josemaria’s birth offers us a heroic example of how to overcome all kinds of hindrances to carrying out a God-given mission. Throughout his life he could have appealed to many good reasons...
to forsake the ideal God had planted in his heart. But he brushed them all aside and struggled to correspond to divine grace. That’s why today his life is an example of someone who sought to direct to Christ the course of history. Our Lord’s promise is bountifully fulfilled in his life: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.”[5]

“Don’t let your life be sterile. Be useful. Blaze a trail.”[6] Whenever a Christian, moved by grace, responds with faith, his own life is transformed. But the benefits also overflow onto the world around him. The fast-approaching centennial of the birth of Opus Dei’s founder is a call to both the Prelature’s faithful and to so many others who find in his example a stimulus and source of light. All of us feel urged to contemplate not only his determination, his docility to the Holy Spirit, in seeking union with God in his own life, but also the impact of his deeds and teachings on society.

Dwelling on his life will prompt each of us to a renewed resolution to conform our own life to Christ’s and to take up our apostolic mission: “seeking holiness in the middle the world,”[7] with no concessions to worldliness. The benefits flowing from the centennial’s celebration should be, first, personal decisions to draw closer to God, to strengthen one’s own Christian life, to serve others generously, helping them to seek Christ, to find Christ, to deal with Christ, to love Christ.

Secondly, we are all asked to reflect more deeply on Blessed Josemaría’s influential message, striving to better grasp its content and explore its myriad applications to present-day circumstances. The richness of his spiritual legacy, teaching men and women how to sanctify the temporal order, and the undertakings born of that spirit’s warmth are there for all to see. The centennial is a marvelous occasion for those of us with a greater responsibility for continuing Blessed Josemaría’s mission to delve more deeply, more daringly, into that treasure of doctrine and deeds of service.

God entrusted Opus Dei’s founder with a charism and a specific spirit. In the warmth of their light, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo said in 1993, “countless fruits of Christian life have matured at all social levels, thanks to God’s grace. Stirred by his preaching on the universal call to holiness and apostolate, an ever greater, more vigorous mobilization of Christians committed to radically following Christ in daily life has arisen. Every corner
of the world has witnessed the birth and growth of a great variety of beneficent and educational undertakings. What Blessed Josemaría taught has been transformed into realities, inspiring so many ordinary Christians to glorify God and serve all men and women with their work.”[8]

The centennial of his birth invites us to reflect on the already substantial fruit of the message proclaimed by Blessed Josemaría, “a man hungry for God and therefore a great apostle.”[9] Therein we discover the transforming power of grace and also, as a spur to our hope, an impressive example of the fruitfulness attained by those who heed Christ’s voice: Duc in altum! “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”[10]

HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
- Review of Other Documents
Address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota (February 1, 2001)

1. The opening of the new judicial year of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota offers me an appropriate occasion to meet you once again. In greeting all present with affection, I am particularly pleased to express to you, dear Prelate Auditors, officials and advocates, my heartfelt appreciation of the prudent and strenuous work you devote to the administration of justice in the service of this Apostolic See. With professional skill you endeavor to safeguard the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage and, in short, the sacred rights of the human person in accordance with the age-old tradition of the Rotal Tribunal.

I thank His Excellency the Dean for voicing and expressing your sentiments and fidelity. His words fittingly allowed us to relive the Great Jubilee which has just ended.

2. Families, in fact, were among those who played a leading role during the Jubilee days, as I pointed out in the Apostolic Letter Novo millennio ineunte (cf. n. 10). There I recalled the risks to which the family institution is exposed, stressing that “this fundamental institution is experiencing a radical and widespread crisis” (n. 47). Among the most difficult challenges facing the Church today is that of a pervasive culture of individualism, which tends, as His Excellency the Dean put it so well, to limit and restrict marriage and the family to the private sphere. Therefore, I think it appropriate this morning to revisit several themes that I dwelt on in our previous meetings (cf. Addresses to the Rota, 28 January 1991: AAS, 83, pp. 947-953; and 21 January 1999: AAS, 91, pp. 622-627), to reaffirm the traditional teaching about the natural dimension of marriage and the family.

The Church’s Magisterium and canonical legislation abound with references to the natural character of marriage. In Gaudium et Spes the Second Vatican Council, after first stating that “God himself is the author of marriage and has endowed it with various benefits and ends” (n. 48), addresses several problems of conjugal morality by referring to “objective
criteria drawn from the nature of the human person and of his acts” (n. 51). For their part, both of the Codes I promulgated affirm in their definition of marriage that the “consortium totius vitae” is “by its very nature ordered to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children” (CIC, can. 1055; CCEO, can. 776, 1).

This truth, in the climate created by an ever more marked secularization and a thoroughly privatistic approach to marriage and the family, is not only disregarded but openly challenged.

3. Many misunderstandings have beset the very idea of “nature.” The metaphysical concept, referred to by the Church documents cited above, has been particularly neglected. There is a tendency to reduce what is specifically human to the cultural sphere, claiming a completely autonomous creativity and efficacy for the person at both the individual and social levels. From this viewpoint, the natural is merely a physical, biological and sociological datum to be technologically manipulated according to one’s own interests.

This opposition between culture and nature deprives culture of any objective foundation, leaving it at the mercy of will and power. This can be seen very clearly in the current attempts to present de facto unions, including those of homosexuals, as comparable to marriage, whose natural character is precisely denied.

This merely empirical conception of nature makes it radically impossible to understand that the human body is not something extrinsic to the person, but constitutes, along with the spiritual and immortal soul, an intrinsic principle of that unitary being which is the human person. This is what I explained in the Encyclical Veritatis Splendor (cf. nos. 46-50: AAS, 85 [1993], pp. 1169-1174), where I stressed the moral relevance of this doctrine, so important for marriage and the family. In fact, one can easily search in false spiritualities for an alleged confirmation of what is contrary to the spiritual reality of the marital bond.

4. When the Church teaches that marriage is a natural reality, she is proposing a truth evinced by reason for the good of the couple and of society, and confirmed by the revelation of Our Lord, who closely and explicitly relates the marital union to the “beginning” (Mt 19:4-8) spoken of
in the Book of Genesis: “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27), and “the two shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

The fact, however, that the natural datum is authoritatively confirmed and raised by Our Lord to a sacrament in no way justifies the tendency, unfortunately widespread today, to ideologize the idea of marriage—nature, essential properties and ends—by claiming a different valid conception for a believer or a non-believer, for a Catholic or a non-Catholic, as though the sacrament were a subsequent and extrinsic reality to the natural datum and not the natural datum itself evinced by reason, taken up and raised by Christ to a sign and means of salvation.

Marriage is not just any union between human persons that can be formed according to a variety of cultural models. Man and woman experience in themselves the natural inclination to be joined in marriage. But marriage, as St Thomas states so clearly, is natural not because “it results by necessity from natural principles,” but because it is a reality “to which one is inclined by nature, although it comes about through free will” (Summa Theol., Suppl., q. 41, a. 1, in c.). Any opposition, therefore, between nature and freedom or between nature and culture is extremely misleading.

In examining the historical and contemporary reality of the family, there is frequently a tendency to emphasize the differences in order to relativize the very existence of a natural plan for the union of man and woman. The more realistic observation, however, is that, along with the difficulties, limitations and deviations, man and woman have always had a profound inclination in their being which is not the result of their own creativity and which, in its basic features, fully transcends historical and cultural differences.

The only way, in fact, that the authentic richness and variety of all that is essentially human can come to light is through fidelity to the requirements of one’s nature. In marriage too, the desirable harmony between the diversity of expressions and the essential unity is not only conjectural, but is guaranteed by living in fidelity to the natural requirements of the person. Christians, moreover, know that for this task they can count on the strength of grace, which is capable of healing nature wounded by sin.
5. The “consortium totius vitae” requires the reciprocal self-giving of the spouses (CIC, can. 1057, 2; CCEO, can. 817, 1). But this personal self-giving needs a principle to specify it and a permanent foundation. The natural consideration of marriage shows us that husband and wife are joined precisely as sexually different persons with all the wealth, including spiritual wealth, that this difference has at the human level. Husband and wife are united as a man-person and a woman-person. The reference to the natural dimension of their masculinity and femininity is crucial for understanding the essence of marriage. The personal bond of marriage is established precisely at the natural level of the male or female mode of being a human person.

The scope of action for the couple and, therefore, of their matrimonial rights and duties follows from that of their being and has its true foundation in the latter. In this way, therefore, man and woman, by virtue of that most unique act of will which is marital consent (CIC, can. 1057, 2; CCEO, can. 817, 1), freely establish between themselves a bond prefigured by their nature, which now represents for both of them a true vocational path on which to live their own personhood as a response to God’s plan.

The ordering to the natural ends of marriage—the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring—is intrinsically present in masculinity and femininity. This teleological characteristic is crucial for understanding the natural dimension of the union. In this sense, the natural character of marriage is better understood when it is not separated from the family.

Marriage and the family are inseparable, because the masculinity and femininity of the married couple are constitutively open to the gift of children. Without this openness there could not even be a good of the spouses worthy of the name.

The essential properties, unity and indissolubility, are also inscribed in the very being of marriage, since in no way are they laws extrinsic to it. Only if marriage is seen as a union involving the person in the realization of his natural relational structure, which remains essentially the same throughout his personal life, can it withstand the changes of life, the efforts and even the crises through which human freedom often passes in living its
commitments. But if the marital union is thought to be based only on personal qualities, interests or attractions, it obviously is no longer seen as a natural reality but as a situation dependent on the current perseverance of the will in relation to the continuance of contingent facts and feelings. Certainly, the bond is caused by consent, that is, by an act of the man’s and the woman’s will, but this consent actualizes a power already existing in the nature of man and woman. Thus, the indissoluble force of the bond itself is based on the natural reality of the union freely established between man and woman.

6. These ontological premises have many consequences. I will limit myself to pointing out those that are particularly important and relevant to the canon law of marriage. Thus, in the light of marriage as a natural reality we can easily grasp the natural character of the capacity to marry: “All who are not prohibited by law can contract marriage” (CIC, can. 1058; CCEO, can. 778). No interpretation of the norms on the incapacity for consent (cf. CIC, can. 1095; CCEO, can. 818) would be correct if it were to make that principle useless in practice: “The science of law,” Cicero said, “must be drawn from man’s inmost nature” (Cicero, De Legibus, II).

The norm of canon 1058 cited above becomes even clearer if we keep in mind that by its nature the marital union involves the masculinity and femininity itself of the married couple; therefore it is not a union that essentially requires unusual characteristics in the contracting parties. If that were the case, matrimony would be reduced to a factual integration of persons and their characteristics, and its duration would also depend only on the existence of a no better determined interpersonal affection.

To a certain widespread mentality today this view may seem to conflict with the demands of personal fulfillment. What is difficult for this mentality to understand is the very possibility of a true marriage that has not succeeded. The explanation is found in the framework of an integral human and Christian vision of life. This is certainly not the moment to dwell on the truths that shed light on this question: in particular, the truths about human freedom in the present condition of fallen but redeemed nature, about sin, forgiveness and grace.

It will be enough to recall that even marriage does not escape the logic of Christ’s Cross, which indeed requires effort and sacrifice and involves
pain and suffering, but does not prevent, in the acceptance of God’s will, complete and authentic personal fulfillment in peace and serenity of spirit.

7. The very act of marital consent is best understood in relation to the natural dimension of the union. For the latter is the objective reference-point by which the individual lives his natural inclination. Hence the normality and simplicity of true consent. To present consent as the following of a cultural model or one of positive law is not realistic and risks needlessly complicating the investigation of matrimonial validity. It is a question of seeing whether the persons, in addition to identifying each other’s person, have truly grasped the essential natural dimension of their married state, which implies, as an intrinsic requirement, fidelity, indissolubility and potential fatherhood/motherhood as goods that integrate a relationship of justice.

“Even the most profound or subtle science of law,” Pope Pius XII of venerable memory warned, “could not identify another criterion for distinguishing between just and unjust laws, between the mere legal right and the true right, than the criterion which can already be perceived by the light of reason alone from the nature of things and of man himself, the criterion of the law written by the Creator in the human heart and expressly confirmed by Revelation. If law and juridical science do not wish to renounce the only guide that can keep them on the right path, they must recognize ‘ethical obligations’ as valid objective norms for the juridical order too” (Address to the Rota, 13 November 1949: AAS, 41, p. 607).

8. In drawing to a close, I would like to dwell briefly on the relationship between the natural character of marriage and its sacramentality, seeing that there have been frequent attempts since Vatican II to revitalize the supernatural aspect of marriage which include theological, pastoral and canonical proposals that are foreign to tradition, such as the attempt to require faith as a prerequisite for marriage.

Shortly after the start of my Pontificate, following the Synod of Bishops on the family which discussed this topic, I addressed it in Familiaris consortio, writing in 1980: “The sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is
the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator” (n. 68: AAS, 73, p. 163). Consequently, the only way to identify the reality that was linked from the beginning with the economy of salvation and that in the fullness of time is one of the seven sacraments of the New Covenant in the proper sense is to refer to the natural reality presented to us by Scripture in Genesis (1:27; 2:18-25). This is what Jesus did in speaking about the indissolubility of the marital bond (cf. Mt 19:3-12; Mk 10:1-2), and what St Paul did in explaining the nature of the “great mystery” which marriage has “in reference to Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32).

Matrimony, moreover, while being a “sign signifying and conferring grace,” is the only one of the seven sacraments that is not related to an activity specifically ordered to the attainment of directly supernatural ends. For the ends of marriage are not only predominantly but properly “by its very nature” the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring (CIC, can. 1055).

A different viewpoint would consider the sacramental sign to consist in the couple’s response of faith and Christian life; thus it would lack an objective consistency allowing it to be numbered among the true Christian sacraments. To obscure the natural dimension of marriage, therefore, with its reduction to a mere subjective experience, also entails the implicit denial of its sacramentality. On the contrary, it is precisely the correct understanding of this sacramentality in the Christian life which spurs us to a new estimation of its natural dimension.

On the other hand, to introduce requirements of intention or faith for the sacrament that go beyond that of marrying according to God’s plan from the “beginning”—in addition to the grave risks that I mentioned in Familiaris consortio (n. 68, loc. cit., pp. 164-165): unfounded and discriminatory judgements, doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, particularly by baptized non-Catholics—would inevitably mean separating the marriage of Christians from that of other people. This would be deeply contrary to the true meaning of God’s plan, in which it is precisely the created reality that is a “great mystery” in reference to Christ and the Church.

9. Dear Prelate Auditors, officials and advocates, these are some of the reflections I wanted to share with you to guide and support your valuable
service to the People of God.

Upon each of you and your daily work I invoke the special protection of Mary Most Holy, *Mirror of Justice*, and cordially give you my Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to your relatives and to the students of the *Studio Rotale*.

Message for the World Day of Peace (January 1, 2001)

1. At the dawn of a new millennium, there is growing hope that relationships between people will be increasingly inspired by the ideal of a truly universal brotherhood. Unless this ideal is shared, there will be no way to ensure a stable peace. There are many signs which suggest that this conviction is becoming more deeply rooted in people’s minds. The importance of fraternity is proclaimed in the great “charters” of human rights; it is embodied in great international institutions, particularly the United Nations; and it is called for, as never before, by the process of globalization which is leading to a progressive unification of the economy, culture and society. For their part, the followers of the different religions are ever more conscious of the fact that a relationship with the one God, the common Father of all, cannot fail to bring about a greater sense of human brotherhood and a more fraternal life together. In God’s revelation in Christ, this principle finds a radical expression: “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).

2. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that thick clouds overshadow these bright hopes. Humanity is beginning this new chapter of its history with still open wounds. In many regions it is beset by bitter and bloody conflicts, and is struggling with increasing difficulty to maintain solidarity between people of different cultures and civilizations living together in the same territory. We all know how hard it is to settle differences between parties when ancient hatreds and serious problems which admit of no easy solution create an atmosphere of anger and
exasperation. But no less dangerous for the future of peace would be the inability to confront intelligently the problems posed by a new social configuration resulting in many countries from accelerated migration and the unprecedented situation of people of different cultures and civilizations living side by side.

3. I therefore consider it urgent to invite believers in Christ, together with all men and women of good will, to reflect on the theme of dialogue between cultures and traditions. This dialogue is the obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world, a world able to look with serenity to its own future. This is a theme which is crucial to the pursuit of peace. I am pleased that the United Nations Organization has called attention to this urgent need by declaring 2001 the “International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations.”

Naturally, I do not believe that there can be easy or readily applicable solutions to a problem like this. It is difficult enough to undertake an analysis of the situation, which is in constant flux and defies all preconceived models. There is also the difficulty of combining principles and values which, however reconcilable in the abstract, can prove on the practical level to be resistant to any easy synthesis. In addition, at a deeper level, there are always the demands which ethical commitment makes upon individuals, who are not free of self-interest and human limitations.

But for this very reason I see the usefulness of a shared reflection on these issues. With this intention I confine myself here to offering some guidelines, listening to what the Spirit of God is saying to the Churches (cf. Rev 2:7) and to all of humanity at this decisive hour of its history.

_Mankind and its different cultures_

4. Reflecting upon the human situation, one is always amazed at the complexity and diversity of human cultures. Each of them is distinct by virtue of its specific historical evolution and the resulting characteristics which make it a structurally unique, original and organic whole. _Culture is the form of man’s self-expression in his journey through history_, on the level of both individuals and social groups. For man is driven incessantly by his intellect and will to “cultivate natural goods and values,”[1] to incorporate in an ever higher and more systematic cultural synthesis his basic knowledge of
all aspects of life, particularly those involving social and political life, security and economic development, and to foster those existential values and perspectives, especially in the religious sphere, which enable individual and community life to develop in a way that is authentically human.[2]

5. A culture is always marked by stable and enduring elements, as well as by changing and contingent features. At first glance, in examining a culture we are struck above all by those aspects which distinguish it from our own culture; these give each culture a face of its own, as an amalgam of quite distinctive elements. In most cases, a culture develops in a specific place, where geographical, historical and ethnic elements combine in an original and unique way. The “uniqueness” of each culture is reflected more or less clearly in those individuals who are its bearers, in a constant process whereby individuals are influenced by their culture and then, according to their different abilities and genius, contribute to it something of their own. In any event, a person necessarily lives within a specific culture. People are marked by the culture whose very air they breathe through the family and the social groups around them, through education and the most varied influences of their environment, through the very relationship which they have with the place in which they live. There is no determinism here, but rather a constant dialectic between the strength of the individual’s conditioning and the workings of human freedom.

**Human development and being part of a culture**

6. The need to accept one’s own culture as a structuring element of one’s personality, especially in the initial stages of life, is a fact of universal experience whose importance can hardly be overestimated. Without a firm rooting in a specific “soil,” individuals risk being subjected at a still vulnerable age to an excess of conflicting stimuli which could impair their serene and balanced development. It is on the basis of this essential relationship with one’s own “origins”—on the level of the family, but also of territory, society and culture—that people acquire *a sense of their nationality*, and culture tends to take on, to a greater or lesser degree in different places, a “national” configuration. The Son of God himself, by becoming man, acquired, along with a human family, a country. He remains for ever Jesus of Nazareth, the Nazarean (cf. *Mk* 10:47; *Lk* 18:37; *Jn* 1:45; 19:19). This is a natural process, in which sociological and psychological forces interact,
with results that are normally positive and constructive. Love for one’s
country is thus a value to be fostered, without narrow-mindedness but with
love for the whole human family[3] and with an effort to avoid those
pathological manifestations which occur when the sense of belonging turns
into self-exaltation, the rejection of diversity, and forms of nationalism,
racism and xenophobia.

7. Consequently, while it is certainly important to be able to appreciate
the values of one’s own culture, there is also a need to recognize that every
culture, as a typically human and historically conditioned reality, necessarily
has its limitations. In order to prevent the sense of belonging to one
particular culture from turning into isolation, an effective antidote is a
serene and unprejudiced knowledge of other cultures. Moreover, when
cultures are carefully and rigorously studied, they very often reveal beneath
their outward variations significant common elements. This can also be seen in
the historical sequence of cultures and civilizations. The Church, looking to
Christ, who reveals man to himself,[4] and drawing upon her experience of
two thousand years of history, is convinced that “beneath all that changes,
there is much that is unchanging.”[5] This continuity is based upon the
essential and universal character of God’s plan for humanity.

Cultural diversity should therefore be understood within the broader
horizon of the unity of the human race. In a real way, this unity constitutes the
primordial historical and ontological datum in the light of which the
profound meaning of cultural diversity can be grasped. In fact, only an
overall vision of both the elements of unity and the elements of diversity
makes it possible to understand and interpret the full truth of every human
culture.[6]

Cultural differences and mutual respect

8. In the past, cultural differences have often been a source of
misunderstanding between peoples and the cause of conflicts and wars.
Even now, sad to say, in different parts of the world we are witnessing with
growing alarm the aggressive claims of some cultures against others. In the long
run, this situation can end in disastrous tensions and conflicts. At the very
least it can make more difficult the situation of those ethnic and cultural
minorities living in a majority cultural context which is different from their
own and prone to hostile and racist ways of thinking and acting.
In light of this, people of good will need to examine the basic ethical orientations which mark a particular community’s cultural experience. Cultures, like the people who give rise to them, are marked by the “mystery of evil” at work in human history (cf. 1 Th 2:7), and they too are in need of purification and salvation. The authenticity of each human culture, the soundness of its underlying ethos, and hence the validity of its moral bearings, can be measured to an extent by its commitment to the human cause and by its capacity to promote human dignity at every level and in every circumstance.

9. The radicalization of identity which makes cultures resistant to any beneficial influence from outside is worrying enough; but no less perilous is the slavish conformity of cultures, or at least of key aspects of them, to cultural models deriving from the Western world. Detached from their Christians origins, these models are often inspired by an approach to life marked by secularism and practical atheism and by patterns of radical individualism. This is a phenomenon of vast proportions, sustained by powerful media campaigns and designed to propagate lifestyles, social and economic programs and, in the last analysis, a comprehensive world-view which erodes from within other estimable cultures and civilizations. Western cultural models are enticing and alluring because of their remarkable scientific and technical cast, but regrettably there is growing evidence of their deepening human, spiritual and moral impoverishment. The culture which produces such models is marked by the fatal attempt to secure the good of humanity by eliminating God, the Supreme Good. Yet, as the Second Vatican Council warned, “without the Creator the creature comes to nothing!” A culture which no longer has a point of reference in God loses its soul and loses its way, becoming a culture of death. This was amply demonstrated by the tragic events of the twentieth century and is now apparent in the nihilism present in some prominent circles in the Western world.

Dialogue between cultures

10. Individuals come to maturity through receptive openness to others and through generous self-giving to them; so too do cultures. Created by people and at the service of people, they have to be perfected through
dialogue and communion, on the basis of the original and fundamental unity of the human family as it came from the hands of God who “made from one stock every nation of mankind” (*Acts* 17:26).

In this perspective, *dialogue between cultures*—the theme of this World Day of Peace Message—emerges as an intrinsic demand of human nature itself, as well as of culture. It is dialogue which protects the distinctiveness of cultures as historical and creative expressions of the underlying unity of the human family, and which sustains understanding and communion between them. The notion of communion, which has its source in Christian revelation and finds its sublime prototype in the Triune God (cf. *Jn* 17:11, 21), never implies a dull uniformity or enforced homogenization or assimilation; rather it expresses the convergence of a multiform variety, and is therefore a sign of richness and a promise of growth.

Dialogue leads to a recognition of diversity and opens the mind to the mutual acceptance and genuine collaboration demanded by the human family’s basic vocation to unity. As such, dialogue is a privileged means for building the civilization of love and peace that my revered predecessor Pope Paul VI indicated as the ideal to inspire cultural, social, political and economic life in our time. At the beginning of the Third Millennium, it is urgent that the path of dialogue be proposed once again to a world marked by excessive conflict and violence, a world at times discouraged and incapable of seeing signs of hope and peace.

**Possibilities and risks of global communication**

11. Dialogue between cultures is especially needed today because of the impact of new communications technology on the lives of individuals and peoples. Ours is an era of global communication, which is shaping society along the lines of new cultural models which more or less break with past models. At least in principle, accurate and up-to-date information is available to anyone in any part of the world.

The free flow of images and speech on a global scale is transforming not only political and economic relations between peoples, but even our understanding of the world. It opens up a range of hitherto unthinkable possibilities, but it also has certain negative and dangerous aspects. The fact that a few countries have a monopoly on these cultural “industries” and
distribute their products to an ever growing public in every corner of the earth can be a powerful factor in undermining cultural distinctness. These products include and transmit implicit value-systems and can therefore lead to a kind of dispossession and loss of cultural identity in those who receive them.

The challenge of migration

12. A style and culture of dialogue are especially important when it comes to the complex question of migration, which is an important social phenomenon of our time. The movement of large numbers of people from one part of the planet to another is often a terrible odyssey for those involved, and it brings with it the intermingling of traditions and customs, with notable repercussions both on the countries from which people come and on those in which they settle. How migrants are welcomed by receiving countries and how well they become integrated in their new environment are also an indication of how much effective dialogue there is between the various cultures.

The question of cultural integration is much debated these days, and it is not easy to specify in detail how best to guarantee, in a balanced and equitable way, the rights and duties of those who welcome and those who are welcomed. Historically, migrations have occurred in all sorts of ways and with very different results. In the case of many civilizations, immigration has brought new growth and enrichment. In other cases, the local people and immigrants have remained culturally separate but have shown that they are able to live together, respecting each other and accepting or tolerating the diversity of customs. Regrettably, situations still exist in which the difficulties involved in the encounter of different cultures have never been resolved, and the consequent tensions have become the cause of periodic outbreaks of conflict.

13. In such a complex issue there are no “magic” formulas; but still we must identify some basic ethical principles to serve as points of reference. First of all, it is important to remember the principle that immigrants must always be treated with the respect due to the dignity of every human person. In the matter of controlling the influx of immigrants, the consideration which should rightly be given to the common good should not ignore this principle. The challenge is to combine the welcome due to every human
being, especially when in need, with a reckoning of what is necessary for both the local inhabitants and the new arrivals to live a dignified and peaceful life. The cultural practices which immigrants bring with them should be respected and accepted, as long as they do not contravene either the universal ethical values inherent in the natural law or fundamental human rights.

**Respect for cultures and the “cultural profile” of different regions**

14. It is a much more difficult thing to determine the extent to which immigrants are entitled to public legal recognition of the particular customs of their culture, which may not be readily compatible with the customs of the majority of citizens. The solution to this question, within a climate of genuine openness, calls for a realistic evaluation of the common good at any given time in history and in any given place and social context. Much depends upon whether people embrace a spirit of openness that, without yielding to indifferentism about values, can combine the concern for identity with the willingness to engage in dialogue.

On the other hand, as I noted above, one cannot underestimate the capacity of the characteristic culture of a region to produce a balanced growth, especially in the delicate early stages of life, in those who belong to that culture from birth. From this point of view, a reasonable way forward would be to ensure a certain “cultural equilibrium” in each region, by reference to the culture which has prevalently marked its development. This equilibrium, even while welcoming minorities and respecting their basic rights, would allow the continued existence and development of a particular “cultural profile,” by which I mean that basic heritage of language, traditions and values which are inextricably part of a nation’s history and its national identity.

15. Clearly, though, the need to ensure an equilibrium in a region’s cultural profile cannot be met by legislative measures alone, since these would prove ineffectual unless they were grounded in the ethos of the population. They would also be inevitably destined to change should a culture lose its ability to inspire a people and a region, becoming no more than a legacy preserved in museums or in artistic and literary monuments.
In effect, as long as a culture is truly alive, it need have no fear of being displaced. And no law could keep it alive if it were already dead in people’s hearts. In the dialogue between cultures, no side can be prevented from proposing to the other the values in which it believes, as long as this is done in way that is respectful of people’s freedom and conscience. “Truth can be imposed only with the force of truth itself, which penetrates the mind both gently and powerfully.”[8]

The recognition of shared values

16. Dialogue between cultures, a privileged means for building the civilization of love, is based upon the recognition that there are values which are common to all cultures because they are rooted in the nature of the person. These values express humanity’s most authentic and distinctive features. Leaving aside ideological prejudices and selfish interests, it is necessary to foster people’s awareness of these shared values, in order to nurture that intrinsically universal cultural “soil” which makes for fruitful and constructive dialogue. The different religions too can and ought to contribute decisively to this process. My many encounters with representatives of other religions—I recall especially the meeting in Assisi in 1986 and in Saint Peter’s Square in 1999—have made me more confident that mutual openness between the followers of the various religions can greatly serve the cause of peace and the common good of the human family.

The value of solidarity

17. Faced with growing inequalities in the world, the prime value which must be ever more widely inculcated is certainly that of solidarity. A society depends on the basic relations that people cultivate with one another in ever widening circles—from the family to other intermediary social groups, to civil society as a whole and to the national community. States in turn have no choice but to enter into relations with one another. The present reality of global interdependence makes it easier to appreciate the common destiny of the entire human family, and makes all thoughtful people increasingly appreciate the virtue of solidarity.

At the same time it is necessary to point out that this growing interdependence has brought to light many inequalities, such as the gap
between rich and poor nations; the social imbalance within each nation between those living in opulence and those offended in their dignity since they lack even the necessities of life; the human and environmental degradation provoked and accelerated by the irresponsible use of natural resources. These social inequalities and imbalances have grown worse in certain places, and some of the poorest nations have reached a point of irreversible decline.

Consequently, the promotion of justice is at the heart of a true culture of solidarity. It is not just a question of giving one’s surplus to those in need, but of “helping entire peoples presently excluded or marginalized to enter into the sphere of economic and human development. For this to happen, it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces; it requires above all a change of lifestyles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies.”[9]

The value of peace

18. The culture of solidarity is closely connected with the value of peace, the primary objective of every society and of national and international life. However, on the path to better understanding among peoples there remain many challenges which the world must face: these set before everyone choices which cannot be postponed. The alarming increase of arms, together with the halting progress of commitment to nuclear non-proliferation, runs the risk of feeding and expanding a culture of competition and conflict, a culture involving not only States but also non-institutional entities, such as paramilitary groups and terrorist organizations.

Even today the world is dealing with the consequences of wars past and present, as well as the tragic effects of anti-personnel mines and the use of frightful chemical and biological weapons. And what can be said about the permanent risk of conflicts between nations, of civil wars within some States and of widespread violence, before which international organizations and national governments appear almost impotent? Faced with such threats, everyone must feel the moral duty to take concrete and timely steps to promote the cause of peace and understanding among peoples.
The value of life

19. An authentic dialogue between cultures cannot fail to nourish, in addition to sentiments of mutual respect, a lively sense of the value of life itself. Human life cannot be seen as an object to do with as we please, but as the most sacred and inviolable earthly reality. There can be no peace when this most basic good is not protected. It is not possible to invoke peace and despise life. Our own times have seen shining examples of generosity and dedication in the service of life, but also the sad sight of hundreds of millions of men and women whom cruelty and indifference have consigned to a painful and harsh destiny. I am speaking of a tragic spiral of death which includes murder, suicide, abortion, euthanasia, as well as practices of mutilation, physical and psychological torture, forms of unjust coercion, arbitrary imprisonment, unnecessary recourse to the death penalty, deportations, slavery, prostitution, trafficking in women and children. To this list we must add irresponsible practices of genetic engineering, such as the cloning and use of human embryos for research, which are justified by an illegitimate appeal to freedom, to cultural progress, to the advancement of mankind. When the weakest and most vulnerable members of society are subjected to such atrocities, the very idea of the human family, built on the value of the person, on trust, respect and mutual support, is dangerously eroded. A civilization based on love and peace must oppose these experiments, which are unworthy of man.

The value of education

20. In order to build the civilization of love, dialogue between cultures must work to overcome all ethnocentric selfishness and make it possible to combine regard for one’s own identity with understanding of others and respect for diversity. Fundamental in this respect is the responsibility of education. Education must make students aware of their own roots and provide points of reference which allow them to define their own personal place in the world. At the same time, it must be committed to teaching respect for other cultures. There is a need to look beyond one’s immediate personal experience and accept differences, discovering the richness to be found in other people’s history and in their values.
Knowledge of other cultures, acquired with an appropriate critical sense and within a solid ethical framework, leads to a deeper awareness of the values and limitations within one’s own culture, and at the same time it reveals the existence of a patrimony that is common to the whole of humanity. Thanks precisely to this broadening of horizons, education has a particular role to play in building a more united and peaceful world. It can help to affirm that integral humanism, open to life’s ethical and religious dimension, which appreciates the importance of understanding and showing esteem for other cultures and the spiritual values present in them.

Forgiveness and reconciliation

21. During the Great Jubilee, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, the Church has had a powerful experience of the challenging call to reconciliation. This call is significant also in the context of the complex issue of dialogue between cultures. Dialogue in fact is often difficult because it is weighed down by the tragic heritage of war, conflict, violence and hatred, which lives on in people’s memory. For the barriers caused by noncommunication to be bridged, the path to take is the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. Many people, in the name of a disillusioned realism, maintain that this is a utopian and naive path. From the Christian point of view it is the only path which leads to the goal of peace.

The eyes of believers contemplate the image of the Crucified One. Shortly before dying, Jesus exclaims: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). The evil-doer crucified on his right, hearing these last words of the dying Redeemer, opens his heart to the grace of conversion, welcomes the Gospel of forgiveness and receives the promise of eternal happiness. The example of Christ makes us certain that the many impediments to communication and dialogue between people can indeed be torn down. Gazing upon the Crucified One we are filled with confidence that forgiveness and reconciliation can become the normal practice of everyday life and of every culture, and thus a real opportunity for building humanity’s peace and future.

Mindful of the significant Jubilee experience of the purification of memory, I wish to make a specific appeal to Christians to become witnesses to and missionaries of forgiveness and reconciliation. In this way, through
their active invocation of the God of peace, they will hasten the fulfillment of Isaiah’s splendid prophecy, which can be applied to all the peoples of the earth: “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, ‘Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage’” (Is 19:23-25).

An appeal to young people

22. I wish to conclude this Message of peace with a special appeal to you, young people of the whole world, who are humanity’s future and living stones in the building of the civilization of love. I treasure in my heart the memory of the emotional and hope-filled meetings which we had during the recent World Youth Day in Rome. Your participation was joyous, sincere and reassuring. In your energy and vitality, and in your love of Christ, I was able to glimpse a more peaceful and human future for the world.

Feeling your closeness to me, I sensed a profound gratitude to the Lord who gave me the grace of contemplating—through the multicolored mosaic of your different languages, cultures, customs and ways of thinking—the miracle of the universality of the Church, of her catholicity, of her unity. Through you I was able to admire the marvellous coming together of diversity in the unity of the same faith, the same hope, the same love. Here was an eloquent expression of the wondrous reality of the Church, sign and instrument of Christ for the salvation of the world and for the unity of mankind.[10] The Gospel calls you to rebuild the original unity of the human family, which has its source in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Dear young people of every language and culture, a high and exhilarating task awaits you: that of becoming men and women capable of solidarity, peace and love of life, with respect for everyone. Become craftsmen of a new humanity, where brothers and sisters—members all of the same family—are able at last to live in peace.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2000.
Letter to Priests on Holy Thursday (March 25, 2001)

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

1. On the day when the Lord Jesus gave to the Church the gift of the Eucharist, and with it instituted our priesthood, I cannot but address to you—as is now traditional—a word of friendship and, I might say, of intimacy, wishing to join you in thanksgiving and praise.

*Lauda Sion, Salvatorem, lauda ducem et pastorem, in hymnis et canticis!*

Great indeed is the mystery of which we have been made ministers. A mystery of love without limit, for “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1); a mystery of unity, which from the source of Trinitarian life is poured out upon us in order to make us...
“one” in the gift of the Spirit (cf. Jn 17); a mystery of divine *diakonia* which prompts the Word made flesh to wash the feet of his creation, thus showing that service is the high road in all genuine relationships between people: “You also should do as I have done to you” (Jn 13:15).

Of this great mystery we have been made, in a special way, witnesses and ministers.

2. This is the first Holy Thursday after the Great Jubilee. What we have experienced together with our communities, in that special celebration of mercy, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, now becomes the incentive to continue the journey. *Duc in altum!* The Lord invites us to put out into the deep, with trust in his word. Let us learn from the Jubilee experience and persevere in the task of bearing witness to the Gospel with the enthusiasm that contemplating the face of Christ engenders in us!

As I in fact stressed in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, we must start out from Christ, in order to be open, in him, with the “ineffable” groanings of the Spirit (cf. Rom 8:26), to the embrace of the Father: “*Abba! Father!*” (Gal 4:6). Christ must be our point of departure in rediscovering the source and the profound rationale of our brotherhood: “As I have loved you, you also must love one another” (Jn 13:34).

3. Today I wish to express to each of you my gratitude for all that you did during the Jubilee Year to ensure that the people entrusted to your care might experience more intensely the saving presence of the Risen Lord. At this time, I am also thinking of the work you do every day, work that is often hidden and, without making headlines, causes the Kingdom of God to advance in people’s minds and hearts. I want you to know of my admiration for this ministry, discreet, tenacious and creative, even if it is sometimes watered by those tears of the soul which only God sees and “stores in his bottle” (cf. Ps 56:8). Your ministry is all the more admirable when it is tested by the resistance of a widely secularized environment, which subjects priestly activity to the temptations of fatigue and discouragement. You well know that such daily commitment is precious in the eyes of God.

At the same time, I wish to echo the voice of Christ who continuously calls us to deepen our relationship with him. “Behold, I stand at the door
and knock” (Rev 3:20). Chosen to proclaim Christ, we are first of all invited to live in intimacy with him: we cannot give to others what we ourselves do not have! There is a thirst for Christ which, despite many appearances to the contrary, emerges even in contemporary society; it is present among all the inconsistencies of new forms of spirituality; it can be seen even where, on important ethical issues, the Church’s witness becomes a sign of contradiction. This thirst for Christ—whether conscious or not—cannot be quenched with empty words. Only authentic witnesses can communicate in a credible way the word that saves.

4. In my Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte I said that the true legacy of the Great Jubilee is the experience of a more intense encounter with Christ. From among the many aspects of this encounter, today I would like to choose for this reflection the theme of sacramental reconciliation: this too was a central feature of the Jubilee Year, also because it is closely connected with the gift of the Jubilee indulgence.

Here in Rome, and I am sure that you too had similar experiences in your local Churches, one of the most visible manifestations of the Jubilee was certainly the exceptional numbers of people receiving the Sacrament of mercy. Even non-religious observers were impressed by this. The confessionals in Saint Peter’s and in the other Basilicas were “stormed,” as it were, by pilgrims, who often had to wait in long lines, patiently waiting their turn. The interest shown by young people in this Sacrament during the splendid week of their Jubilee was particularly significant.

5. As you well know, in recent decades this Sacrament has passed through a certain crisis, for a number of reasons. Precisely in order to tackle this crisis, in 1984 a Synod was held, the conclusions of which were presented in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Reconciliatio et Paenitentia.

It would be naive to think that the mere intensifying of the practice of the Sacrament of forgiveness during the Jubilee Year is proof of a definitive turnabout. It was nevertheless an encouraging sign. It impels us to recognize that the profound needs of the human spirit, to which God’s saving plan responds, cannot be cancelled out by temporary crises. We should accept this Jubilee indication as a sign from on high, and make it a reason for renewed boldness in re-proposing the meaning and practice of this
6. But it is not so much on pastoral problems that I wish to dwell. Holy Thursday, the special day of our vocation, calls us to reflect above all on “who we are,” and in particular on our journey to holiness. It is from this source too that our apostolic zeal will flow.

So, as we gaze upon Christ at the Last Supper, as he becomes for us the “bread that is broken,” as he stoops down in humble service at the feet of the Apostles, how can we not experience, together with Peter, the same feeling of unworthiness in the face of the greatness of the gift received? “You shall never wash my feet” (Jn 13:8). Peter was wrong to reject Christ’s gesture. But he was right to feel unworthy of it. It is important, on this day of love par excellence, that we should feel the grace of the priesthood as a superabundance of mercy.

Mercy is the absolutely free initiative by which God has chosen us: “You did not choose me but I chose you” (Jn 15:16).

Mercy is his deigning to call us to act as his representatives, though he knows that we are sinners.

Mercy is the forgiveness which he never refuses us, as he did not refuse it to Peter after his betrayal. The avowal that “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk 15:7) also holds true for us.

7. Let us then rediscover our vocation as a “mystery of mercy.” In the Gospel we find that Peter receives his special ministry with precisely this spiritual attitude. His experience is indicative for all those who have received the apostolic task in the different grades of the Sacrament of Orders.

Our thoughts turn to the scene of the miraculous catch of fish as described in the Gospel of Luke (5:1-11). Jesus asks Peter for an act of trust in his word, inviting him to put out into the deep for a catch. A disconcerting request, humanly speaking: after a sleepless and exhausting night spent casting the nets with no result, how could one believe him? But trying again, “at Jesus’ word,” changes everything. The fish arrive in such quantities as to tear the nets. The Word reveals his power. The result is
wonder, but also fear and trembling, as when we are unexpectedly struck by an intense beam of light which lays bare all our personal limits. Peter exclaims: “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Lk 5:8). But scarcely has he uttered his admission when the Master’s mercy becomes for him the beginning of new life: “Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men” (Lk 5:10). The “sinner” becomes a minister of mercy. From a fisher of fish to a “fisher of men”!

8. Dear priests, this is a great mystery: Christ was not afraid to choose his ministers from among sinners. Is not this our own experience? It is Peter once again who will become more aware of this in his touching dialogue with Jesus after the Resurrection. Before entrusting him with the mandate to care for the flock, the Master asks the embarrassing question: “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). The one being questioned is the very man who a few days earlier had denied him three times. It is easy to understand the humble tone of his reply: “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (Jn 21:17). And it is on the basis of this love, which knows all too well its own frailty, a love professed with both trust and hesitation, that Peter receives the commission: “Feed my lambs,” “feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15, 16, 17). It will be on the basis of this love, strengthened by the fire of Pentecost, that Peter will be able to accomplish the ministry entrusted to him.

9. And is it not within an experience of mercy that Paul’s vocation too is born? No one experienced the gratuitousness of Christ’s choice as vividly as he did. His past as a ferocious persecutor of the Church seared itself deep into his soul: “I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God” (1 Cor 15:9). Yet, far from stifling his enthusiasm, this memory made it soar. The more he was embraced by mercy, the more Paul felt the need to bear witness to it and to let it shine forth in his life. The “voice” which speaks to him on the road to Damascus leads him to the heart of the Gospel, and enables him to discover the Gospel as the merciful love of the Father who in Christ is reconciling the world to himself. On this basis, Paul will also understand apostolic service as the ministry of reconciliation: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men’s
trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19).

10. Dear priests, the witness of Peter and Paul contains valuable pointers for us. Their lives invite us to live the gift of the ministry with a sense of endless thanksgiving: nothing is due to our merits, all is grace! The experience of the two Apostles prompts us to abandon ourselves to the mercy of God, to give over to him in sincere repentance our frailties, and with his grace to set out again on our journey to holiness. In Novo Millennio Ineunte I indicated the commitment to holiness as the first element of all wise pastoral “planning.” It is the basic task of all believers, so how much more must it be for us (cf. Nos. 30-31)!

For this very reason it is important for us to rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a fundamental means of our sanctification. Approaching a brother priest in order to ask for the absolution that we so often give to the faithful enables us to live the great and consoling truth that, before being ministers, we are all members of the same people, a “saved” people. What Augustine said of his task as bishop is true also of the service of priests: “If I am anxious about being for you, I am consoled by being with you. For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian... In the first there is danger, in the second there is salvation” (Discourses, 340, 1). It is wonderful to be able to confess our sins, and to hear as a balm the word which floods us with mercy and sends us on our way again. Only those who have known the Father’s tender embrace, as the Gospel describes it in the parable of the Prodigal Son—“he embraced him and kissed him” (Lk 15:20)—only they can pass on to others the same warmth, when after receiving pardon themselves they administer it to others.

11. On this holy day, therefore, let us ask Christ to help us to rediscover, for ourselves, the full beauty of this Sacrament. Did not Jesus himself help Peter to make this discovery? “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me” (Jn 13:8). Jesus of course was not referring directly to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but in some sense he was pointing to it, alluding to that process of purification which would begin with his redeeming Death, and to its sacramental application to individuals down the ages.

Dear priests, let us make regular use of this Sacrament, that the Lord
may constantly purify our hearts and make us less unworthy of the mysteries which we celebrate. Since we are called to show forth the face of the Good Shepherd, and therefore to have the heart of Christ himself, we more than others must make our own the Psalmist’s ardent cry: “A pure heart create for me, O God, put a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps 51:12). The Sacrament of Reconciliation, essential for every Christian life, is especially a source of support, guidance and healing for the priestly life.

12. The priest who fully experiences the joy of sacramental reconciliation will find it altogether normal to repeat to his brothers and sisters the words of Paul: “So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

The crisis of the Sacrament of Reconciliation which I mentioned earlier is due to many factors from the diminished sense of sin to an inadequate realization of the sacramental economy of God’s salvation. But perhaps we should also recognize that another factor sometimes working against the Sacrament has been a certain dwindling of our own enthusiasm and availability for the exercise of this delicate and demanding ministry.

Conversely, now more than ever the People of God must be helped to rediscover the Sacrament. We need to declare with firmness and conviction that the Sacrament of Penance is the ordinary means of obtaining pardon and the remission of grave sins committed after Baptism. We ought to celebrate the Sacrament in the best possible way, according to the forms laid down by liturgical law, so that it may lose none of its character as the celebration of God’s mercy.

13. A source of renewed confidence in the revival of this Sacrament is not only the fact that, despite many incongruities, a new and urgent need for spirituality is becoming widespread in society. There is also a deeply-felt need for interpersonal contact, which is increasingly experienced as a reaction to the anonymous mass society which often leaves people interiorly isolated, even when it involves them in a flurry of purely functional relationships. Obviously sacramental confession is not to be confused with a support system or with psychotherapy. But neither should we underestimate the fact that the Sacrament of Reconciliation, when correctly celebrated, also has a
“humanizing” effect, which is in perfect harmony with its primary purpose of reconciling the individual with God and the Church.

Here too, it is important that the minister of reconciliation should fulfill his role correctly. His ability to be welcoming, to be a good listener and to engage in dialogue, together with his ready accessibility, is essential if the ministry of reconciliation is to be seen in all its value. The faithful and uncompromising proclamation of the radical demands of God’s word must always be accompanied by great understanding and sensitivity, in imitation of Jesus’ own way of dealing with sinners.

14. The liturgical form of the Sacrament also needs to be given due attention. The Sacrament forms part of the structure of communion which is the mark of the Church. Sin itself cannot be properly understood if it is viewed in a purely “private” way, forgetting that it inevitably affects the entire community and lowers the level of holiness within it. Moreover, the offer of forgiveness expresses a mystery of supernatural solidarity, since its sacramental significance rests on the profound union between Christ the Head and the members of his Body.

It is extremely important to help people recover this “community” aspect of the Sacrament, also by means of community penance services which conclude with individual confession and absolution. This manner of celebration enables the faithful to appreciate better the two-fold dimension of reconciliation, and commits them more effectively to following the penitential path in all its revitalizing richness.

15. Then there is also the fundamental problem of catechetical teaching about the moral conscience and about sin, so that people can have a clearer idea of the radical demands of the Gospel. Unfortunately, there exists a minimalist tendency which prevents the Sacrament from producing all the benefits that we might hope for. Many of the faithful have an idea of sin that is not based on the Gospel but on common convention, on what is socially “acceptable.” This makes them feel not particularly responsible for things that “everybody does,” and all the more so if these things are permitted by civil law.

Evangelization in the third millennium must come to grips with the urgent need for a presentation of the Gospel message which is dynamic,
complete and demanding. The Christian life to be aimed at cannot be reduced to a mediocre commitment to “goodness” as society defines it; it must be a true quest for holiness. We need to re-read with fresh enthusiasm the fifth chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, which deals with the universal call to holiness. Being a Christian means to receive a “gift” of sanctifying grace which cannot fail to become a “commitment” to respond personally to that gift in everyday life. It is precisely for this reason that I have sought over the years to foster a wider recognition of holiness, in all the contexts where it has appeared, so that Christians can have many different models of holiness, and all can be reminded that they are personally called to this goal.

16. Dear Brother Priests, let us go forward in the joy of our ministry, knowing that we have at our side the One who called us and does not abandon us. May the certainty of his presence sustain and console us.

On Holy Thursday may we have an even more vivid sense of this presence, as we contemplate with deep emotion the hour when Jesus, in the Upper Room, gave himself to us under the signs of bread and wine, sacramentally anticipating the sacrifice of the Cross. Last year I wrote to you from the Upper Room itself, during my visit to the Holy Land. How can I forget that touching moment? I re-live it today, not without sorrow for the tragic situation which persists in the land of Christ.

Our spiritual meeting-place on Holy Thursday is still there, in the Upper Room, as we celebrate in union with the Bishops in the cathedrals of the whole world the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ and gratefully recall the origins of our Priesthood.

In the joy of the immense gift which we have all received, I embrace you all and give you my blessing.

*From the Vatican, on March 25, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, in the year 2001, the twenty-third of my Pontificate.*

Torna ai contenuti

Address to participants in UNIV Conference (April 9, 2001)
The Association UNIV every year gathers youths from all over the world to participate in a University Congress. The participants work on some themes which the Institute for University Cooperation proposes and present their conclusions in the form of oral presentations or in videos. After the first edition of the Congress in 1968, the Institute for University Cooperation confided to the Prelature of Opus Dei the organization of the activities of Christian formation, as a complement to the cultural activities. During the Holy Week, those who wish can participate in the liturgical ceremonies and in the audience with the Holy Father. Thus, the Congress becomes an opportunity to get to know the city of Rome in the context of the history of the Church from its first centuries.

The morning of April 9, His Holiness John Paul II received the participants of the 34th Congress UNIV 2001 in audience in the Paul VI hall. This is the address he gave.

Dear Young People,

1. Welcome! As in past years, you have returned to Rome to spend Holy Week together. Many of you perhaps are here in this marvellous city for the first time, but for your association this Roman gathering, which includes a visit to the Successor of Peter, has become something of a custom.

Thank you for this meeting and for your youthful enthusiasm. I affectionately greet you and your superiors. I greet and especially thank those who in your name expressed the sentiments you share. I hope that each of you will spend these holy days in an atmosphere of deep spirituality.

2. The theme of the congress that has brought you together is “A Human Face for the Global World.” This is a topic that allows you to compare experiences and proposals on globalization, a phenomenon that will increasingly mark society in the future.

You grasp the positive aspects of this process, but without ignoring the dangers. It cannot be the economy that dictates the models and pace of development and, even if it is only right to provide for material needs, the values of the spirit must never be stifled. The true must always prevail over the useful, good over well-being, freedom over fashion, people over structures. On the other hand, it is not enough to criticize; we must go further: we must be builders. For Christians cannot limit themselves to
analyzing the historical processes under way and maintain a passive attitude, as if they were beyond their capacities to intervene because guided by blind and impersonal forces. Believers are convinced that *every human event is under the provident hand of God*, who asks everyone to cooperate with him in guiding history to an end worthy of man.

3. In short, the fundamental issue involves a decisive question: *How do I live the Christian faith?* For me, is it just a set of beliefs and devotions restricted to the private sphere, or is it also a force that demands to be translated into decisions affecting my relationship with others? How much a man and woman of faith can influence society!

Part of Christian realism is to understand that great social changes are the fruit of small courageous daily choices. You often ask yourselves: when will this world of ours be fully conformed to the Gospel message? The answer is simple: when you first think and always act according to Christ, at least a part of that world will, in you, be entrusted to him. Blessed Josemaria, from whose spirituality you draw your inspiration, wrote: “Among those around you, apostolic soul, you are the stone fallen into the lake. With your word and example produce a first ripple... and it will produce another... and then another, and another... each time wider. Now do you understand the greatness of your mission?” (*The Way*, 831).

4. In today’s society, which pursues the optimization of productive activity, we note a *process of standardization* that endangers personal freedoms and even national cultures. How should we react? The Church’s social doctrine contains the principles for an answer that respects the role of individuals and groups. But to promote a global culture of those moral absolutes which are the rights of the person, it is necessary for each Christian to begin with himself by striving to reflect the image of Christ in all his thoughts and actions.

This is certainly not an easy program. It is instead a demanding act of faith, because following Christ means taking a path that leads to self-denial in order to give oneself to God and to others.

5. In the Message for the recent World Youth Day, which we celebrated yesterday, Palm Sunday, I wrote that Christ “is the Messiah who did not fit into any mould, who came without fanfare and who cannot be
“understood’ with the logic of success and power, the kind of logic often used by the world to verify its projects and actions.” And I explained that following the Master in this way involves the courage of a total “yes” to his call: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). These words express the radicalness of a choice that does not allow for hesitation or second thoughts. It is a hard demand: these words today still sound like scandal and folly (cf. 1 Cor 1:22-25). And yet this is the demand that we must follow.

Dear young people, may the Lord grant you to grow in understanding the mission to which he calls you. As I wish you a Holy Easter, allow me to renew the invitation contained in the Apostolic Letter Novo millennio ineunte: “Put out into the deep—Duc in altum!”: Jesus’ invitation to Peter (cf. Lk 5:4) offers you the measure of the response that the Lord expects from you. A total response of complete abandonment into his hands.

*Duc in altum*, where the sea is deepest, where the mystery of God’s love opens before you marvellous spaces that an entire life will not be enough to explore.

May you be accompanied by Our Lady, whom I ask to guide you on the demanding path of holiness. It is with holiness that the world is changed. I cordially bless you.

**Torna ai contenuti**

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**Review of Other Documents**

**A review of other documents**

John Paul II: *Message for 35th World Communications Day (January 24, 2001)*

John Paul II: *Apostolic Letter for the 1700th anniversary of the “Baptism of Armenia” (February 17, 2001)*
John Paul II: Message for 16th World Youth Day (February 14, 2001)

John Paul II: Address to the Apostolic Penitentiary (March 31, 2001)

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Notification regarding certain writings by Father Marciano Vidal (February 22, 2001)

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Notification on the Book “Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism” by Father Jacques Dupuis (February 26, 2001)

Torna ai contenuti
AUDIENCE WITH THE HOLY FATHER
On the occasion of a gathering to reflect on the Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio Ineunte”

Opus Dei’s prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, in response to the Pope’s apostolic letter Novo Millennio Ineunte (cf. no. 29, 5), convoked in Rome, from March 14 to 17, a gathering of the Prelature’s faithful to reflect on the document. The purpose was to second the papal challenge to the whole Church to spread the Gospel message as the new millennium begins.

Some four hundred faithful took part in the study sessions, priests and lay people, both men and women, representing more than 50 countries.

Four general sessions were held. The Prelature’s vicar general, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, spoke about Opus Dei’s mission within the Church. The main themes of the Pope’s letter were addressed by Ángel Rodríguez Luño, professor of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Monsignor Ernst Burkhart delineated the laity’s role in bringing Christianity into the secular realm. Paul O’Callaghan, the pontifical university’s dean, dealt with some issues related to sanctifying work.

In the afternoons, participants broke into smaller groups to study practical ways to implement Novo Millennio in the various apostolic undertakings carried out by Opus Dei faithful throughout the world.

Opus Dei’s Prelate also met on various occasions with participants. He encouraged them to recommit themselves to the Pope’s apostolic intentions.

The gathering was capped by an audience with the Holy Father on March 17 in the Vatican’s Clementine Hall.

Following is the greeting Bishop Echevarría addressed to the Pope.

Most Holy Father,

The good things that the Lord has done during the Jubilee are such a great gift of grace that we feel the duty of treasuring this extraordinary experience, in order to give new impulse to the mission of evangelization.
For this reason, responding to the invitation of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* which Your Holiness has directed to the Church in all its variety, I wanted to convocate these days of reflection, in which representatives of the presbyterate and of the lay faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei who are active in various professional and apostolic sectors have taken part.

We have meditated deeply on the Apostolic Letter, which is filled with enlightening ideas. In the name of all the faithful of the Prelature, I would like to thank you, Holy Father, for the help that once again you have offered us with *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, as well as granting us this audience where we can express to you personally our sentiments, and listen once more to your words.

During these days we have sought to specify pastoral approaches that we hope will respond to the concrete needs of today, as we begin this new millennium. The level of development in the countries in which the Prelature is present varies enormously, and as a consequence, the social and human problems are also very different, as are needs of the particular Churches at work in each of those places.

We are aware, therefore, of having sketched out only a general outline, which will have to be adapted later to the different local contexts, since the only ambition that inspires the apostolic activity of the Prelature is—in the words of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá—*to serve the Church as it wants to be served*, offering each one of its parts a service analogous to that which, in a body, each member provides for the rest of its members. In this way, we will continue to work in close harmony with the local Churches and their respective Pastors.

The variety of local situations does not impede, however, the recognition of certain constant factors as objectives for pastoral work. These objectives are none other than the guidelines established by the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: the search for holiness as the final aim of all evangelization, formation in prayer, sacramental preparation, charity, the unity of the Church, ecumenism, solidarity, etc.

These are ideals that surpass our human capacity. But the miraculous catch of fish will always be present in the life of the Church. There will
always be the need to cast the nets in verbo autem tuo (Luke 5:5). There will always be the need to unite sanctity and apostolate, contemplation and action, work and prayer. Therefore, having formulated during these days the outline of future pastoral plans, we are committed, above all, to entrusting our own souls to divine grace, and to renewing our personal resolutions to seek holiness. Duc in altum!: these words of Christ, repeated by the Pope, enkindle in us aspirations of greater love for God.

In an age in which secularism tried to take God from the world, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá recalled that all earthly activities are marked with the permanent imprint of the presence of the Incarnate Christ and can, therefore, be converted into means of holiness and of encounter with the Lord. In order to return Christ to the heart of earthly realities, it is necessary to have Him at the center of our soul. This is the substance of our pastoral program. And with this in mind, we reaffirm the close adherence of the Prelature to the Chair of Peter, and we ask you, Most Holy Father, for your Apostolic Blessing.

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His Holiness John Paul II read the following address:

Dearest Brothers and Sisters,

1. Welcome! Heartfelt greetings to each one of you, priests and laity who have come together in Rome to spend some days reflecting on the Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, and on the prospects for evangelization that I have outlined in it. In a special way I greet your Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, who has organized this event with the aim of invigorating the service rendered by the Prelature to those particular Churches in which its faithful are present.

You are here representing the components by which the Prelature is organically structured, that is, priests and lay faithful, men and women, with its own Prelate as head. This hierarchical nature of Opus Dei, established in the Apostolic Constitution with which I erected the Prelature (cf. Apostolic Const. Ut Sit, Nov. 28, 1982), offers a starting point for pastoral considerations that are rich in practical applications. In the first place, I wish to emphasize that the membership of the lay faithful in their
own particular Church, and in the Prelature through their incorporation in it, means that the specific mission of the Prelature converges with the evangelizing efforts of each particular Church, just as the Second Vatican Council foresaw when it first envisaged personal prelatures.

The way in which priests and lay people work together provides fertile ground that will enable pastoral activity to spring up and develop, taking as its inspiration the “new energy” (cf. Ap. Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, 15) unleashed by the Great Jubilee. In this context, we should bear in mind the importance of that “spirituality of communion” emphasized by the Apostolic Letter (cf. ibid., 42-43).

2. Lay people, in as much as they are Christians, are committed to carrying out a missionary apostolate. Their specific capacities in the various different human activities are, in the first place, an instrument entrusted to them by God, which will enable “the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mould communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture” (ibid., 29). They are, therefore, encouraged to find effective ways of placing their knowledge at the service of the “new frontiers” that currently present themselves as challenges to the salvific presence of the Church in the world.

It will be the direct witness of lay people in all these fields that will reveal how it is only in Christ that the highest human values attain their fullness. Thanks to their apostolic zeal, their fraternal friendship, and their charity and solidarity, they will be able to turn ordinary social relationships into opportunities to awaken among the people around them that thirst for truth which is the first condition for a salvific encounter with Christ.

Priests, on their part, perform an irreplaceable primary function: that of helping souls, one by one, by means of the sacraments, preaching, and spiritual guidance, to open up to the gift of grace. A spirituality of communion, therefore, will enable the role of each one of these constitutive ecclesial elements to be appreciated to the full.

I exhort you, dearly beloved, not to forget in your work the central point of the Jubilee experience: the encounter with Christ. The Jubilee has been a continuous, unforgettable contemplation of the face of Christ, the eternal Son, God and Man, crucified and risen. We have sought him in the
pilgrimage towards the Door that opens up for man the way to heaven. We have experienced his sweetness in the most human and divine act of forgiving the sinner. We have discovered him as a brother to all men and women, and have been led to unity through the gift of saving love. The thirst for spirituality that has arisen in our society cannot be satisfied except by Christ.

“No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you!” (cf. Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, 29). To the world, to all our brothers and sisters, we Christians must open the road that leads to Christ. “I seek your face, O Lord” (Ps 27 [26], 8). This aspiration was often on the lips of Blessed Josemaria, a man who thirsted for God and was consequently a great apostle. He wrote: “In intentions, may Jesus be our aim; in affections, our Love; in conversation, our theme; in actions, our model” (The Way, 271).

It is time to set aside any fear and launch ourselves towards daring apostolic endeavours. Duc in altum! (Lk 5:4): Christ’s invitation encourages us to go out into the deep, to foster ambitious dreams of personal holiness and of apostolic fruitfulness. Apostolate is always the overflow of the interior life. Certainly it is also action, but it is sustained by charity. And the source of charity is always in the most intimate dimension of the person, where the voice of Christ is heard calling us to go out into the deep with him. May each one of you be able to welcome this invitation of Christ and respond with greater generosity every day.

I entrust to the intercession of Mary your commitment to prayer, to work, and to giving witness, and I give you my affectionate Blessing.
PRELATE

- Decrees
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- Homilies
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Decrees

Some Decrees

Establishment of the Josemaria Escriva Historical Institute

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicae Sedis gratia Praelatus
Sanctæ Crucis et Operis Dei

DECRETUM

Centesimo feliciter appropinquante anniversario die, ex quo ortus est Beatus Iosephmaria Escriva de Balaguer, Operis Dei Conditor, grato ac filiali animo respicientes eius heroicum respondum divinæ voluntati atque vitam, quam impendit totam in Ecclesiae Sanctae, suorum filiorum filiarumque et animarum omnium servitium, opportuum nobis visum est altioris inquisitionis Centrum constituere quo historicæ de Beato Iosephmaria pervestigationes promoveantur necnon, iuxta viam et rationem scientiarum (nempe sacrae theologiae, iuris canonici, pædagogicae artis aliarumque id genus), studia quoque peragantur de eius spiritu, de iis quæ docuit deque apostolatus operibus quæ, velut mare sine oris, suo ipsius impulsu, cum directo tum indirecto, per orbem universum incepta sunt.

Quapropter, postquam auxilium invocavimus Beatissimæ Virginis Mariæ, Sedis Sapientiae ac Reginæ Operis Dei, necnon Sanctorum Praelaturæ Operis Dei Patronorum ipsiusque Beati Iosephmariae, hoc Decreto erigimus atque erectum declaramus

INSTITUTUM HISTORICUM IOSEPHMARIA Escriva,

cuius ambitus erit internationalis, eiusmod sedes Romæ consistet, directe pendet a Prelato Operis Dei et aliis in civitatibus Sectiones habere poterit.

Datum Romæ, ex ædibus Curiæ Praelatitiae, die 9 Ianuarii anni 2001.

+ Xaverius Echevarría

Thomas G. Bohlin

Curiæ Praelatitiae Cancellarius
Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips

Jerusalem

In January 2001 Bishop Javier Echevarría, Opus Dei’s prelate, visited the Holy Land to meet with the prelature’s faithful and those taking part in the activities and spiritual formation the prelature offers. His main objective was personally to make known to them the prayer and closeness of other members, cooperators and friends, in the difficult situation that region is going through. Above all he wanted to bring them the blessing and encouragement of the Holy Father, who closely follows events in that part of the world.

At gatherings in Jerusalem and Nazareth, Bishop Echevarría spurred those attending to continue a generous sowing of joy, grounded in prayer. He urged people to spread understanding and peace to those around them, forgiving offenses and helping those most in need, even when this requires personal sacrifice.

Some faithful of the prelature and those frequenting Biranta Study Center, taking to heart suggestions made by the Patriarch of Jerusalem and by the prelate, helped to gather and distribute food and other essential items to the neediest families. People from all social sectors responded generously. In addition, a number of overseas companies agreed to help out financially; these funds were use to help alleviate the severe poverty of many families in and around Bethelehem.
United States and Mexico

Bishop Echevarría traveled to the United States in March, to take part in the episcopal ordination of Bishop José Gómez. In Denver he was able to meet with a good number of people who attend the means of Christian formation imparted by some of the Prelature’s faithful. He asked them to fulfill generously their Christian commitments and to be a strong support for the Church, carrying out their daily work with love.

Continuing on to Mexico, he took part in various work sessions with regional vicars, directors, priests and lay people of the prelature. Among other things, he shared with them what the Holy Father had said in the audience he granted to participants gathered to study Novo millennio ineunte. He encouraged everyone to undertake specific initiatives in keeping with that apostolic Letter.

On April 3 and April 4 Bishop Echevarría held several get-togethers with faithful of the Opus Dei prelature. He recalled the stay there of Blessed Josemaría in 1970, who had come to pray to our Lady of Guadalupe and to entrust to her care the Church and Opus Dei, its faithful and apostolates. He urged those present to be apostolic, prayerful and generous in their dedication to God and others. He also had the opportunity to visit the Guadalupe shrine to pray at the feet of Mexico’s patroness.

On his return from America on April 6, Bishop Echevarría was in Madrid to confer ordination as deacons on 24 of the prelature’s faithful in the parish church of Our Lady of the Angels. The bells of this church were those Blessed Josemaria heard ringing on October 2, 1928, when God let him see Opus Dei while he was making a retreat.

Pamplona, Spain

From June 27 to July 2, Opus Dei’s prelate, Bishop Echevarría, was in Pamplona, Spain, to spend time with the prelature’s faithful and to visit some sick people in the University Clinic.
On June 30 the Prelate blessed a new statue of the founder, in the patio of the main building of the University of Navarre. Many were able to view the ceremony from the patio itself and from the windows of the floors above the patio.

Previously Bishop Echevarría held a working session with the trustees and directors of the schools of theology, philosophy and canon law. He also met with the university’s Board of Governors and encouraged each of them to work in keeping with Blessed Josemaría’s spirit and therefore in complete agreement with the Church’s magisterium.

On Sunday, July 1, the Prelate took part in two get-togethers in the university’s large gymnasium with some 4,000 of the prelature’s faithful from the delegation of Pamplona. On both occasions he extensively referred to the Gospel words duc in altum (“launch out into the deep”), on which the Holy Father commented at length in the apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte. He also encouraged everyone to prepare for celebrating the centennial of Blessed Josemaría.

Establishment of new Centers of the Prelature

The Prelate’s Vicars in their respective areas have established Centers of the Prelature in:

Aravaca, Spain, and Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Participation in the episcopal consecration of the Auxiliary Bishop of Denver

On March 26 Opus Dei’s Prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría was one of the consecrating bishops at the episcopal ordination of Rev. José H.
Gómez, at the invitation of Denver’s Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., who officiated at the ceremony. Bishop Gómez, a priest of Opus Dei’s clergy, was named by John Paul II auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Denver, Colorado, on January 8, 2001.

The ceremony took place in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, drawing more than 25 bishops, mostly from dioceses in the United States.

Priestly Ordinations

On June 2 Bishop Javier Echevarría, Opus Dei’s Prelate, conferred priestly ordination on ten of the Prelature’s deacons in a ceremony that took place in the basilica of St. Eugene in Rome.

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Homilies

On the feast of Blessed Josemaria, Parish of Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Rome (June 26, 2001)

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. In a few months, on January 9, 2002, we will celebrate the hundredth anniversary of Blessed Josemaria Escriva’s birth. We are preparing spiritually for this date by renewing our desires for holiness. I hope that all of you will take advantage of the graces and favors, both spiritual and
material, that I am certain the Blessed Trinity wants to grant to the world on the occasion of the first centennial of the birth of Opus Dei’s founder.

Now I would like to recall some central features of the message God entrusted to Blessed Josemaria, for men and women seeking sanctity in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. At the beginning of the new century, our Holy Father John Paul II reminded us that “all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness.”[1] And, he added, the ideal of a fully Christian life “must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few “uncommon heroes” of holiness... The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this ‘high standard’ of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction.”[2]

As we know, Blessed Josemaria’s mission in the Church was to re-awaken in Christians, with new force and in new ways, the awareness of the universal call to holiness and apostolate. I still recall how animated his answer was when someone asked him during his trip to Brazil why he had been accused, in Opus Dei’s early years, of being crazy: “Doesn’t it seem crazy to you to say that one can and should be a saint walking along the street? That the ice cream seller with his little wagon, the household employee spending her day in the kitchen, the bank manager, the university professor, the farmer, the bell hop... can and should be saints? All are called to sanctity!”[3]

2. In the opening prayer of today’s liturgy, the Church draws our attention to what I just mentioned as the most appropriate starting point for any reflection on our holy Founder: God our Father, you chose Blessed Josemaria to proclaim the universal call to sanctity and apostolate in the Church... God created our Father precisely to fulfill this mission, and he responded with a faithful and unconditional dedication to the graces he received. Every man and woman who comes into the world is called to carry out a mission which only he or she can fulfill. No one’s life is without a purpose. Everyone is precious in the sight of God, who arranges circumstances in the best way and gives each person the graces needed to fulfill his will.

But, what is sanctity? What does it mean to aspire to be saints? Does it mean to be impeccable, to have no defects, to be outstanding in men’s eyes? Certainly not. To repeat a favorite teaching of Blessed Josemaria, there are
no saints here on earth. Saints are found only in heaven. Here we are all sinners; but sinners who strive, and this is the important thing, to truly love Jesus, and therefore who get up each time they fall, going frequently to the sacrament of Penance, who seek to strengthen their own spiritual life, frequently receiving Communion, praying insistently, while trying to fulfill as perfectly as possible their family, professional and social duties, and, at the same time, striving for justice and peace in society. We should be convinced that becoming saints, with the decisive help of grace, is a goal within everyone’s reach.

The effort to attain Christian perfection does not imply uniformity. But the many paths towards sanctity necessarily converge in one point: in configuration with Christ, the fruit of grace and our personal response to the divine call. “You have to be different from one another, as the saints in heaven are different, each having his own personal and very special characteristics. But also, you have to be as identical as the saints, who would not be saints if each of them had not identified himself with Christ.”[4]

In order to correspond to all the graces we receive at each moment in our life, we go to God, the fount of sanctity, invoking the help of Blessed Josemaría: By his example and prayers, grant that in faithfully carrying out our daily work in the spirit of Christ, we may be formed in the likeness of your Son, and together with the most Blessed Virgin Mary, serve the work of redemption with an ardent love. Let us remember that at every moment in our life, without exception, our Lord is helping us to sanctify that specific situation.

3. When we truly seek to identify ourselves with Christ, the consequences are clear. We have to collaborate with him in bringing the fruits of his redemption to all men and women. “You cannot separate the fact that Christ is God from his role as Redeemer. The Word became flesh and came into the world ‘to save all men’ (see 1 Tim 2:4) With all our personal defects and limitations, we are other Christs, Christ himself, and we too are called to serve all men.”[5]

These words taken from a homily of the Founder of Opus Dei are recalled in the opening prayer of the Mass, which speaks of serving the work of redemption with ardent love. Christ, to save us, wanted to be raised on the
Cross. The offertory prayer indicates the only way we can collaborate in spreading the salvation worked by Jesus: by seeking to offer all our actions in union with the Mass, the memorial which makes our Lord’s death and resurrection present in a sacramental way. Thanks to the Eucharist, we are able to say with the apostles: *possimus!* [6] “We can!”

*Accept, Father, these gifts we offer in memory of Blessed Josemaria, and through this sacramental renewal of the sacrifice of the Cross graciously sanctify all our works.* In the bread and wine that constitute the material of the Eucharist, fruit of the earth and work of human hands, all of us are represented. We are invited to make a Eucharist of ourselves. Therefore, the Cross must be present in our life and in our actions. Only thus will we have a guarantee that we are traveling the path that leads to holiness and conforming ourselves ever more faithfully to the Savior.

Our conduct has to always be marked by the Cross, even if “there is a kind of fear around, a fear of the Cross, of our Lord’s Cross. What has happened is that people have begun to regard as crosses all the unpleasant things that crop up in life, and they don’t know how to take them as God’s children should, with supernatural outlook. So much so, that they are even removing the roadside crosses set up by our forefathers!” Blessed Josemaria was sad to see this undermining of the Christian spirit, which leads people to forget that salvation and true happiness are found only in the Cross. But never one to lose hope, he continued: “In the Passion, the Cross ceased to be a symbol of punishment and became instead a sign of victory. The Cross is the emblem of the Redeemer: *in quo est salus, vita et resurrectio nostra:* there lies our salvation, our life and our resurrection.”[7]

Sharing in Jesus’ Cross (and not all the hardships that we complain about are Jesus’ cross; many are just the fruit of our imagination), sharing in our Lord’s Cross is a sign of God’s blessing, a proof of Jesus’ love and trust. Yes, his trust, because in those moments our Lord is asking us to carry with him the weight of the wood on which he is immolated. Even humanly speaking, true love shines forth in sacrifice for those we love. “Sometimes we speak of love as if it were an impulse to self-satisfaction or a mere means to selfish fulfillment of one’s own personality. But that’s not love. True love means going out of oneself, giving oneself. Love brings joy, but a joy whose roots are in the shape of a cross.”[8]
4. When one grasps this truth, when one understands that meeting up with the Cross, far from being a negative experience, is a moment rich in fruit, pledge of a reward that exceeds all expectations, then our heart overflows spontaneously with a deep joy and peace stronger than any storm. This experience always accompanies those who strive to follow Jesus’ call. The Christian vocation has room for many paths, as we have already said, but these invariably converge on one point: knowing and sensing ourselves to be God’s beloved children. Children of God who, in Christ and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, seek to advance rapidly towards the final goal: eternal life with the Trinity, of which the Holy Eucharist is a pledge hidden under the veil of the sacramental signs.

The happiest people on earth are true Christians. In the prayer after communion, we address the following plea to our heavenly Father: Father... may this sacrament we have received in memory of Blessed Josemaria, strengthen in us the spirit of adoption as children of God, and fulfilling your will, may we walk joyfully on the path of our vocation.

In conclusion, I would like to remind you of some words from the Pope’s Apostolic Letter for the new millennium: “On this journey we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin Mary.” We entrust ourselves to Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, “Star of the New Evangelization.” Today in particular, we beseech her to watch over the apostolic trip of John Paul II to the Ukraine. May our Lady “the radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps,”[9] smooth the path to Christian unity and bring about a period rich in fruit for the Church. I invite you to invoke her with an aspiration that Blessed Josemaria’s heart poured out fifty years ago now: Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum! Amen.

Torna ai contenuti

At the priestly ordination ofdeacons of the Prelature, Basílica of St. Eugene, Rome
(June 2, 2001)

Dear Brothers and Sisters:
Beloved Deacons:

1. The Church, born from Christ’s side on the Cross, was publicly manifested on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles with the force of a mighty wind[1] and rested upon them in the form of tongues of fire.[2] Before, they had locked themselves in the Cenacle out of fear.[3] Now, filled with the Spirit, no longer concerned about the dangers, they launched out openly to announce that only in Jesus, crucified and risen, could mankind attain salvation.

That same Spirit of holiness, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, is poured out upon each Christian at the moment of Baptism, and later in Confirmation. Today there will descend upon you, my beloved deacons, a new effusion of the Paraclete. He will transform you into Christ’s priests and bring to birth in you a new life,[4] based on the service to souls that marks the ministerial priesthood. The Church took its first steps on earth with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and impelled by the Spirit it continues going forward in history.

In virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, a marvelous transformation is on the point of being accomplished in you. You will listen in sacramental confession to the sins of men and pronounce the words of absolution. But it will be Christ who pardons them with his grace. And it will be He who, with the sound of your voice, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, will consecrate his Body and Blood in the Mass. The priesthood will give you the power to teach his truth with authority and to proclaim his law. It will confer on you the grace of letting Christ act through you, so that our Lord himself can continue consoling the afflicted, curing the wounds of the soul, cleansing human miseries, restoring hope to mankind, listening to the prayers of the humble. And you will marvel to see that, as happened on the day of Pentecost, people of all ages, social conditions and cultures will hear you praising God in their own language; and, moved by the Holy Spirit, they will unite themselves to your praise.[5]

Through the priest there is fulfilled each day the prophecy of Joel that we heard in the first reading: And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.[6] Today we
recognize with joy that the priestly ministry, with its great variety of functions (centered on preaching, administration of the sacraments and spiritual direction) renews in time the miracle of Pentecost. As an ancient Father of the Church tells us, our Lord “wanted his benefits to remain with us; he wanted the souls redeemed with his precious Blood to be continually sanctified by the sacrament of his Passion. Therefore he commanded his first disciples, whom he made the first priests in his Church, to unceasingly celebrate these mysteries of eternal life.

“It is necessary, then, that all priests celebrate the sacraments in churches throughout the whole world, until Christ returns from heaven, so that we, both ministers and the faithful, may have every day before our eyes and in our hands the memorial of the passion of Christ, receiving it in our mouth and in our breast, preserving the indelible memory of our redemption.”

2. The coming of the Holy Spirit into the world, by bringing Christ’s mission to perfection, crowned the divine plan of redemption. The Spirit of truth, as our Lord promised, guides us into all the truth.

What is truth? Pilate asks, trying to rob us of all certitude. The Spirit shows us, in contrast, that the truth is found in this God of ours who, out of love for us, went to the extreme of giving his life for us. Truth is love shown by sacrifice. The love for which we have been created and in which we find our happiness is not a vague sentiment or fleeting emotion; nor is it simply compassion. It is the gift of self: this is what the Holy Spirit makes us discover in Christ’s face, furrowed by pain during the Passion and transfigured by the glory of the Resurrection. God has given himself to man, to every man and woman, so that we can love him unconditionally. Saint Paul sums up this reality in the following words: I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

God asks us for everything. As Blessed Josemaría wrote: “Jesus is never satisfied ‘sharing.’ He wants all.” Any soul led by the Holy Spirit understands that it could not be otherwise, because the contrary would not be love. Such a soul does not see renunciations, burdens or sacrifices in what God asks of him, but rather opportunities to demonstrate with deeds that he truly loves. “How little a life is to offer to God.” From this
perspective, which is that of Christ’s passion, even suffering becomes a manifestation of our Lord’s love of predilection.

3. My dear deacons: You have had the generosity to respond to our Lord with an unconditional Yes, when he called you to the priesthood in the Prelature of Opus Dei, in order to serve the Church in a new way, in a priestly way. One attains maturity in the spiritual life only when, in the face of each request of our Lord, love overcomes selfishness and leads us to strive decisively for the goals held up to us. Now a long path is opening up before you, before each of us. Our Lord is waiting for us to say Yes to him many more times. Let us forcefully invoke the Holy Spirit, who will transform us into Christ and awaken in our souls the same sentiments of abnegation and dedication that always filled Christ’s heart.[14]

Victory over our selfishness requires a lifetime of struggle. The Holy Spirit never ceases to sustain us and to spur us on with his grace. Therefore, as Blessed Josemaria wrote, the fundamental disposition we need in front of the Paraclete can be summed up in one word: docility. Anyone who strives to follow the promptings of the Spirit experiences his efficacious assistance. What seemed impossible becomes the starting point for another step forward. Scripture describes the interventions of the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity with metaphors of an impetuous wind, a consuming fire, water springing up to life eternal: images which elicit in us a firm hope and trust in the fruitfulness of the Holy Spirit’s action in our lives.

Let us meditate once more on the Pope’s concluding words in his Apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte: “A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ.” Jesus invites us “to share the enthusiasm of the very first Christians: we can count on the power of the same Spirit who was poured out at Pentecost and who impels us still today to start out anew, sustained by the hope ‘which does not disappoint’ (Rom 5:5).”[15] If we correspond to the action of the Paraclete, holiness, identification with Christ, will be a goal within the reach of each of us, despite our personal littleness.

What a great need there is for many holy priests! Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.[16] Priests filled with love for
God and their brethren, always united to the Holy Father and to their own Ordinary—in your case the Ordinary of the Prelature of Opus Dei. I ask the Paraclete today, in a special way, to nourish in our souls a great love for the Church, which will encourage us to pray insistently for the Pope, for the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, for all the bishops, for priests and religious, for the entire people of God.

I will finish by once again reminding all the parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends of these candidates to the priesthood that, through this ordination, the Holy Spirit will enter more fully into their lives. You too are receiving a great gift today and are assuming a great responsibility before the whole Church. Invoke the Paraclete so that, in pouring down his grace, he will renew the marvelous deeds of Pentecost. To attain this, let us go to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[13] Ibid., no. 420.
At the Mass for the eternal repose of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (March 23, 2001)

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. In the language of the Gospel, the verb “to know” is very rich in meaning; it encompasses much more than a conceptual knowledge of God, no matter how profound. “To know” God implies, above all, the complete adhesion of the human person—intellect, will and heart; soul and body; spiritual faculties and senses—to our heavenly Father, the beginning and end of our existence. And since we cannot attain this participation in God’s life by ourselves alone, the Father has sent his eternal Word into the world. This is what we confess in the Creed: for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven... and became man. Jesus became incarnate in the virginal womb of Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit. He lived among us, died, rose and ascended into heaven, in order to send us the Paraclete so that we might live in communion with the Blessed Trinity.

This is eternal life, Jesus also taught, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent. Today, as we offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in suffrage for Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, on the seventh anniversary of his dies natalis, these words of our Lord reinforce in us the intimate and sure hope that Don Alvaro, through the mercy of God who has rewarded his holy life, enjoys the vision of God’s face. Let us make our own, then, the words of the entrance hymn: Beatus quem elegisti et assumpsisti: inhabitat in atriis tuis. Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!
2. In his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Pope John Paul II sketches out the great pastoral task of the Church at the beginning of the new century. After pointing out the positive and negative aspects of contemporary society, he concludes, with the light of faith, that only by following Christ, the Savior of the world, can we gain the intimate and definitive union with God that we call “eternal life,” to which every human being aspires. “We shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance that he gives us: *I am with you!*”[5] From here, the Pope continues, stems our absolute need, today and always, *to begin again from Christ.*

Fifteen years have passed since the Holy Father pointed out the characteristics of the evangelizers the modern world is waiting for. “There is a need for heralds of the Gospel who are experts in humanity, who have a profound knowledge of the heart of present-day man, sharing his joys and hopes, his anguish and sadness, and who are also contemplative souls, in love with God. Thus what we need are new saints. *The saints were the great evangelizers of Europe.* Let us beseech our Lord to increase the spirit of holiness in his Church and send us new saints to evangelize today’s world.”[6]

These words could serve as a portrait of the first successor of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá at the head of Opus Dei. This shouldn’t surprise us, since it is in the forge of saints that other saints are formed. Without anticipating the judgment of the Church, whose task it is to verify the heroic Christian virtues of the Servant of God, those familiar with Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s life will readily recognize in the figure of this exemplary priest and bishop, an example of the holiness the Pope sees as so essential for our day and age.

In the course of his long and fruitful life, my unforgettable predecessor was indeed an *expert in humanity.* Those who came into contact with him, even if only briefly, were drawn by his goodness. Everyone who approached him felt immediately understood, encouraged, and loved. Bishop del Portillo shared fully in the joys and hopes of the men and women of his time. First, as a lay person in Opus Dei, later as a priest, at the Founder’s side for many years, and finally as Prelate and Bishop, he had a deep concern for all the problems of humanity. He followed very closely present-
day concerns, which led him to pray and mortify himself, and to give impetus to apostolic initiatives aimed at bettering the spiritual and material well-being of people all over the world. I cannot fail to recall, for example, how he encouraged the faithful and cooperators of Opus Dei during his pastoral trips to seek out ways and means to promote apostolic works for technical and professional formation, closely linked to spiritual formation (which was the principal aim of Don Alvaro in all his projects), especially among those with fewer material resources. Thus thousands of people from all walks of life have benefited from the apostolic impetus of this generous priest.

All of this was made possible by Bishop del Portillo’s eager search, right from his youth, for the sanctity to which the Divine Master calls everyone. It was precisely his passion for God and the concerns of God that nourished his hunger to serve mankind. Deeply aware of being a son of God, Don Alvaro let himself be guided by the Holy Spirit (as we have just read in the letter to the Romans),[7] becoming truly a person in love, a contemplative in the midst of the world.

3. This is the teaching I would like to stress as we commemorate this exemplary priest and bishop, beloved by all of us. We too, in the specific circumstances of our life, can and must seriously aspire to be saints. Pope John Paul II, in the apostolic letter cited above, lists the Church’s pastoral priorities for the new century: prayer, assiduous participation in the Eucharist and the sacrament of penance, complete trust in divine grace, meditating on and preaching the Word of God.... All of this, the Pope states, stems from the fact that “all pastoral initiatives must be set in relation to holiness.”[8] And he continues: “To place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity....

“As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few ‘uncommon heroes’ of holiness. The paths of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual....The time
has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction.”[9]

I would like to end by reading from a pastoral letter Bishop del Portillo wrote in 1985, to second the Roman Pontiff’s initiatives for a new evangelization: “Increase then, my daughters and sons, your union with our Lord, which is the only guarantee of success in apostolic work. He has overcome the world (see Jn 16:33), and we will share in his triumph if we truly cultivate a strong piety, nourished by the study of doctrine; if our prayer is practical, leading to generous sacrifice and the example of our integral behavior, with a unity of life; if we keep striving each day to live in God’s presence. Don’t forget,” he concluded, citing Blessed Josemaria: “that ‘the further away your surroundings may be from Christ’s truth, the more immersed you must be in God, with our inner fire and our apostolic fervor. Thus we will be light, a shining lantern, enkindled on the crossroads of this earth.”[10]

I advise you to meditate attentively on these ideals, which are within our grasp because Bishop Del Portillo is praying for us. Have trusting recourse to his protection.

We beseech our Lady to intercede for us before her divine Son, so that our sincere desire to be saints may lead us to a deeper conversion in these weeks of Lent that still remain before Easter: the first Easter of the new millennium. Amen.

Torna ai contenuti

Articles and Interviews
“Opus Dei: a lay pathway to correspond to Christ,” interview published in Le Nouvel Informateur Catholique, Montreal, Canada (January 21, 2001)

interview by Michèle Boulva

“The hour of the laity has struck!”... It is hard to say things much clearer. On the occasion of the Jubilee of the lay apostolate, that is how John Paul II expressed the great message of Vatican Council II on the universal call to holiness and the responsibility of all baptized persons to collaborate in building Jesus' project of love for humanity.

In 1928, a young Spanish priest saw himself entrusted by God with the immense task of reminding people of this reality within the very heart of the Church. The generous response of Blessed Josemaria Escriva would bring forth the Prelature of Opus Dei.

Monsignor Javier Echevarría is the current prelate. We met him in Rome last October, and he readily agreed to answer the questions of the NIC.

How did your founder receive the mission that God wanted to entrust to him?

Opus Dei was founded on October 2, 1928. Blessed Josemaria Escriva was making a retreat. That day, while he was in his room after having celebrated Mass, he reviewed some notes he had written during the previous months. Those notes reflected some of the promptings that the Lord had been placing in his soul for some years.

Suddenly, while he meditated on those notes, he saw Opus Dei: that is how he always described it. Thanks to a supernatural light, infused in his heart by our Lord, he understood what God expected of him.

Some time later, in his personal writings, Blessed Josemaria recalled that he had knelt down, baffled by this divine burden and yet ready to carry it out.
The founder of Opus Dei received his mission with faith and humility, very much aware of his personal unworthiness. He used to say he was “an inept and deaf instrument” in God’s hands.

At the same time, he had a gigantic faith, fully convinced that the Work of God would be carried out exactly as he had seen it that October morning of 1928, despite the total lack of human means. How many times he repeated that he then possessed nothing but “26 years, the grace of God, and good humor”!

**Decisive influence**

*You knew Blessed Josemaria: what was your relationship with him like? What special memories do you have of his personality?*

I had the grace to live close to our founder for many years, from 1950, the year of my arrival in Rome, until 1975, when God called him to His presence. My relationship was that of a son with his father. From the very beginning of my vocation to Opus Dei, I really felt like a son. As for Blessed Josemaria, he was truly a father for the members of the Work and for many people who, without belonging to Opus Dei, considered themselves children of his spirit.

Logically, as soon as I began to serve Blessed Josemaria as his personal secretary, my relationship with him became closer without ceasing to be filial. My role was to care for all that had to do with the material aspects of his life: physical health, professional schedule, rest, etc. I must say that he always followed my suggestions promptly, even though I was much younger than he.

After having been at the side of Blessed Josemaria for so many years, my memories are obviously innumerable. I have gathered them in a book that was recently published. In line with what I have just mentioned, I would stress Blessed Josemaria’s docility. He was very cultured, possessed a remarkable intelligence and a deep interior life, but was in fact extraordinarily simple and docile.

He trusted in God as a young child trusts his father or mother when cradled in their arms. At the same time, he had a forceful character and a
moral energy capable of instilling enthusiasm in people and winning over crowds.

Blessed Josemaria was unfailingly tenacious, and yet he was always ready to rectify his opinions or judgements whenever he was presented with new data. He was an open-minded man, never enslaved by his own viewpoint. He was always eager to listen to those around him and to learn from them.

What impact did he have on you and your vocation?

He had a decisive influence. If I had not met Opus Dei and its founder, I would not have discovered for my own life the vast horizons of holiness and service to humanity. I witnessed the life of a saint first-hand, with his struggles, his constant dedication to others, his heroic generosity in corresponding to grace. This was and still is to me a shining example and a constant encouragement in my desire to follow that path, even though I do so only from a great distance back.

Children of God

What are the central points of Opus Dei’s spirit?

A keen awareness of the fact that we are children of God by virtue of our incorporation in Christ through both Baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit. This is an essential element of the Christian faith. The faithful of Opus Dei seek to permeate their being and their behaviour with this conviction, so that it becomes a constant point of reference in any circumstance of life one may find oneself.

Members of the Work thus strive to work as children of God. They seek to carry out their work perfectly on the human level and with an upright intention, by seeking only the glory of God and service to others. Whenever they pray, they address God as an affectionate Father to whom they open their hearts with trust, constantly and everywhere.

When resting or during moments of leisure, they are aware of always being under the loving gaze of their Father in Heaven, and thus avoid anything that could displease Him. In short, they try, by struggling against their shortcomings and defects, to fulfill their personal and social duties,
both civil and religious. And they try to do this with the joy that comes from knowing that they are children of God in Christ.

It is from this perspective that the Prelature of Opus Dei constantly orients the doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic formation it offers its faithful.

*How does the spirit of Opus Dei respond to the needs of today’s Church?*

As our founder wrote, the spirit of Opus Dei encourages the faithful of the Prelature to be present “at the very beginning of any upright changes that occur in the life of society” and to make their own “the progress of each epoch.” In this way, their mentality and their undertakings “will always fully meet the demands and needs likely to arise throughout the centuries.”

On the other hand, Christians will always need to seek holiness, because that is the fundamental commitment contracted in Baptism. Since the vast majority of people must sanctify themselves precisely in the fulfillment of their family, professional and social duties, the spirit of Opus Dei will always be up to date. It is a concrete and practical path to answer the universal call to holiness and apostolate.

*Evangelization*

*What is the current status of Opus Dei: its extension in the five continents; the number of its members; the next steps; challenges tied to enculturation?*

Opus Dei was born in 1928 with a “catholic” scope, which means a universal scope. For many years now, it has also been in fact a universal reality within the Church. When our founder died, there were 56,000 faithful of Opus Dei on the five continents. Since then, with the grace of God, it has not stopped growing: today there are Centers in 60 countries.

During the last six years, Opus Dei has begun its apostolate in Estonia, Lithuania, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Uganda, South Africa and Panama. As for the number of faithful, there are 81,854 lay members of the Prelature and 1,734 priests incardinated within it. All this is indicated in the Pontifical Yearbook for the year 2000.

The next steps? In addition to the consolidation of the apostolate everywhere, especially where we have recently arrived, a great desire motivates all the faithful of Opus Dei. It comes down to spreading this spirit of sanctification of daily work and the fulfillment of the ordinary
duties of a Christian. When going to new countries in Asia and Africa, where Catholics are still very few, the idea is to collaborate there in the evangelizing mission of the Church. With regards to enculturation, it should be noted that the faithful Opus Dei are already in same environment as the other citizens, their peers. Like them, they contribute to the conception and the development of changes of their own society, each of which has its own characteristics.

The spirit of the Work impels them to sanctify their daily work and their ordinary duties. This is why the Prelature offers them the continuing formation that I just mentioned. It helps them to act as Christian leaven in the mass of humanity, to permeate their very diverse professional environments with the light and salt of Jesus Christ. Also to learn from their families, their colleagues, their friends, etc.

Without any vainglory, I am happy to repeat that there are millions of people all over the world who love the apostolates of the Prelature, who attend the means of formation it offers and are grateful for them. If I say this without vainglory, it is because what is important is that people come closer to God: that is the goal.

**Marriage and family**

*What place does the family have in the Work?*

From its very beginnings, Opus Dei as such has not had any specific apostolic specializations such as the family, young people, those who are marginalized, influential people... The secular character of everyday life intrinsically marks its message and its spirit. And “everyday life” does not mean “worldly life.”

At the same time, as Blessed Josemaria often pointed out, Opus Dei has all the specializations, for it addresses any person who aspires to holiness in the midst of the occupations of this world: professional work, studies, family and social relations. That is the forum for the effort to strive for holiness and the field for apostolic activity.

It goes without saying that evangelization and the Christian promotion of the family represent one of the priorities of the pastoral work of Opus Dei. That is explained by the fact that the family is the basic cell of
society and that it is impossible to permeate human activities with a Christian meaning without intensely seeking at the same time the formation of truly Christian families.

It should be kept in mind that most of the faithful of the Prelature are married people who seek their sanctification through the faithful fulfillment of all their duties, especially those duties that derive from their state in life.

*Today's society often ridicules marriage and the family. In your opinion, what should be done?*

I think it is extremely urgent that everyone, regardless of his or her religion, rediscover the sacred character of the marital bond. Marriage is not simply a civil institution, even if it obviously has important civil effects that the law must protect. It is in fact an institution established by God from the moment of the creation of man and woman, and marked by its essential properties of unity and indissolubility. Marriage is a covenant of love founded on the personal self-giving of the spouses: a gift that is mutual, irrevocable and open to life.

Christians should know and understand the significance of Christ’s raising marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament of the New Covenant. This implies that it is a channel of divine grace and a living sign of Christ’s spousal love for the Church. If these basic points are well transmitted through catechesis, future generations will be well prepared for marriage and they will form truly Christian families. Within these families, the children will mature in the faith, the very same faith lived by their parents. And they will be able to exert a positive, Christian influence on all of society.

*Young and generous*

*Why do so many young people refuse to follow the teachings of the Church?*

I think that is a stereotype that is a bit too easily spread about. What characterizes young people is a big, generous heart full of ambitious projects, and that has not changed in the young men and women of our time.
At the same time, and this will always be the case, every Christian without exception needs to receive formation and to grow in one's relationship with God. This is what happens with young people. Look at the World Youth Days: two million young people who walk for kilometres under a blazing sun, facing tiredness, often thirsty, sleeping on the ground, and yet without a lament or a complaint, smiling.

All that for what? To listen to a noble elderly man? No, I would say rather that they came to meet the Vicar of Christ on earth, the Pope. John Paul II shows them the demanding way of the faith. He gives witness to them of Jesus’ love for them in the hope brought to us by the Word that was made flesh and dwelt among us, to use the words of Saint John that were the theme of those days.

No one can deny the thousands of confessions, innumerable conversions and many new vocations. Those who try to manipulate young people are still open-mouthed about it. I insist that young people are eager to follow the message of the Church. This is the time of generous commitment and personal effort, but also of the splendid experience of God’s loving mercy.

Radio interview on the network COPE, Madrid, Spain, on the occasion of the publication of the book Itinerarios de Vida Cristiana (April 9, 2001)

There is no better mirror of our faith that the life of men and women who have been changed by encountering Jesus Christ, living and present in his Church. That’s why on our program we try to present the paths of these person’s lives, paths that provide guidance for us and help each of us to follow our own path in life. Itinerarios de Vida Cristiana is the title of a recent book by Bishop Javier Echevarría, Opus Dei’s Prelate (part of the collection “Planeta Testimonio”). Bishop Echevarría, who just ordained 24 members of Opus Dei to the priesthood here in Madrid, has graciously accepted our invitation to appear on
Good afternoon, Bishop Echevarría, and many thanks for being with us.

Good afternoon to you. I'm the one who is grateful. I ask you and your audience to pray for me, as I do with all my heart for them.

I imagine you are happy to be back in your native Madrid, especially on such a joyous occasion as the ordination of 24 members of the Opus Dei Prelature. Here's my first question: What is the significance of the fact that the Work continues being so fruitful in finding men who say Yes to God's call as priests?

I think the answer is found in the very reality of the Church's life. Although throughout its history the Church encounters many trials, it remains a living body, thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit. I think it's clear to everyone that the Church couldn't exist without priests. Our Lord, who promised to assist his Church till the end of time, continues sending priests in every corner of the world. I pray for a worldwide increase in priests and seminarians who are eager to be holy priests. In particular it gives me a special joy (and this is my sixth ordination) to confer ordination as deacons on these men who have dedicated their lives, with a total generosity, to serving the Church through their service to this part of the Church that is the prelature of Opus Dei.

Now let's turn to some basic themes of your book. You say there that every spiritual, Christian pathway takes place within the Church. Today we find, however, the anomaly of people hungry for spirituality, hungry for a spirit free of materialism, who seek it on paths outside of the Church. What would you say to those who are looking for spirituality, but who do so on the often strange paths of sects or new age religions?

I think that people today have a hunger for God, a hunger that will always be present in this world of ours. Perhaps part of the confusion and disorientation evident in today's society is due to a gap between dealing with God and people's daily lives. In consistent Christians there should be no gaps, since they know that their faith, hope and love have to be exercised in all of life's circumstances. Despite the claims made by some persons, it's undeniable that man's soul has engraved upon it a deep longing for transcendence. And when he least expects it, and even at times explicitly rejects it, there comes a moment when he feels a deep need for the truth,
the truth of a God who creates, whose providence guides the world, and who never abandons mankind. We are all called to enjoy eternal happiness with God, to a transcendent destiny. At times this truth can be lost from sight, replaced by a seemingly worldwide search for material security. When faith is weakened or obscured, the need is felt for something to take its place. How this contrasts with the sincerity and holy steadfastness God has given the Church with this Pope of ours, who continues to proclaim the Truth vigorously, despite his declining physical strength. His witness to the faith is universally acknowledged, independently of his outstanding personal qualities. His life has given testimony to the fact that only in the living Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever, is found the truth that saves humanity.

You have just mentioned the Pope and the witness of his life. I know that recently a large group of the Prelature’s faithful met with the Holy Father. I was impressed by how strongly and urgently the Pope in his address called for lay people to commit themselves to be missionaries in the environment where the find themselves, in order to help those who are disconcerted and confused to find again the path to Christ.

This meeting was meant to be an opportunity for reflection. It wasn’t a presentation of formal papers or studies. Rather we meditated on the main ideas found in the Pope’s letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. At the end, we asked the Pope for his confirmation of the ideas that had been discussed. How the Holy Father spends himself every day in serving the Church! The only thing he insisted on, as he did in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, is that, to make the redemption take root in souls, we must all, priests and lay people, strive for holiness. All of us without distinctions are the Church, right where we find ourselves. It was very comforting to see how the Pope is relying on the help of everyone in the Church. He knows that we are all called to help carry Christ’s cross, since we all called to live in true freedom and happiness.

Your book speaks of pathways. It seems to me that this word is very well chosen, since Christian life is truly a pathway that one has to set out on. You also speak of the grace of finding on one’s journey a guide, a teacher, to point out the path. I’d like to ask you, in light of your personal experience, to tell us briefly how Blessed Josemaría Escriva de Balaguer has affected your own path in life.
If I had to sum things up...

A difficult task, right?

Difficult, yes, since everything I try to do (with God’s grace, of course) I’ve learned from the heroic correspondence of that holy priest, with whom I was very blessed to live. At his side one experienced with supernatural naturalness, or natural supernaturalness, that God’s gift of freedom to humanity allows for a wide range of paths leading to Him. Supernatural life must also be fully human. The universal call to holiness that Christ addressed to everyone is relevant wherever we find ourselves, amid all the upright occupations that men and women carry out. There we can find Christ, placing Him at the summit of our work, in order to praise God, to give him glory, knowing ourselves accompanied and protected by his marvelous providence.

Monsignor Escriva was the great apostle of heroic sanctity in daily life (and all sanctity requires heroism; a half-hearted sanctity is a contradiction in terms). He taught us to finish well whatever task we have at hand, whether important or not, regardless of how the world might view things.

Bishop Echevarría, today is Monday of Holy Week, an appropriate time to speak of conversion, as you do in your book. There you put great stress on the fact that Christian life means a conversion. Isn't this a titanic task. Is it a realistic goal, especially since we are often disheartened on seeing how weak we are? How are we to pose the challenge of conversion to men and women of the 21st century?

You're absolutely right about it being a titanic struggle. Not because it is beyond our strength, since with the help of grace we can attain it. Rather, because with Christ one can carry out great epics, marvelous adventures. Holy Week shows us how close God is, how he loved us to the very end. As Blessed Josemaria insisted, Christ gladly gave his last drop of blood, his last breath, for each of us. Always, especially in Holy Week, we should have a vivid sense of God’s nearness to us, of his concern for us. In Christian life conversion means beginning once and again. But that doesn’t mean only correcting our shortcomings, which we all have an obligation to do. Conversion should also be seen in a very positive light, as a constantly renewed effort to draw closer to God and to help those at our side.

Certainly, this requires effort! It requires a new effort each day, and
many struggles throughout the course of each day. But what joy and peace this struggle wins for us, and also for those around us. One's heart then expands, and one feels the need to serve all men and women, helping them through our work, carried out with more love and care. And one also feels the need, as Blessed Josemaria so often said, to learn from the others. A Christian, someone who is truly Christ’s disciple, knows that he can learn a lot from every soul he meets.

There are three main dimensions to life, within faith’s journey, as you point out in your book, that I’d like to ask about. One is the role of the family. Why are today’s men and women so reluctant to take up parenthood? Where does this fear come from, and how can it be overcome?

I think a lot of people in today’s culture are caught up in a selfish search for comfort. Many people have lost sight of the truth that those who are called to take up the path of marriage, the path of the family, are called to a path that requires a generous self-giving. Bringing into the world other souls is proof of God’s confidence in the husband and wife, since children come not when they want but when God wants, with their collaboration of course. If men and women united by the holy sacrament of marriage try to appreciate more deeply the marvelous mystery of their participation in God’s creative power, there would be less fear to transmit life. They would also come to realize that it’s by spending themselves and caring for their children that they become fuller men and women, better parents, sharing in God’s own paternity and maternity.

Another dimension of the contemporary scene is the world of work—something you follow very closely, for it lies at the heart of Opus Dei’s spiritual path. How does one go about seeing work in all its depth, given our obsession with productivity and a technology that tries to absorb everything else?

That is another challenge. It seems to me that when one loses sight of work as service, one also overlooks its true role in society, and its true value for the human person. Work can be prayer, friendship with God. It’s not we men who invented work, but God. When God created us, he told us that he wanted us to draw close to him and become holy by means of work, also before the fall. God placed our first parents in a marvelous garden, so that they might enjoy it and subdue it. But also, as Genesis 2:15 says, “ut operaretur,” “in order to work,” to draw close to God by working. If one
views work not as a punishment, but as a means to co-redeem the world, then we become aware of its extraordinary value. We can raise to God a pure offering by our work, uniting it to the Host offered in the Mass.

Finally, besides family and work, a third dimension consists of a Christian’s presence in society. On this point the Pope spoke very clearly, I’d even say with a sense of urgency, to the Prelature’s members in your recent audience. How are Christians to be present in a world fast losing traces of the human dignity inherited from Christian tradition?

Yes, the Pope placed great stress on the need to sanctify work. I remember how at first I was deeply struck by Blessed Josemaría’s strong affirmation of the essence of the spirit of Opus Dei: we have to sanctify ourselves in our work and through the circumstances presented by our work. A consistent faith requires living it in every setting. Back in the thirties, he used to say that we can’t be part-time Christians. How can one sincerely claim to be a Christian if, while praying from time to time, one leaves aside his faith on entering a legislature, a university, a corporation? We have to manifest our faith precisely by working very well, giving a testimony of solidarity, service, dedication and responsibility. And all this can be converted into a dialogue with God, whether our work requires great intellectual efforts or great physical prowess. Any job, whether manual or intellectual, if oriented to God, becomes prayer, as both the Old and the New Testaments teach us. Work can and ought to be another way of keeping up our conversation with God.

Well, Bishop Echevarría, time is running out. Thank you for spending these minutes with us on Holy Monday, discussing the pathways you sketch in your book. I hope in future we can continue our conversation.

I do too. It’s always a great joy for me to speak to a radio audience, and to learn from them. Others’ needs and viewpoints are a great stimulus to me, and I learn a lot from them.
“Christian joy stems from pardon, not sinlessness,” an interview published by the agency Zenit, Rome (February 14, 2001)

Opus Dei’s prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, has just published a book, “Itinerarios de vida cristiana” (“Planeta+ Testimonio”). In it, he offers reflections on who Christians are and what they are called to do. He also addresses themes relevant to both the Church and the contemporary world, including the family crisis, responsible parenthood, and the meaning and value of the human body. Echevarría (Madrid, 1932) is the second successor to Blessed Josemaría Escriva to head the personal Prelature, founded on October 2, 1928. According to the latest Anuario Pontificio, some 84,000 people form part of Opus Dei (Latin for “Work of God”). In the following interview the Prelate talks about what it means to be a Christian in “an environment where the main concern is one’s good image, success and power... where people get depressed over a failure or a financial setback, even by wrinkles on their face.”

How do you size up our age?

I think it’s obvious that we’re living in complex times, even paradoxical ones. Alongside undeniable shadows we find sources of light. It would be easy to list examples of human progress and decline, of conquests and defeats. But, beyond all this, we can’t forget that we’re living in the fullness of time. Now is the moment, which has already lasted two thousand years, of true and definitive novelty: the moment when God becomes man in Jesus Christ, opening up to us the possibility of becoming God’s children. We can never be sufficiently grateful for this treasure, which enables us to confront every situation with human and supernatural optimism. Any other perspective on our times would be incomplete, showing us only the surface of what is happening in history, both our personal history and that of the world’s.

But don’t you think that the conduct of those committed to living Christianity clashes with much of the contemporary world?

Absolutely, but this clash is nothing new. At Jesus’ presentation in the temple, Simeon forewarned Joseph and Mary that the child would be a sign of contradiction. When the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles, they
overcame their fears to proclaim Christ. But the “level-headed” claimed they were drunk, and they were thrown into jail. We know eventually how they ended up, but they were always happy. So has it been throughout the centuries. The newness of the Christian message will always clash, a clash that can and ought to be an awakening that brings forth love, that makes man more human, freeing him and opening up new horizons.

What is your opinion of the contemporary concept of love?

In today’s society, it seems to me, the trend is to divorce love from commitment, from the mutual faithfulness of those who love each other, which is so essential to the very concept of love. When that happens, everything is tainted with selfishness and the search for self-fulfillment. What mother would stop loving her child because her neighbor’s is more winning? That’s why legal sanctions for broken marriages are a great tragedy. In contrast, Christ’s demand—“what God has united let no man put asunder”—is the source and guarantee of freedom and true love.

In your book you refer to those who criticise the father’s role in the family. What lies at the root of this negative criticism?

The problem starts when children are seen mainly as contributing to their parents’ self-fulfillment. Then the father can come across as some kind of ogre. In contrast, Jesus Christ has revealed to us the tenderness of God’s fatherhood and the freedom God the Father grants us by adopting us as his sons and daughters in Christ Jesus.

Many couples complain that conditions today don’t allow them to have as many children as they’d like.

There’s no doubt that many pressures exist (poverty, unemployment, housing costs, to name a few) that might lead couples justifiably to choose natural methods of family planning. Unfortunately, even in the absence of pressures, there are those who question the intrinsic value of paternity and maternity. Such an attitude views reproduction, not as something good and desirable in itself, but as merely one of many competing options. While such people acknowledge that transmitting life is a great good, the prospect of having more children and educating them is seen as something complicated and risky. Then parental satisfactions are weighed against the required sacrifices, and often the balance reached is that more children just
aren't worth while. Circumstances are blamed, but what people have forgotten is the value of life, the meaning of love, and the beauty of motherhood and fatherhood.

Your book concludes with a chapter on “the essence of joy.” But some might ask how one can be joyful in a world filled, as is ours, with suffering and injustice.

In its liturgy, the Church sings joyfully of the mystery of Christ’s cross. Suffering doesn’t eliminate joy if one is united to Christ’s self-giving for our salvation. Joy withers when one gives in to the selfishness of sin, when one overlooks love for God and love for neighbor, when one fails to repent. Those swayed by an environment where the main concern is one’s good image, success and power, easily get depressed over a failure or a financial setback, even by wrinkles on their face. For a Christian, joy doesn’t depend on a presumed sinlessness, which doesn’t exist. Rather it comes from asking for pardon, from repenting. It’s the joy of the prodigal son. I’m more and more convinced that Blessed Josemaria Escriva was right when he called the sacrament of Penance “the sacrament of joy.”
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Two streets named after Blessed Josemaria

Blessed Josemaria Escriva is no stranger to the streets of Soveria Mannelli, Italy. On February 10 a street was renamed after him. Present at the dedication were, among others, the Mayor, Mario Caligiuri, and the Bishop of Lamezia Terme, Vincenzo Rimedio.

A round-table discussion of the person and message of Opus Dei’s founder took place afterwards. Several professors joined the Bishop to address the topic, “Work and Holiness.” Soveria Mannelli is the fifth Italian city to name a street after Blessed Josemaria. The others are Rome, Bari, Palermo and Terrasini.

In the Philippines, in a suburb of Manila known as Pasig City, Amber Drive is now known as Blessed Josemaria Escriva Drive. The Deputy Mayor, Loma Angeles Bernardo, officiated at the ceremony. On the street are two undertakings promoted by the faithful of Opus Dei: the University of Asia and the Pacific, and the oratory of Sancta Maria Stella Orientis (Holy Mary Star of the East).

“The fact that many Christians with devotion to Blessed Josemaria come from throughout the Philippines to take part in liturgical events at the Star of the East oratory brings honor and standing to our beloved city,” said the Deputy Mayor. In particular she thanked the University for its pivotal role in the recent development of Pasig City. “We need institutions like this to support us continually in our efforts,” Loma Angeles said, according to *The Philippine Star*, a Manila newspaper reporting on the event that took place on January 12, 2001.

Blessed Josemaria honored

Thousands of people all over the world took part in Eucharistic celebrations to honor Blessed Josemaria on his June 26th feast. In many cases the diocesan bishop or the Vatican’s nuncio presided over the ceremonies.
In Shukugawa, Japan, the Mass took place on June 23rd, drawing faithful from such cities as Tokyo, Kyoto, Kanazawa and Okayama. It was concelebrated by Takaaki Hirayama, bishop emeritus of Oita, Monsignor Soichiro Nitta, regional vicar of the Opus Dei Prelature in Japan, and Monsignor José Ramon Madurga. The latter marks this year the golden anniversary of his ordination, most of these fifty years dedicated to pastoral work in Japan. In his homily Bishop Hirayama urged those attending to be bold apostles, strengthened by a sincere determination to be holy, transforming society as leaven transforms a mass of dough.

In Costa Rica the liturgical ceremony drew faithful to the National Shrine of the Basilica of our Lady of the Angels, the country’s patroness. The Papal Nuncio, Bishop Antonio Sozzo, was the main celebrant. Before dismissing the crowd, he told them, “Blessed Josemaría’s message will resound through the centuries reminding us that we are all called to be holy right where we are, amid everyday realities, despite our weaknesses and the difficulties we may face. By living in this way we can change the world.”

Some 500 people gathered in Managua’s cathedral on Blessed Josemaría’s feast day. The main celebrant was the capital’s archbishop, Miguel Cardinal Obando Bravo. Joining him at the altar were eight diocesan priests. At the start the Cardinal praised the work the prelature is carrying out in Nicaragua. He pointed out that Opus Dei’s founder knew how to unite holiness and apostolate. Echoing the Holy Father in his recent letter Novo Millennio Ineunte, he encouraged those present to “launch out into the deep,” as Blessed Josemaria had done. The Mass was carried live on the radio network Star of the Sea.

As in previous years, commemorative Masses were celebrated throughout Italy. In Rome Opus Dei’s prelate presided over the ceremony in the Parish of Blessed Josemaría. In Florence the newly named Archbishop Ennio Antonelli concelebrated with a dozen priests. The celebration was accompanied by a 50-voice choir from Ramini, Pistoia. More than 500 faithful from throughout Tuscany participated.

The archbishop of Toulouse, Émile Marcus, presided over the concelebration on June 26 at Notre-Dame de la Dalbade. In his homily he
said that the youthfulness of the saints never goes out of date. Not only are they perennial, but they also anticipate the future.

In Kazakhstan, Almaty’s Apostolic Administrator, Bishop Henry Howaniec O.F.M., was the main celebrant at the Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaría in the cathedral of the Most Holy Trinity. His homily dwelt on the sense of divine filiation in Blessed Josemaría’s life and preaching. He encouraged the faithful to imitate his life of prayer. Among the participants were people with Kazakh, Russian, German and Polish backgrounds.

On June 26 a solemn Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaria took place in the Basilica cathedral of Vilnius in Lithuania. The Apostolic Nuncio for the three Baltic countries, Bishop Erwin Josef Ender, was the primary celebrant, assisted by the Regional Vicar of the Opus Dei prelature and other priests. As he fondly recalled, Bishop Elder was present at the founder’s beatification in Rome in 1992. He expressed gratitude for the Prelature’s work of both priests and lay people in the Baltic nations. He signaled out Estonia, where the Church, still small, is grateful to see a number of conversions.

The Cardinal Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, Eugênio de Araújo Sales, presided over a Mass in the Candelária Church. Also on the altar were the auxiliary bishop, Rafael Llano Cifuentes, the Prelature’s delegate vicar, Monsignor Pedro Barreto, and other priests. In the homily, the Cardinal quoted from and commented on a papal address given on March 17th to prelature faithful attending a conference called to study ways to implement Pope John II’s recent document, “As the third millennium begins.” Similar celebrations took place in Brasilia, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Niterói, Campinas, São José dos Campos, Londrina and Sorocaba.

The cathedral in Braga, Portugal, witnessed a concelebrated Mass presided by the auxiliary bishop, António Marto. In his homily Bishop Marto emphasized how central Christ was in the life and preaching of Blessed Josemaria, with his spiritual life grounded in divine filiation.

The main celebrant at the holy Mass celebrated in the cathedral of St. Andrew’s in Glasgow was Monsignor James Clancy, the archdiocese’ vicar general and acting head since the recent death of Cardinal Winning. Expressing his happiness to be present at a celebration in the founder’s
honor, Msgr. Clancy said his first assignment as a young priest had been with a pastor who was very devoted to Blessed Josemaria, whom he liked to quote. At the conclusion he made reference to the number and noise of so many small children. He remarked that the “Church is the best place for children to be; so bring them to church!”

In Kinshasa, Congo, Blessed Josemaria’s liturgical feast drew more than a thousand faithful to the Notre Dame cathedral. Presiding was Monsignor Xavier Hervás, the Prelature’s regional vicar in Congo, assisted by, among others, the secretary-general of the national episcopal conference, l’abbé Urbain Kabunga.

Many Masses were celebrated throughout the U.S. Presiding at the one in Boston was Bernard Cardinal Law; in Manchester, N.H. Bishop John B. McCormick; in Syracuse, N.Y., Bishop James Moynihan. The main celebrant in Washington, D.C., was Theodore Cardinal McCarrick. Other celebrations honoring Blessed Josemaria were held in Miami, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Moline, Denver, Houston, Dallas and San Francisco, among others. In New York’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Archbishop Renato Martino, the Vatican’s representative to the United Nations, presided, accompanied by 14 priests. The archbishop encouraged those present to continue serving the Church by doing what is characteristic of Opus Dei: seeking and manifesting Christ in ordinary life, being witnesses to him in the midst of one’s daily work.

In the church of St. Joseph of the Mountain in San Salvador, the Eucharistic celebration for some 1500 faithful was presided by Archbishop Fernando Sáenz Lacalle. Concelebrating with him, among others, was the delegate vicar of Opus Dei in El Salvador and the vicar general for the archdiocese.

In Chile Masses were said throughout the country, including Valdivia, Osorno, Antofagasta, Valparaiso, Punta Arenas and the capital itself, Santiago.

In Medellin, Colombia, auxiliary Bishop Gonzalo Rivera Gomez celebrated the Mass on June 26th for some 800 faithful. Among the other Masses celebrated throughout the country, that celebrated in the small town of Rebolo, Magdalena, in the Santa Marta diocese, deserves special
Its faithful are very devoted to Blessed Josemaria for the many favors obtained through his intercession.

In Yaounde’s cathedral in Cameroon, the archbishop, Andre Wouking, presided at the solemn concelebration. He invited the faithful in his homily to accept our Lord’s call to holiness and apostolate, echoed by Blessed Josemaria’s constant preaching and example. “God helped him to see,” he remarked, “that for an ordinary Christian, there is no need to change one’s place or condition in society or the Church in order to work for Christ. The Work’s faithful, priests and laity, by belonging to the prelature, undergo no change in their situation in the Church, although they firmly pledge themselves to the mission of evangelization.”

Lima’s cathedral welcomed some three thousand persons to the Mass celebrated in honor of Blessed Josemaria on June 26th by the Cardinal Archbishop, Juan Luis Cipriani. Concelebrating were the Holy See’s Nuncio, Bishop Rino Passigato, Monsignor Jose Luis Lopez-Jurado, regional vicar of Opus Dei, and 15 other priests.

Also in Peru, following the Mass, faithful in Cañete fervently carried an image of Blessed Josemaria through the streets. In Arequipa the Archbishop, Luis Sanchez-Moreno, celebrated Mass in a hall next to the Yanahuara church, damaged in a recent earthquake.

In Buenos Aires’ cathedral the Cardinal Archbishop Jorge Bergoglio presided over a Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaria for some 2500 faithful. Joining him was the regional vicar of the Opus Dei prelature.

On June 26th in Beirut’s church of Notre Dame des Dons de Achrafieh, the Maronite Archbishop Boulos Matar presided at a Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaria. In his homily he referred to sanctifying work as a central message for the third millennium. Holiness is not reserved to priests or religious. All the faithful are obliged to seek holiness and give Christian witness in every corner of their lives. Attending the Mass, celebrated in the Maronite rite, were some 400 faithful.

Prague’s auxiliary Bishop Vaclav Maly was the main celebrant at the Eucharistic celebration in the church of Our Lady of Tyn. In Budapest the Holy See’s Nuncio, Bishop Karl Josef Rauber, was the main celebrant.
In Sydney auxiliary Bishop Peter Ingham celebrated Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaria on June 26th. In his homily he stressed that all the members of the Church have been entrusted with an apostolic mission.

Many other Eucharistic celebrations took place also in many cities in Spain, the Philippines, Germany, as well as in Macao, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Johannesburg, to mention some widely-scattered points. This year for the first time Moscow and Mozambique had Masses in honor of Blessed Josemaria.


Commemorative stamps issued in Venezuela

The centennial of Blessed Josemaria Escriva's birth (1902-2002) is celebrated in a recent issue of commemorative stamps by the Venezuelan Postal Service. The unveiling took place on June 8th in the auditorium of Caracas’ Monteavila University.

In response to thousands of Venezuelans who prayerfully turn to the late founder of Opus Dei, the Postal Service (IPOSTEL), joined by the Venezuelan Association of Cultural Development, brought about the philatelic issue to honor this widely admired priest. Many Venezuelans inspired by Blessed Josemaria’s message have begun and fostered a number of initiatives in the areas of welfare, education and culture.

The ten stamps represent an overview of the figure, role and legacy of the beatified Spanish monsignor. The issue consists of a million sets, ranging in price from 300 to 550 Bolivars.

Present at the inauguration were Gerardo Fernandez, infrastructure minister, and the vice-president of the Postal Service, Rafael Osio.

Many philatelic issues honoring Blessed Josemaria have come out in recent years. Recently, Spain commemorated the 25th anniversary of his death by issuing a stamp. So did Poland with a series dedicated to the “work ethic.” In 1998 Honduras observed the 70th anniversary of
Opus Dei’s founding. Earlier (1995) Ecuador brought out another stamp. In 1994, the Colombian Postal Service brought out a stamp with his image and words from *The Way*, “May you seek Christ, may you find him, may you love him.” On the occasion of his beatification in 1992, Venezuela had also issued a commemorative series.

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**Blessed Josemaría’s works, new printings**

To commemorate the centennial of Blessed Josemaría’s birth, a Mexican publisher has issued a new printing of 100,000 copies of *The Way*. MiNos Publishers has printed two equal runs of paperbacks in two handy sizes and reduced prices. One will sell for around $2.50; the other, smaller size, is available for less than $2.00.

In Colombia, *The Way* has been reissued for the sixth time, in a pressrun of 30,000 copies. The Costa Rican publishing house Promotora de Ediciones has also published the book for the first time in that nation.

Spring Publications Ltd. of Hong Kong has brought out the first translation into Chinese (traditional ideograms) of *Furrow*. Its title is *Laih Hahn*.

With the title *Vhen*, Cesta Publishers in Brno, Czech Republic, has brought out the first Czech edition of *The Forge*. 2,000 copies have been published.

A book of Blessed Josemaría Escriva’s homilies translated into Arabic has been published in Beirut, Lebanon. Two thousand copies were printed. The five homilies included are “Marriage: a Christian Vocation”; “The Epiphany of our Lord”; “In Joseph’s Workshop”; “The Eucharist, Mystery of Faith and Love”; and “On the Feast of Corpus Christi.”
Lublin Archbishop introduces new edition of Blessed Josemaría’s works

Also on January 9, 2001, Archbishop Jozef Zycinski (Lublin, Poland) brought to the public’s attention the first Polish edition of three combined works by Opus Dei’s founder. This single volume represents the ninth printing of *The Way* in Polish, the fourth for *Furrow* and the third for *The Forge*.

Two publishing houses joined forces to bring out a pressrun of 5,000 copies; namely, the Pallotine Fathers’ Apostolicum and the Katowice diocese’s Swietego Jacka. As part of the commemoration of the centennial of Blessed Josemaría’s birth, all of his works will be republished in Polish.

The public event took place in the Warsaw offices of the Polish Agency of Information. In addition to Lublin’s Archbishop, taking part in the press conference were Agnieszka Dietrych, lawyer and housewife, and Marek Miller, writer and head of the journalism institute “Collegium Civitas.” They both spoke of the impact of Blessed Josemaría’s works on their lives.

Josemaría Escriva Historical Institute launched

On January 9, 2001, a year from the 100th anniversary of the birth of Opus Dei’s founder, Bishop Javier Echevarría established in Rome an institute to promote historical studies of Blessed Josemaría’s life, as well as theological, canonical and other studies of his spirit and teachings and of the apostolic undertakings born of his direct or indirect impulse. Known as the Josemaría Escriva Historical Institute,[1] it will also begin preparing a critical editions of all his writings.

Monsignor José Luis Illanes will be the director of this international research center, assisted by Fathers Joaquin Fernandez Monistrol and Carlo Pioppi. An advisory board has also been established, made up of wide-ranging specialists from various countries.
Publications about Blessed Josemaría and Opus Dei

In June the Italian translation of “Memories of Blessed Josemaría Escriva,” a book-length interview with Bishop Javier Echevarría, was published by Leonardo International. The Brazilian edition was also published in June. Earlier the Portuguese edition, entitled Lembrando o Beato Josemaria, was brought out by the publishing house Diel.

The German publishing house Adamas-Verlag has issued the German video of Alberto Michelini’s “It’s a Question of Faith,” under the title Nur eine Frage des Glaubens: Die Verehrung zum Seligen Josemaría Escriva. Recently it also brought out the German translation of From Now on I Have to be Strong, an account of the life of Montse Grases, written by Edith Zeltner.

Mexican pianist Margarita Murillo is the author of a recent book recounting her years in Opus Dei. The Spanish publisher is Rialp. Its title, A New Score, clearly reflects her walk of life. Also from Rialp is a similar book entitled, Sooner, More and Better. The author of the memoir is Lazaro Linares, sportsman and former painter.

Also recent is a biography, written by Mercedes Eguibar and published by Palabra Publishers, of Guadalupe Ortiz de Landazuri, one of the first Spanish women to earn a degree in chemistry. She belonged to Opus Dei and died with a reputation for holiness. So did her brother, Eduardo, a physician whose process of beatification is already under way.

Bilingual edition of The Way

This past summer Scepter Publishers brought out the first bilingual, Spanish-English edition of The Way. It went on sale simultaneously in the United States, United Kingdom, Ireland, Kenya, Singapore, the
Philippines, Australia and India. The editor is Rev. Andrew Byrne, Oxford-trained in modern languages and a doctor in theology.

The edition is enriched with 1500 footnotes. Their purpose is to explain to the English-speaking world the expressions from Spanish culture and literature used by Blessed Josemaría when he wrote *The Way* early in the nineteen-thirties.

This is a quality hardback consisting of 452 pages, plus an analytical index of nearly 90 pages.
NEWS
Some activities of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

Again this year the four schools that currently make up the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross have celebrated their traditional congresses (suspended during the previous academic year because of the Great Jubilee).

On March 1 and 2 the philosophy faculty and guests concentrated on “God and Nature.”

The presentations dealt with the openness of the natural sciences to God at a time when cosmology, physics and biology have taken significant steps in our knowledge of the physical world. The purpose was to re-examine nature’s relationship with God, especially in the light of new scientific contexts and a willingness to overcome the close-mindedness of positivism. Scientists, philosophers and theologians took part in this interdisciplinary dialogue.

A week later the theology faculty held its sixth annual international symposium on the theme of the “Council of Chalcedon 1550 years later.” The aim was to celebrate Christ as the unfailing light on mankind’s journey through history.

As John Paul II teaches in his letter Novo Millennio Ineunte: “The Word and the flesh, the divine glory and his dwelling among us! It is in the intimate and inseparable union of these two aspects that Christ’s identity is to be found, in accordance with the classic formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451): ‘one person in two natures’...We know that our concepts and our words are limited. The formula, though always human, is nonetheless carefully measured in its doctrinal content, and it enables us, albeit with trepidation, to gaze in some way into the depths of the mystery. Yes, Jesus is true God and true man!” (no. 21).

On March 22, a day-long seminar was held on the Statutes of the State of the Vatican City. The main speaker at the canon law forum was professor Cesare Mirabelli, faculty member of the University of Rome-Tor Vergata. He was introduced by Rev. Juan Ignacio Arrieta, of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Discussed were the reasons for revising the
statutes and the relationship of legislative power with the executive. Also debated was the exercise of judicial power within Vatican City.

Also in March a symposium on “Social volunteers and the Church’s mission” was organized by the canon law faculty. The scope was to discuss legal recourses obtained by volunteers in the ecclesial community, as well as those recognized by both national and international bodies. The canon law department thus contributed to the international debate begun when the General Assembly of the United Nations declared 2001 the “Year of Volunteers.”

For its part, the faculty of institutional communications organized on April 26-27 a conference on “Quality Communication between the Church and the Media.” Some 170 participants from 36 nations gathered to study how best to bring the Christian message to everyone by means of the various media and how to do so professionally and with due respect to the mind-set of widely varying publics.

Pontifical appointments

The Holy Father has appointed:

Norberto Gonzalez Gaitano

Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Social Communications .


On the seventh anniversary of the death of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo

On March 23, seventh anniversary of the death of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, first successor to Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Masses for the respose of his soul were celebrated in churches throughout the world. In Rome,
Bishop Javier Echevarría presided over a solemn concelebration in the basilica of St. Eugene, attended by thousands of people.

The Archbishop of San Juan, Puerto Rico, Roberto González Neves, was the main celebrant at the solemn Mass celebrated for Bishop Alvaro del Portillo in the church of St. Joseph of Villa Caparra. In the homily he affectionately referred to Bishop Alvaro, evoking his visit in 1988 to the Patroness of Puerto Rico and recalling his love for our Lady.

In Quito the Eucharistic celebration was presided over by the city’s auxiliary Bishop, Carlos Altamirano, accompanied by the Prelature’s vicars in Ecuador. In Guayaquil, Archbishop Juan Larrea concelebrated in that city’s cathedral. “Above all,” he said in the homily, “what we most admire is his heroism in daily life: his humble, quiet and extraordinarily faithful fulfillment of his assignments; his full collaboration with Monsignor Josemaría Escriva; his tireless service and spiritual advice.”

The emeritus archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König, in his homily emphasized Bishop del Portillo’s important role in drafting several documents of Vatican Council II. It was thanks to this work, the Cardinal said, that he came to know not only Blessed Josemaría, but also his closest collaborator and the first Prelate of Opus Dei.

Some 300 people attended the anniversary Mass in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It took place in the Chapelle Saint Laurent.

In Lima, the anniversary Mass took place in the Church of the Miraculous Medal and drew some 700 people. Presiding over the concelebration was the auxiliary Bishop Alberto Brazini. In the homily he stressed the friendship he felt for Bishop del Portillo, even though they met just a few times. He was drawn by the simplicity and warmth Bishop del Portillo always radiated in his dealings with others.

On March 23 a Mass for the eternal rest of Bishop Alvaro took place in Amsterdam’s Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk. It was concelebrated by the regional vicar and two other priests of the prelature. In Spain requiem Masses were celebrated in practically all the provincial capitals and in many other cities for thousands of faithful. On the same day, in Buenos Aires, the regional vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Argentina, Rev. Patricio Olmos, celebrated Mass in the church of Our Lady of Ransom.
In Australia the commemorative Mass was concelebrated on March 24 in the parish church of St. Martha, Strathfield (Sydney). The regional vicar, Monsignor John Masso, was joined by a good group of priests.

There were various concelebrations in Colombia. In Bogota the emeritus bishop of Ponce, Fremiot Torres Oliver, presided over the Mass in Gimnasio Moderno Church. In Medellin the city’s auxiliary bishop Jesús Rivera Gómez presided over the ceremony in the parish of Our Lady of Sorrows. In Cartagena, in the parish church of Bocagrande, the diocese’s vicar general, Monsignor Domingo Gándara Romero, presided.

In Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, the Apostolic Nuncio of His Holiness, Bishop Francois Bacqué, was the primary concelebrant at the commemorative Mass for the respose of the soul of Bishop del Portillo. He was joined by the auxiliary bishop of Santo Domingo, Pablo Cedano, the Prelature’s vicar and other priests. Bishop Bacqué spoke of his affection for the current Prelate of Opus Dei, recalling the Pope’s words to Prelature members in Rome during a study conference on the apostolic Letter Novo Millennio Ineunte. He also stressed the support the Prelature provides to the particular churches.

**Book about Bishop Alvaro del Portillo**

The publishing house Editrice Vaticana has issued a book on Bishop Alvaro del Portillo entitled “Good and Faithful Servant.” It was edited by Vicente Bosch, library director of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Cardenal Darío Castrillón Hoyos, prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy, added a preface.

The title refers to the phrase used by John Paul II in his condolence telegram just after the demise of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, on March 23, 1994. By publishing this book seven years after his passing, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross seeks to recall, with thankfulness and affection, its founder and chancellor.
The book is divided into three sections: the figure of Bishop del Portillo, his role in the Church, and his theological and canonical contributions. It gathers in one compilation the testimonies of a number of people working in the university. Two articles and an address by the current Prelate of Opus Dei are also included.
INITIATIVES
São Paulo: engineers among the shacks

Sumaré is the name of a center for university students in São Paulo. Among other activities, it sponsors a volunteer project in the St. Catherine favela, one of the poorest slums in the metropolitan area. The aim of this project is to redo the insecure electrical installations currently reaching some huts.

The project is the brain child of Rodrigo, a civil engineering student at the University of São Paulo and a resident at Sumaré. Work began in August 2000, dedicating Saturday mornings to the project.

The slum dwellings are often assembled with discarded pieces of wood and covered with sheets of plastic or tin cans. The favelados themselves strung and connected bits and pieces of wire to bring electricity to their humble homes, and the danger of fires from short circuits is always present.

Most of the volunteers study engineering at São Paulo University. Diogo studies control systems and automation; Denis and Nilton are studying to become electrical engineers; while Eric is a telecommunications student. Flavio, who studies computer engineering, travels almost 70 miles each Saturday to reach the project area. Supervising the project are three professional engineers: Vinicius, a computer engineer; Matheus, who works in telecommunications; and Charles Vladimir, lieutenant in the army and electrical engineer.

On the job

For each visit the volunteers break into two- or three-man teams, each working on a single shack, starting with those most in need. Their first visit was to a shack where Helena lived with her husband and five children. At first she was quite reserved, mistaking them for undercover police. But soon, at Christmas, she sent each one a different handmade card, thanking them for what they were doing for her family and the other favelados.

The gratitude of the poor is very moving to see. Ivone, mother of three, lost her job and shack because of a fire, and has been abandoned by her husband. Grateful for the help she is receiving, she offers the young men cups of cafezinho (thick coffee), even if she has to skip her next meal.
The first step is to examine the existing electrical installation in each shack, seeking to reduce immediate hazards. Then an independent new connection is installed and the makeshift wiring is removed. So no home is ever without light. Only new materials are used, requested and contributed during the week from stores and wholesalers near the slums. It generally takes four weekly visits to complete each job and get rid of the provisional hook-up.

Obviously this joint effort benefits slum families, but also the students, whose generosity and social concern are spurred by this contact. “I know I’ve benefited more than what I’ve contributed in time and knowledge,” say one of the future engineers.

**Fostering a spirit of service**

Sumaré volunteers also help to teach classes in math and Portuguese to the *favela’s* students, inadequately served by state-run schools. In addition, medical students from Sumaré are setting up a walk-in clinic to diagnose and serve basic needs of the people in the slum district.

Many of the volunteers also take part in short courses organized by Sumaré in such areas as law, sociology, information technology and humanities. Sumaré also offers classes and talks aimed at helping the young men grow in both human and Christian dimensions.

Of especial recent interest is a seminar on leadership and professional excellence. Intended to spur social and professional responsibility among university students, the seminar has attracted academic and business notables as speakers. These include Jacques Marcovich, rector of São Paulo University, and noted jurist and professor Ives Gandra da Silva Martins. Another conference was given by Mauricio Botelho, CEO of Brazil’s largest aircraft builder.

The efforts to improve the life of the poor and the Christian formation given to the university students has led to new volunteers offering their services. Some of these have already begun working in the *favela* of Santana de Parnaíba, some 40 kilometers from São Paulo.
In brief

Arequipa, Buenos Aires and Dublin

A letter to be meditated and shared

The publication of the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* by John Paul II has been a good occasion to awaken people to the concerns the Holy Father has in his heart. To that end various initiatives have taken place in different countries. The aim has been to study the Letter and exchange ideas on how to help make a reality of the universal call to holiness.

In the Peruvian city of Arequipa, Wayrana Cultural Center organized a four-part series aimed at housewives and businesswomen. In her conferences Dr Rocío Chirinos Montalbetti covered these topics: “Contemplating Jesus Christ,” “Holiness, a Program for Christian Living,” “*Duc in altum*: Contemporary Challenges to being Christian in the World,” and “The Christian Family: Called to Give Convincing Example According to God’s Design.”

Two centers in Buenos Aires organized a weekend of reflection on both Pope John Paul’s Letter and Blessed Josemaria Escriva’s life and works in preparation for the centennial of his birth next January 9. These workshops for older high school students and university students were organized by Arenales Cultural Center and the university residence La Ciudadela.

In Ireland, students from several universities in Dublin and Galway met at Dublin’s Carraigburn University Center on a weekend in February to study and reflect on the content of *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. The sessions, which alternated between seminars and round-table discussions, dealt with such themes as personal holiness, spreading the Church’s teachings, excellence in studies and the Pope’s person and message.

**Hong Kong, China**

“*Little Sprouts*”

It’s Sunday, just before ten in the morning. In a classroom at *Tak Sun*, Emmanuel, Charles and Louis are preparing the catechism classes they will soon give. The three are regulars at the activities of Hong Kong’s Granite
Study Center, sponsored by Opus Dei faithful and aimed at college students and young professionals. One of these activities consists in their collaboration in catechism classes organized in Tak Sun primary school.

Each year Tak Sun’s 1200 students are offered the chance to attend these catechism classes on Sunday mornings in a program called “Little Sprouts.” Most of those signing up are Catholics, but a good number are not, who attend these classes with their parents’ permission. Of Hong Kong’s six million citizens only a bit more than four percent are Catholics.

Hong Kong parents place great importance on their children’s education, and religious formation is no exception. Not a few parents take a direct interest in what their children are learning in these catechism sessions and have even been known to accompany them on Sunday mornings. Now a few catechism classes have been organized for them at the school while their children are studying nearby. Some parents of the students have recently converted. At the Easter Vigil last year, for instance, a mother and her son were baptized at the same ceremony.

This year those taking part in “Little Sprouts” number 120, between Catholics and non-Catholics. Received into the Catholic Church at Easter this year were Ho Chun, 8, and Chan Lok, 11, along with a boy from a neighboring school who attended catechism at Tak Sun.

Not all of the catechists were born Catholics either. In fact the three mentioned above converted to Catholicism while studying at the university. Emmanuel studied environmental science in Hong Kong; Charles graduated from an Australian college; and Louis is a mechanical engineer from London University.

By 11 in the morning the classes are over. Then the catechists join their students at Mass in the Holy Family chapel or in the school’s vestibule. An hour later, around noon, the catechists have a chance to speak to the parents. Before leaving, they also meet briefly to go over the topics to be covered next Sunday.

Lagos, Nigeria

Math Camp
Over Easter break Helmbridge Study Centre organized a math camp for boys in its Junior and Senior Club. Also taking part in the camp, held in Whitesands School, were members of the new Southcreek Club, recently started in Lagos. It was a learning experience also for the tutors who spent a whole week getting to know their charges better. The “senior” boys also got involved passing on their math skills to the “juniors,” thus stimulating the formers’ sense of generosity and responsibility.

The boys were divided into groups according to grades, and took part in intensive small-group sessions. There was also time for sports, math games, catechism and character-building classes. The club’s chaplain showed up daily to celebrate Mass, and emphasized the privilege of making frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Some of the parents, especially of the younger boys, were invited to visit, coming away with a pleasant impression of true fellowship. It was also a chance for them to get acquainted with Whitesands School, launched by the prelature’s faithful the previous October.

In all 45 boys took part in the camp, assisted by 8 tutors.

Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria

*Mobilizing Christians for the new Millennium*

In preparation for the 100th anniversary of Blessed Josemaria Escriva’s birth, priests and their bishops have been attending a series of seminars at Iroto Conference Center, on the outskirts of Ijebu-Ode. The center, an apostolic undertaking of Opus Dei, organized the sessions under the name of “Sanctifying the World from Within.” Speakers included Abuja’s Archbishop John Onaiyenk, Bishop Anthony O. Gbuji, and Bishop Alfred Martins.

In the May 7th seminar, Bishop Gbuji said he had come to see how marvelous was the spirit that God had inspired in Blessed Josemaria with the founding of Opus Dei. We can all learn from this spirit, he stressed, especially the importance of helping the faithful to be “actively and fruitfully apostolic, capable of leading society toward Christ.”

Bishop Gbuji explained that Vatican Council II represented a new theological exploration of the Church’s mystery, with a “greater flexibility
in Church structures, in order to better grasp the variety and complexity of modern life and to preach the Gospel in a more organic and effective way.” He commented that Opus Dei forms part of the Church’s mystery, and that the “canonical structure of personal prelatures as hierarchical structures has fully clarified Opus Dei’s position in the Church.”

Paraphrasing Blessed Josemaria, Bishop Gbuji stressed that “apostolate is the fruit of interior life.” He expressed the desire that “many people in Nigeria and all over the world will seriously undertake the path of holiness in daily work and in fulfilling a Christian’s ordinary duties,” evoking words from the devotional prayer card of Blessed Josemaria.

**London, United Kingdom**

*Conference: grounding development in personal dignity*

Nearly 400 women from more than 25 universities in the United Kingdom gathered in London on March 10th for the first University Congress on Development. The conference was jointly sponsored by the London School of Economics and People First, a university group promoted by Ashwell Cultural Association. Sessions were held in Ashwell House, a hall of residence for university students, directed by faithful of Opus Dei.

Entitled “Development in the Third Millennium: Focusing on People,” the conference’s aim was to energize participants to seek and promote better solutions to today’s social problems, based on the dignity of the human person. Prior to the conference itself, the young women taking part had written essays and entered them in the first Contest for Development Proposals in the Third World. The winning essays were presented with awards.

Among the speakers were Bill Jackson, consultant to the United Nations, John Clark from the World Bank, Professor Robert Chambers from the University of Sussex and Cuca Canel, director of the Kianda Foundation in Kenya.

Prof. Chambers opening address centered on what “development” means, as well as the differences between poverty and well-being. He challenged the audience to think of well-being in social, family and moral
terms, not merely material dimensions. Mr. Jackson underlined the role of volunteers in all authentic development. After a lively question-and-answer session, Prof. Chambers, in response to the interest expressed, continued the discussion with a number of the students.

In turn, Mr. Clark spoke of the reciprocal relationship between international bodies and non-governmental organizations. Miss Cuca Canel described various projects of the Kianda Foundation as examples of undertakings that address the population’s material needs, but always keeping uppermost a well-rounded concept of personal dignity. The Foundation arose in answer to Kenya’s educational needs, promoted by faithful of the Prelature.

Some 20 volunteer organizations were on hand to acquaint participants first-hand with their respective activities.

**Macao, China**

*With Macao’s Handicapped*

When school vacations come around, the opportunity also presents itself to lend a hand to the less privileged. That’s why Wahn Study Center organized two service projects at a center in Macao for handicapped children. Wahn was soon able to count on a good number of volunteers, young women still at the university or in the world of work.

Before Christmas they organized a raffle to obtain money for food purchases for the children. Many people also donated clothing and toys.

When the Chinese New Year vacation began, both students and young professional women gave up the three last days of January to work with the handicapped. Mornings were spent putting the children through their physical therapy and overseeing their lunch. Afternoons were spent in simple games and competitions where all could participate, most of them from their wheel chairs. The prizes handed out to the winners were well received.

The following month project supporters organized a mini-walkathon to raise funds to buy equipment the children need for their exercises and special chairs, including two new wheel chairs.

**Montreal, Canada**
Faith seeking understanding

Throughout the academic year, Riverview Study Center in Montreal organized a series of conferences under the title of “faith seeking understanding” for university students at McGill and Concordia Universities. Contemporary questions were examined in the light of the Catholic faith.

A gamut of speakers from both the academic and professional worlds drew crowds of eager students. In the first trimester sessions were held on the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith’s declaration *Dominus Iesus*, and on questions of Christian anthropology. Animated discussions arose on both moral relativism and workplace apostolate. In the winter term, topics dealt with included genetic engineering, euthanasia and human sexuality, all examined from a Christian perspective.

The last two sessions considered the Christian virtue of tolerance and C. S. Lewis’ apologetical approach. The students left with deeper insights into the Christians’ mission in society and a greater eagerness to bring the truth to others.

São Paulo, Brazil

Volunteer Teachers

In one of the worst slums of Sao Paulo, a new technical school has become so popular that there are ten applications for every opening. Known as Pedreira, the center offers free training to its students, thanks to support from members and cooperators of the Opus Dei prelature.

Some young men from the nearby Interlagos center offer a remedial academic course in both math and Portuguese to help boys finishing primary education in public schools to ready themselves for the classes at Pedreira. This supplementary education takes place at Pedreira on Sunday mornings. Some 80 boys take part in this program, all from the immediate neighborhood.

All the volunteer teachers themselves graduated from Pedreira. This is their first teaching experience, and each of them draws up class outlines and prints them up. Monthly tests are given to measure the boys’ achievements.
After each Sunday session the volunteers sit down with one of Pedreira’s senior teachers to share experiences and come up with improvements.

The Sunday sessions end with a brief talk aimed at fostering human virtues and citizenship.

The parents take an active part in the program. They are invited to get acquainted with Pedreira and to encourage their sons to study and do their homework.

**Sydney, Australia**

*New facilities, more opportunities*

New facilities are helping Kenvale College, which prepares young women for careers in hospitality and tourism, to meet growing demand in Sydney and throughout Australia. The inauguration of a new building on March 23 attracted more than 500 people, among them church and civic authorities, hotel managers, along with students and their families.

Labor Minister Tony Abbot declared the new facility officially open. In his remarks he praised the school’s educational style. “Kendale’s success,” he said, “stems from helping its students not only to be competent in their work, but also to cultivate values that foster a positive attitude to life.” He also stressed that quality training is vital to the hotel sector, which over the next four years is expected to create 30,000 new jobs.

Edward Cardinal Clancy was on hand to bless the new building. He was welcomed by teachers, students and their parents, each of whom in turn he greeted personally. He inquired into the background of the students, encouraging them to imitate the example of Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served, and to draw strength from Gospel principles when difficulties arise. Some of the young women spoke of their experience as volunteers in various social welfare projects as well as their participation in the World Youth Day in Rome during the Jubilee.

Recently Kenvale has joined forces with other national and international bodies committed to helping East Timor get back on its feet. The College has started a pilot program whereby it offers scholarships to four young Timorese women, training them in hotel administration.

**Turin, Italy**
“Minimaster” in communications

Turin has long been active in the film and communications worlds. Therefore Ripara Cultural Center has decided to offer a “minimaster” program in communications and analysis of the media. 40 young women, between the ages of 15 and 19, have signed up. The course, which includes both classes and practical lab sessions, is centered on the special contribution women can make to the fields of journalism, public relations and press offices.

From February 19 to March 28, participants met weekly with various professionals. Giorgio Simonelli, who teaches communications theory at the Catholic University of Milan, helped the young women to analyze TV news programs. Journalist Silvia Secinaro, whose by-line appears in the daily *Il Sole 24 Ore*, had the students write articles and edit them under her guidance. Lucia Bettetini, who heads up the European Institute of Design in Turin, helped participants to improve their oral presentation when speaking in public.

The program is aimed at helping the students to be good constructive critics of the media. Such topics as the TV news, the internet, newspapers and billboards stimulated lively discussions among the students.

Valencia, Spain

*Theological Dialogues*

From February to May a popular series of monthly seminars was held in Valencia under the title “Theological Dialogues,” organized by the Almudí Priests’ Library. Nearly two hundred people, largely priests, took part. Topics discussed included priestly spirituality, fundamentals of morality and ecumenical dialogue.

The first session explored the grounds of morality; expositors were Rev. José Noriega, professor of ethics at the Madrid University of St. Damasus, and Rev. Aurelio Fernandez, emeritus professor of moral theology. In another session Monsignor Gil Hellin, secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family, spoke of a number moral questions related to marriage. Two other professors offered their analyses regarding human cloning: Prof.
Bellver, who teaches at the University of Valencia, and Prof. Perez Soba, a theology professor at St. Damasus.

The March session featured Seville’s Archbishop Carlos Amigo, who spoke about priestly spirituality. Also on the same program appeared Rev. Francisco Lucas Mateo Seco, a theology professor from the University of Navarre, who addressed various topics dealing with the theology of the priesthood.

Discussions on ecumenical dialogue were led by theology professor José Morales from the University of Navarre, and Rev. Sánchez Nogales, professor from Granada’s theology faculty, joined by Professor Francisco Conesa, from the diocese of Orihuela-Alicante. The focus of the seminar was the pontifical declaration *Dominus Iesus*.

The final session took place on April 30. The subject of priestly holiness was addressed by Rev. Saturnino Gamarra, president of the faculty of theology for northern Spain. He was joined by Monsignor Juan Esquerda Bifet, professor at Rome’s Urbanianum University, who spoke of priestly associations.

**Valencia, Philippines**

*Valencia Work Camp*

A group of 31 student volunteers from the Philippine archipelago recently returned from a two-week work camp in the area of Valencia, on Negros Island. From the north a dozen students from the Universities of St. Thomas and Asia & Pacific took part; the rest came from the main campus of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines in Bacolod.

During the two weeks, the volunteers painted the roof of the primary school in Liptong and an adjoining building, and built a cistern for the school. They also taught math, English and catechism to 40 children in grades five and six. Guidelines were provided by the supplementary educational Program Asal-Aral, often used in these kind of work camps throughout the islands.

The participants in the work camp are all university students who frequent various centers of the Opus Dei Prelature in the Philippines. They
also conducted a practical seminar in leadership for promising students in Dumaguete and Valencia.

**Warsaw, Poland**

*School for Families*

A group of professional women and mothers who take part in the means of formation offered by the Opus Dei prelature have organized a series of conferences aimed at young married women. The purpose of the conferences is to strengthen homes, so that peace, affection and understanding may reign there.

Now in its second year, the program takes place in provincial government quarters in Warsaw and is subsidized by the Family Department of the Ministry of National Education.

Conference themes include understanding and communication between the spouses, the psychological profile of femininity and masculinity, housework and its consequences in educating young children, school and kindergarten, educating one’s children, the art of making the most of free time and family relaxation. After the presentation, the floor is opened to questions. In some of the sessions, a case study method is used.

**Saragossa, Spain**

*50th Anniversary of Miraflores University Residence*

On March 24 Miraflores Residence celebrated its 50th anniversary. Hundreds of persons, including current and past residents, collaborators and friends, took part. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s role in its founding was highlighted.

Saragossa’s Archbishop Elias Yanes presided over the Eucharistic concelebration. In his homily he stressed the efforts by the residence to give young men a well-rounded education, including a solid spiritual formation.

Also attending the Mass were various academic and civil officials. Afterwards residents went to the cathedral to present our Lady of the Pillar with a commemorative mantle featuring Miraflores’ coat of arms.
An academic ceremony was held in the auditorium of the University of Saragossa recalling events in Miraflor’s first fifty years. Since opening its doors in 1950, close to 20,000 young men have benefited from the cultural, human and spiritual formation offered by the residence.
IN PACE
Suffrages

*In the first half of 2001, 210 faithful of the Prelature and 19 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 they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work and the ordinary circumstances of their lives into an occasion for loving God and 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
Teaching the Faith in the Family: Some guidelines from Blessed Josemaria Escriva

Michele Dolz

Doctor in Theology and Education

Parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their own children. This is a recurrent teaching in the Church’s magisterium from Divini Illius Magistri of Pope Pius XI in 1929 to the documents of Pope John Paul II. The Second Vatican Council summarizes this teaching: “As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family. They must therefore be recognized as being primarily and principally responsible for their education. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow-men which will promote an integrated, personal and social education of their children.”[1]

I would like to consider here some of Blessed Josemaria Escriva’s insights into this truth, which he placed in the context of the baptismal call to holiness and apostolate. Hopefully this brief consideration of a few key texts will serve to show the richness of his teaching on this topic and give rise to further studies.[2]

The family in God’s plans

Among the ancient people of Israel, the family was the firm foundation stone of society. For the Semitic peoples families took precedence over the individual, and were united in turn into clans and tribes, which accentuated the role of tradition and contributed towards stability and continuity in society. The patriarchal family was further reinforced among the chosen people by their determination to be faithful to Yahweh: “Fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life...These words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them
when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”[3]

A Jewish father under the Old Covenant felt a moral duty to transmit to his children the deposit of faith that God had entrusted to him. This obligation gave meaning to his mission as head of the family and was essential for the family’s prosperity and happiness.[4] Hence the intimate link between its members: “we are your bone and flesh.”[5] This close union led at times to paradoxical results, such as the punishment of an entire family for the fault of the father.[6]

The Hebrew family is “the father’s house” and God is “the God of our fathers.” The mission of the father has religious features. The father carries out an almost priestly role.[7] The family is not only a social unit but also a religious group. Festivals and holy days are celebrated within the household with a truly liturgical spirit. Thus the religion of Yahweh, from a social point of view, is centered not on preachers and charismatic figures, nor even specifically on a priestly caste, but rather on the family unit. And although Israel never lacked prophets and leaders of the people, religion was transmitted through the family.

The New Testament shows us how this ancient model was initially replaced by the new faith in Jesus Christ. Entire families were converted through the father’s conversion. After the cure of his son, the official from Capharnaum “believed, and all his household.”[8] The jailer of Paul and Silas,[9] and the head of the synagogue at Corinth, Crispus,[10] are other examples.

With the expansion of Christianity throughout the empire, the patriarchal Hebrew family soon ceased to be the only model. But the sense of responsibility of parents to transmit the faith in the family did not disappear. The literature on this topic is very abundant.[11] Blessed Josemaría always had a great interest in reading about the first Christians, not only because of the immediacy and freshness of the narratives, but also because of the high aspirations to holiness found there.

“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 Saint 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.

“Families who lived in union with Christ and who made him known to others. Small Christian communities which were centers for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be.”[12]

Blessed Josemaría’s admiration for the first Christians and his tireless reference to their example does not, of course, detract in any way from recognizing all the fruits of sanctity that the Church has produced throughout the two thousand years of her history, a sanctity often “cultivated” within Christian families. But the first Christian generations give very clear witness to three important truths:

a) the goal to which they aspired was holiness, understood as a full identification with Christ;

b) the mission of Christianizing society and culture (which means bringing people one by one to Christ) was the task of each Christian in his or her own environment, beginning with the family;

c) all of this has its origin in baptism, that is to say, in the very fact of being a Christian, and not in particular mandates from the hierarchy or added acts of consecration.

Blessed Josemaría always taught, not without some initial incomprehension, that marriage is a divine vocation and that its greatness, its obligations, and its efficacy are rooted in the sacrament itself.

“The purpose of marriage is to help married people sanctify themselves and others. For this they receive a special grace in the sacrament which Jesus Christ instituted. Those called to the married state will, with the grace of God, find within their state everything they need to be holy, to identify
themselves each day more with Jesus Christ, and to lead those with whom they live to God.

“We must strive so that these cells of Christianity may be born and may develop with a desire for holiness, conscious of the fact that the Sacrament of Initiation—Baptism—confers on all Christians a divine mission that each must fulfill in his own walk of life. Christian couples should be aware that they are called to sanctify themselves and to sanctify others, that they are called to be apostles and that their first apostolate is in the home. They should understand that founding a family, educating their children, and exercising a Christian influence in society are supernatural tasks. The effectiveness and the success of their life—their happiness—depends to a great extent on their awareness of their specific mission.”[13]

The parents’ mission to educate their children in the faith stems from the sacraments. When they teach the faith at home, it is the Church that is teaching. Their home is the domestic Church. Besides being a duty, it is a right, as the Code of Canon Law clearly recognizes.[14]

“Experience shows in all Christian environments what good effects come from this natural and supernatural introduction to the life of piety given in the warmth of the home. Children learn to place God first and foremost in their affections. They learn to see God as their Father and Mary as their Mother and they learn to pray following their parents’ example. In this way one can easily see what a wonderful apostolate parents have and how it is their duty to live a fully Christian life of prayer, so they can communicate their love of God to their children, which is something more than just teaching them.”[15]

Here he speaks with the assurance that stems from his deep interior life and his vast experience in guiding souls. Nevertheless, his intuition accords with much twentieth century research into child psychology. Alfred Baldwin, Pierre Bovet and Jean Piaget have all highlighted the central role of the child-parent relationship in the forming of a child's values and personality.[16]

The child readily “captures” what is transmitted to him through the irreplaceable affective bonds with his parents. While institutions outside the family, even when moved by the best of intentions, are must less effective.
Many beneficent institutions, inspired by Christian charity, have educated parentless children in the faith as well as in secular subjects. God has even brought forth great saints from such environments. But in general it is precisely such institutions that show how indispensable Christian parents are. Even more, the history of Christian education over many centuries shows how difficult it is for the seed of supernatural life to germinate without the parents’ help. In contrast, the family-school synergy (or that of the family and Christian educators in general) is highly effective. Here we see another of Blessed Josemaría’s pastoral intuitions that has now become widespread. All over the world educational centers have been started that work closely with the parents’ own efforts to educate their children and in which the parents continue to exercise the role of principal educators.

Blessed Josemaría always gave parents some advice that at first might seem a pedagogical technique: become friends of your children, win their trust and confidence. The educator Victor Garcia Hoz, who first met Blessed Josemaría Escrivá back in the thirties, has focused attention on the importance of this advice. He stressed that, in the long run, all true education is based on a relationship of friendship between the educator and the person being educated.[17] I said “might seem a pedagogical technique,” because friendship and Christian love are charity, which can never be reduced to a “technique” but rather constitutes the very core of our new life in Christ.

Education in holiness

We mentioned above Blessed Josemaría’s admiration for the example of the early Christians, who saw the faith, and taught those around them to see it, as the search for holiness, complete identification with Christ. In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul writes: “If I do what I do not want.... It is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.”[18] We are presented here with the drama of our fallen nature, and the impossibility of carrying out holy actions without grace. In the context of forming others in the faith, it reminds us of the absurdity (and the dangers) of a moral education that covers over our weakness in doing the good (a weakness caused by sin) and that fails to take grace into account.[19] The true context for all Christian moral education is found in
another passage from Saint Paul, in his letter to the Galatians (a passage frequently cited by Blessed Josemaría): “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.”[20] A Christian’s moral activity is the consequence of the life of Christ in his soul.

The entire letter to the Galatians can be read, in my opinion, as the “Magna Carta” for Christian educators. Concepts such as “life in Christ,” “being children of God through faith in Christ,” “being called to freedom,” go far beyond a simple observance of precepts or moral codes and remind those involved in forming others that Christianity is not a morality or a philosophy of life. Rather it is a life, the life of Christ in us. This is why Paul exclaims in the same epistle: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you.”[21] This is what holiness consists in. Such a high goal, as Saint Paul also warns, is always in danger of being lowered or viewed in a worldly light: “Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”[22] The lowering of expectations in family education (a consequence of the logic of “sowing to the flesh”) is what Blessed Josemaría used to call “the failure of Christ in Christian families.” Such families neither recognize nor accept God’s gifts, for example, the vocation of their children to a particular mission in the Church (such as the call to the ministerial priesthood) or simply the divine invitation to take up in a consistent way the vocation to sanctity and apostolate received in baptism.

But parents who aspire to holiness and desire holiness for their children understand very well those other words of Blessed Josemaría: “There is a special communion of the saints among members of the same family. If you are very holy, your children will find it easier to be so.”[23] This very particular spiritual communion also stems from the sacrament of marriage, since Christ has taken up the natural family relationships, sanctified them, and made them into a vocation.

It is impossible to “teach” sanctity, in the sense of merely passing on some facts or theories. Parents can and should transmit the truths of the Catholic faith and guide their children towards the means of sanctification
provided by the Church. Nevertheless, we should never forget that “parents teach their children mainly through their own conduct. What a son or daughter looks for in a father or mother is not only a certain amount of knowledge or some more or less effective advice, but primarily something more important: a proof of the value and meaning of life, shown through the life of a specific person, and confirmed in the different situations and circumstances that occur over a period of time.”[24]

Parents can certainly teach their children how to pray: “so that God is not regarded as a stranger whom we go to see in Church once a week on Sunday. He will be seen and treated as he really is, not only in church but also at home, because our Lord has told us, ‘where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them’ (Mt 18:20).”[25]

Jesus teaches us on every page of the Gospel how important prayer is for attaining sanctity. And this is a constant theme in Blessed Josemaría’s preaching. Referring to the formation of young people, he would always say: “If you don’t make the boys men of prayer, you have wasted your time.”[26] All the apostolates of Opus Dei encourage people to set out on the paths of mental prayer and to undertake a full plan of spiritual life. At the same time, the founder always feared, as a disease of the soul, any kind of formalism or external “observance,” the exterior practice of piety without an interior openness to Christ. He applied the same criteria to the family, with the due qualifications based on the age of the children and on the fact that parents are not spiritual directors. But he was no less demanding here, since he knew that almost all Catholics have learned their prayers in their own family, and yet few have truly become souls of prayer.

“The meaning of true piety should be taught first by example and then by word. False piety is a sad pseudo-spiritual caricature which generally results from a lack of doctrine and from a certain psychological defect. The logical result is that it is repellent to anyone who loves authenticity and sincerity.

“I am very glad to see how Christian piety takes root among young people today, as it did forty years ago:

“when they see it lived sincerely in the lives of others;
“when they understand that prayer is speaking with God, not anonymously, but personally, as with one’s parent or with a friend, in a heart to heart conversation;

“when we try to make them hear deep in their souls the words with which Jesus Christ himself invites them to a confidential encounter: \( vos autem dixi amicos \) (Jn 15:15) ‘I have called you friends’;

“when a strong appeal is made to their Faith, so that they see that our Lord is the ‘same yesterday and today and forever’ (Heb 13:8).

“It is essential for them to realize that simple and heartfelt piety also calls for the exercise of human virtues and that it cannot be reduced to a few daily or weekly pious acts. It must penetrate our entire life and give meaning to our work, rest, friendships and entertainment, to everything that we do. We are children of God all day long, even though we do set aside special moments for considering it, so that we can fill ourselves with the awareness of our divine filiation that is the essence of true piety.”[27]

He was convinced that because of the child’s special affective bond with his parents, the piety learned in childhood would take deep root in the soul and never completely disappear, not even when there is an apparent distancing from the faith or from Catholic practice. Speaking of piety in the family, he told parents:

“Your refinement and your piety... remain in the depths of their soul. And if later the passions come and pull us down, and we have a bad period in our life, in the end the good seed will blossom again. The piety that you mothers place in your children’s hearts is never lost.”[28]

He advised parents to teach their children a few prayers that they say regularly. Piety should never be a cause of boredom for young children. What is essential is that they learn they are children of God and act accordingly. To foster personal union with God, Blessed Josemaría saw that the only path was one based on freedom: “There is no real education without personal responsibility, and there is no responsibility without freedom.”[29]

“It’s important not to lose these wonderful traditions of family prayer, but don’t impose them. Let your children see you preserving them with
affection. They should know when the rosary is said each day; and they will end up joining you. But without being forced!

“If they leave themselves open—which they will do if you truly strive to be their friend—tell each one separately: ‘Look, this custom of ours is centuries old and ought to be continued because it pleases our Lady very much, and God is very pleased by it and blesses us. But say it when you want, with complete freedom.’ Then they will return.”[30]

As they grow older and become more mature, children should gradually be given greater freedom. This is another central feature of Blessed Josemaria’s pedagogy: don’t fear freedom, because without it there is no true improvement. As he liked to say, Christ himself wished to take the risk of our freedom. At the same time he urged parents to be patient (“because God has a lot of patience with us.”) One should never be in a hurry with souls, precisely because it is so important to form them well.

“You can’t force your older children to fulfill their religious obligations. You shouldn’t grab them by the ear and say: ‘I’m taking you to Mass.’ Because, even though they are physically at church, if they don’t want to be there, they won’t really be at Mass.

“They should be told that what they are doing is wrong and that it offends God; and that it is a grave offense if they fail to fulfill their obligations in a matter that is serious. But remain tranquil and pray. Remember Saint Monica’s prayers for her son Augustine. If you pray for them, and explain their duties to them, be sure that in the end God will move their hearts and the Holy Spirit will lead them towards contrition and upright behavior.”[31]

The primacy of grace

Good theologian that he was, Blessed Josemaria never fell into the classic trap of the Christian educator: trying to obtain with human means what can only be attained with the help of God’s grace. His catechesis was always focused on the need to have recourse to the fonts of grace, to the sacraments. He always saw the ascetical struggle as a question of correspondence to grace.
Using terminology from the Fathers of the Church,[32] he spoke of the “divinization” of the Christian, both as an objective reality and as a goal. He took with complete seriousness, as something pertaining to ordinary life, Saint John’s references to the communion (koinonía) between Christ and the faithful, with its prototype in the communion between Christ and the Father. Therefore he drew people’s attention to Jesus’ words: “That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us.”[33] And also: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”[34] He taught people how to make a reality of this promise: “Our heart now needs to distinguish and adore each one of the divine Persons.... The soul spends time lovingly with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and readily submits to the work of the life-giving Paraclete, who gives himself to us with no merit on our part, bestowing his gifts and the supernatural virtues.”[35]

Blessed Josemaría Escrivá’s writings revolve around the theme of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our soul. Christian life is the life of “sons in the Son,”[36] made sons of God in Christ (as Saint Paul so often says) through the sending of the Holy Spirit.[37] Saint Paul sees the presence of the Spirit in the Christian as somehow prefigured by the shekinah of God in the Temple[38]: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?... God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.”[39]

Blessed Josemaría stressed that Christian formation should have as its aim the expression of this indwelling and divinization (and therefore the awareness of being children of God in Christ) in prayer and frequent recourse to the sacraments. Thus for him leading someone to prayer and to the sacraments was the core of all Christian education.

“If the sacraments are abandoned, genuine Christian life disappears. Yet we should realize that particularly today there are many people who seem to forget about the sacraments and who even scorn this redeeming flow of Christ’s grace. It is painful to have to speak of this sore in a so-called Christian society, but we must do so for it will encourage us to approach these sources of sanctification more gratefully and more lovingly.”[40]
Throughout his life, and particularly between 1970 and 1975, the year in which he died, he carried out a broad catechesis on the sacraments. He was saddened by the widespread trend to delay the baptism of children under the pretext of a more conscious choice on the part of those being baptized. As the Church’s magisterium has recently taught, baptism “not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte ‘a new creature’ (2 Cor 5:17), an adopted son of God who has become a ‘partaker of the divine nature’ (2 Pet 1:4), a member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification:

—enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;

—giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;

—allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.”[41]

As Blessed Josemaría lamented: “There are many people who seem to forget about the sacraments and who even scorn this redeeming flow of Christ’s grace.... Without the slightest scruple people decide to postpone the baptism of newly born children. Yet by doing so they seriously go against justice and charity by depriving children of the grace of faith, of the incalculable treasure of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in a soul which comes into the world stained by original sin. They also try to change the true nature of the sacrament of confirmation, which tradition has unanimously seen as a strengthening of the spiritual life. By giving more supernatural strength to the soul, through a quiet and fruitful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, confirmation enables the Christian to fight as milites Christi, as a soldier of Christ, in his intimate battle against selfishness and lust of all sorts.”[42]

He also made frequent reference to the confession of children, encouraging parents to bring their children to this sacrament without delay.

“What a joy it is to go to confession. I’ve heard the confessions of thousands and thousands of children. It’s not a waste of time. One learns a lot from these souls in whom the Holy Spirit is acting. Just as you mothers give your infants first your blood, and then the nectar of your breast; thus
the Holy Spirit, in the souls of those little ones, who perhaps don’t realize anything, is acting tirelessly. And the priest collaborates with him, with the Holy Spirit. Besides, they receive the grace of the sacrament, which is also the Holy Spirit in action.”[43]

Thus we arrive at what Blessed Josemaría saw as the foundation of all Christian formation: divine filiation. God created us to freely give us a higher, strictly supernatural dignity: to be his adoptive sons, sons in the Son, members of the family of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, domestici Dei.[44] “The way in which God makes us members of his family,” writes Fernando Ocariz, commenting on Blessed Josemaría’s teachings, “is very specific: filiation. This divine familiarity is not simply a ‘moral question,’ a matter of personal behavior. Rather it is based on a real transformation in our being—elevation, adoption. For ‘our faith teaches us that man, in the state of grace, is divinized’ (Christ Is Passing By, no. 103), that is to say, truly placed in God, made a sharer in the divine life: in the Life that is the eternal Processions of the Blessed Trinity...God, in his extravagant goodness, has not only wanted us to treat him like a father. Rather, in an incomparably greater extravagance of love, he has adopted us as his children.”[45] Saint John writes: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”[46] Blessed Josemaría saw divine filiation as the foundation of a Christian’s spiritual life. This is not just one more aspect of his teaching, but the all-encompassing framework.

“The piety which is born of divine filiation is a profound attitude of the soul which eventually permeates one’s entire existence. It is there in every thought, every desire, every affection. Haven’t you noticed in families how children, even without realizing it, imitate their parents? They imitate their gestures, their habits; much of their behavior is the same as that of their parents.

“Well, the same kind of thing happens to a good son of God. One finds oneself acquiring—without knowing how, or by what means—a marvelous godliness, which enables us to focus events from the supernatural viewpoint of faith; we come to love all men as our Father in heaven loves them and, what is more important, we become more fervent in our daily efforts to
come closer to God. Our wretchedness, I insist, doesn’t matter, because we have the loving arms of our Father God to lift us up.”

When speaking to parents, he always stressed that the focal point of the Christian formation they imparted to their children had to be the knowledge that God is their Father. And since their children truly love them, it should be easy for parents to teach their children to transfer this natural filiation to the supernatural level.

**Human virtues**

Another central feature of Blessed Josemaría’s approach to Christian education is the importance given to human virtues. He liked to use the adjective ‘human’ to emphasize that these habits enhance the dignity of the person who possesses them. These virtues, which “some possess even without knowing Christ,” provide the grounding for free actions.

“In this world of ours there are many people who neglect God. It may be that they have not had an opportunity to listen to his words, or that they have forgotten them. Yet their human dispositions are honest, loyal, compassionate, and sincere. I would go so far as to say that anyone possessing such qualities is ready to be generous with God, because human virtues constitute the foundation for the supernatural virtues.”

It is hard, for example, to exercise supernatural fortitude if humanly one lacks habits of self-control, or Christian prudence if one is naturally scatter-brained.

In a Christian, the human virtues are converted into supernatural ones when they are vivified by charity and strengthened by the help of divine grace. When trying to teach the virtues in one’s family, these words of the Pope should be kept in mind: “By a kind of osmosis, children incorporate into their own lives and personality what they breathe in the atmosphere of their home, as the fruit of the virtues parents have cultivated in their own lives. The best way to sculpt the virtues in the heart of children is for them to see these virtues engraved in the life of their parents. Human and Christian virtues, in a harmonious and strong unity, make the ideal seen in their parents attractive and spur the children to undertake its conquest.”

A virtuous life is always attractive. But Blessed Josemaría recognized that Christians can fail to give good example here:
“You may perhaps have noticed... so many people who call themselves Christians because they have been baptized and have received other sacraments, but then prove to be disloyal and deceitful, insincere and proud, and... they fail to achieve anything. They are like shooting stars, lighting up the sky for an instant and then falling away to nothing. If we accept the responsibility of being children of God, we will realize that God wants us to be very human. Our heads should indeed be touching heaven, but our feet should be firmly on the ground. The price of living as Christians is not that of ceasing to be human or of abandoning the effort to acquire those virtues which some have even without knowing Christ. The price paid for each Christian is the redeeming blood of our Lord and he, I insist, want us to be both very human and very divine, struggling each day to imitate him who is perfectus Deus, perfectus homo.”[52]

A Christian who does not make an effort to practice the virtues, who does not struggle to fulfill his family, professional and social duties, and also to exercise his own rights, cannot be a good disciple of Christ and damages the Church. Blessed Josemaria wanted children to receive, both in the family and in educational centers, a thorough education on their rights and duties as free citizens. He urged educators to instill in children a strong awareness of their responsibility to contribute to the common good and to the development of society. In this context, he warned of two positions that might seem contradictory, but both of which lead to robbing the human person of his humanity in the end.

“There is a certain type of secularist outlook that one comes across, and also another approach which one might call ‘pietistic,’ both of which share the view that Christians somehow are not fully and entirely human. According to the former, the demands of the Gospel are such as to stifle our human qualities; whereas for the latter, human nature is so fallen that it threatens and endangers the purity of the faith. The result, either way, is the same. They both fail to grasp the full significance of Christ’s Incarnation; they do not see that the Word was made flesh, became man, and dwelt amongst us.”[53]

It is here that he finds the focus for Christian asceticism.[54] And here he is very demanding, first with himself, and afterwards with others. Always counting on God’s grace, he encouraged all men and women to develop
their own potentialities with the tenacity and optimism of someone who practices a sport seriously, and with the toughness of an ascetic. In Christian homes, he said, one must strive to create a climate of sincerity, generosity, loyalty. In schools and centers of formation, one must do everything possible to foster these virtues in young people, precisely because we want them to be saints.

“Once a person is striving to improve in the human virtues, his heart is already very close to Christ. If he is a Christian, he will realize that the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and all the other virtues which God’s grace brings with it are an encouragement never to neglect the good qualities he shares with so many of his fellowmen.

“The human virtues are, I insist, the foundation for the supernatural ones. These in turn provide us with constant encouragement to behave as good human beings. In either case, it is not sufficient merely to want to have these virtues. We have to learn how to practice them. Discite benefacere (“learn to do good”). We need to make a habit of exercising each virtue, by actually being sincere, truthful, balanced, calm, and patient... for love is proved by deeds and we cannot love God only by word, but ‘with deeds and in truth.’

“When a Christian fights to acquire these virtues, his soul is preparing to receive the grace of the Holy Spirit fruitfully. In this way his good human qualities are strengthened by the motions of the Paraclete in his soul. The Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, the soul’s sweet guest, pours out his gifts: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and the fear of the Lord...

“Our faith brings out the full meaning of these human virtues, which no one should ever neglect. Christians should be second to none as human beings. Those who follow Christ are able (not by their own merit but by the grace of God) to communicate to those around them what they at times suspect but cannot quite grasp: that true happiness, a genuine spirit of serving our neighbor, can only come by passing through the Heart of our Redeemer, perfectus Deus, perfectus homo.”[55]

Among the holy educators with whom the history of the Church has been blessed, the founder of Opus Dei certainly has a rightful place. He was
a tireless promoter of Christian formation, not only through the educational institutions inspired by his teachings but also, and above all, through all of Opus Dei’s apostolic activity, which he liked to define as “a great catechesis.” It seeks to foster, in the midst of the world, the formation of men and women who are ready to take up, in all its radical demands, the baptismal call to life in Christ.


[2] In regard to the high concept that Blessed Josemaria had of education as a human activity and as an apostolic expression, see Francisco Ponz, La educación y la actividad educativa en la enseñanza de Monseñor Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, Eunsa, Pamplona 1976.


[11] Aside from the well known studies of A. Hamman (La vie quotidienne des premiers chrétiens) and of G. BARDY (La vie spirituelle d’après les Pères des trois premiers siècles), I will mention here: E.


[14] Cf. can. 1136.

[15] Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Conversations, no. 103. “Parents, by transmitting life and receiving it in an atmosphere of love, have a unique educative potential. They know their own children better than anyone, in each one’s irrepeable singularity, and they possess, through their own experience, the secrets and resources of true love” (Pontifical Council for the Family, Educational Guidelines on the Family, December 8, 1995, no. 7).

[16] An excellent philosophical reflection on love as the soul of education, amply inspired by the teachings of Blessed Josemaria Escriva, is found in Carlos Cardona, Etica del quehacer educativo, Rialp, Madrid 1990.


[21] Ibid. 4:19.

[22] Ibid. 6:7-8.


[27] Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Conversations, no. 102.


[29] Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Christ Is Passing By, no. 27


[34] Jn 14:23.


[36] Second Vatican Council, Declaration Gaudium et Spes, no. 22.

[37] Gal 4:6


[40] Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Christ Is Passing By, no. 78.

[41] Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1265-1266.

[42] Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Christ Is Passing By, no. 78.

[43] Notes taken during a get-together in Santiago, Chile, on July 2, 1974: AGP, P11, p. 106.


[45] Fernando Ocariz, Naturaleza, Gracia y Gloria, Eunsa, Pamplona 2000, pp. 183-184 (chapter “Filiacion divina, realidad central en la vida y en la enseñanza de Mons. Escriva de Balaguer”). “Our relationship with the three divine Persons is based on our participation in the filiation of Christ,
by the initiative of the Father, who wishes to make us sons in the Son, and by the infusion of the Spirit, who assimilates us to Christ as Son” (J.A. Sayes, La gracia de Cristo, BAC, Madrid 1993, p. 283.).


[48] Ibid., no. 75.

[49] Ibid., no. 74.

[50] “Such personal qualities are not enough, for no one is saved without the grace of Christ” (Ibid., no. 75).


[52] Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Friends of God, no. 75.

[53] Ibid., no. 74.
