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
In Rome and from Rome

The year 2005 will go down in history as the year of the death of John Paul II and the election of Benedict XVI. During April and May, the whole world’s attention was focused on Rome as the center of Christianity. The clear demonstration of love and fidelity to the Roman Pontiff, the joy of the hundreds of thousands of Catholics who went to Rome to say goodbye to the former Pope and to greet the new one, with a deep awareness of the Church’s continuity, and also the example of submission to God’s plans that we saw in Benedict XVI from the very first moment, remain forever engraved in the hearts of all Catholics.

For the faithful of Opus Dei, the year 2006 is a new incentive to grow in our union with the Roman Pontiff, shown in deeds and prayer. During the month of June we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the arrival of St. Josemaría in the Eternal City, where he remained until his death in 1975.

This anniversary highlights some of the essential traits of St. Josemaría’s life, especially visible during his “Roman years.” The first is his veneration for and union with the visible head of the Church. “Since we are children of God,” he wrote many years ago, “our greatest love, our greatest esteem, our deepest veneration, our most submissive obedience, our greatest affection has to be... for the Pope. Always remember that after God and our Mother Holy Mary, in the hierarchy of love and authority, comes the Pope. Therefore, I often say: “thank you, my God, for the love for the Pope that you have placed in my heart.”[1]

From the first moment he saw very clearly (it was a divine gift) that the Work our Lord had called him to found had to be an instrument in the service of the Church. He expressed this conviction in a concise and clear phrase: omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam! All with Peter, to Jesus, through Mary! During the twenty-nine years that he spent in Rome, this close union with the See of Peter that characterized Opus Dei from its beginning was transmitted to the faithful of the Work and to innumerable people throughout the whole world.
The story of St. Josemaría’s first hours in Rome is very telling in this regard. His deep emotion when he first caught sight of the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica on the evening of June 23, 1946, and the night he spent in vigil, praying for the person and intention of the Roman Pontiff on the terrace of the small apartment on the Plaza de Città Leonina from which he could see the pontifical apartments, was not a matter of sentimental piety. Rather it was a vivid manifestation of his great love, both theological and human, for the Church and the Pope—a love that all the faithful of the Prelature know they are called to emulate.

“Ubi Petrus, ibi Ecclesia, ibi Deus,” the Founder of Opus Dei used to exclaim, making his own the common conviction of the Church. And he would continue: “We want to be with Peter, because the Church is with him, God is with him; and without him we will not find God. That’s why I’ve tried to ‘romanize’ the Work. Love the Holy Father a lot. Pray for the Pope often. Love him very much, very much! For he needs all his children’s affection. This is something that I understand very well by experience. I’m not a stone, I’m a man of flesh and blood. Therefore I want the Pope to know that we love him, and will always do so, since he is the ‘gentle Christ on earth.’”[2]

Another key trait of St. Josemaría’s life is summarized in the following words: “My role is to hide and disappear so that only Jesus shines forth.”[3] This rule of conduct, inspired by the example of St. John the Baptist—illum oportet crescere, me autem minui; “he must increase, but I must decrease”[4]—guided his conduct at all times, and was especially apparent during his years in Rome. It did not imply any abandonment of his duties, but rather reflected his untiring effort to be very faithful to the spirit he had received from God.

St. Josemaría lived for almost thirty years in the Holy City, which he very seldom left. He made only a few trips to prepare the first steps of Opus Dei’s apostolic work in various countries of Europe, and then towards the end of his life he traveled throughout the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America in a wide-ranging work of catechesis. The exercise of his pastoral charity—the study and resolution of the questions that arose with the development of Opus Dei, the formation of the people who spent time in Rome, the construction of the central headquarters—completely
absorbed the Founder’s days. Through his faithful work in tasks that had no human glamour, without sparing himself fatigue and never putting himself in the limelight, St. Josemaría was a firm support for the Church and spurred forward in a very direct way the beginnings of the apostolic work of the faithful of Opus Dei all over the world.

It is God’s will that this living portion of the Church should grow and develop all over the world, bringing to every environment and place a “romanizing” leaven. With his move to the Eternal City sixty years ago, the Founder of Opus Dei wanted to make the city of Peter and the first Christian martyrs the point of departure for his many sons and daughters who would be dispersing throughout the world carrying with them the seed of the Gospel. May this anniversary be a spur to a more intense “romanization”—a union of hearts with the Church and its visible Head—in all the faithful of the Prelature, shown in a more intense love for the Church and the Pope, following St. Josemaría’s example. "When you are old, and I have gone to render my account to God, you will tell your brothers how the father loved the Pope with all his soul, with all his strength."[5]


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HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Presbyterate,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"Expergiscere, homo: quia pro te Deus factus est homo - Wake up, O man! For your sake God became man" (St Augustine, Sermo, 185). With the Christmas celebrations now at hand, I am opening my Meeting with you, dear collaborators of the Roman Curia, with St Augustine's invitation to understand the true meaning of Christ's Birth. I address to each one my most cordial greeting and I thank you for the sentiments of devotion and affection, effectively conveyed to me by your Cardinal Dean, to whom I address my gratitude.

God became man for our sake: this is the message which, every year, from the silent grotto of Bethlehem spreads even to the most out-of-the-way corners of the earth. Christmas is a feast of light and peace, it is a day of inner wonder and joy that expands throughout the universe, because "God became man". From the humble grotto of Bethlehem, the eternal Son of God, who became a tiny Child, addresses each one of us: he calls us, invites us to be reborn in him so that, with him, we may live eternally in communion with the Most Holy Trinity.

Our hearts brimming with the joy that comes from this knowledge, let us think back to the events of the year that is coming to an end. We have behind us great events which have left a deep mark on the life of the Church. I am thinking first and foremost of the departure of our beloved Holy Father John Paul II, preceded by a long period of suffering and the gradual loss of speech. No Pope has left us such a quantity of texts as he has bequeathed to us; no previous Pope was able to visit the whole world like him and speak directly to people from all the continents.

In the end, however, his lot was a journey of suffering and silence.
Unforgettable for us are the images of Palm Sunday when, holding an olive branch and marked by pain, he came to the window and imparted the Lord's Blessing as he himself was about to walk towards the Cross. Next was the scene in his Private Chapel when, holding the Crucifix, he took part in the Way of the Cross at the Colosseum, where he had so often led the procession carrying the Cross himself. Lastly came his silent Blessing on Easter Sunday, in which we saw the promise of the Resurrection, of eternal life, shine out through all his suffering.

With his words and actions, the Holy Father gave us great things; equally important is the lesson he imparted to us from the chair of suffering and silence. In his last book "Memory and Identity" (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), he has left us an interpretation of suffering that is not a theological or philosophical theory but a fruit that matured on his personal path of suffering which he walked, sustained by faith in the Crucified Lord. This interpretation, which he worked out in faith and which gave meaning to his suffering lived in communion with that of the Lord, spoke through his silent pain, transforming it into an important message.

Both at the beginning and once again at the end of the book mentioned, the Pope shows that he is deeply touched by the spectacle of the power of evil, which we dramatically experienced in the century that has just ended. He says in his text: "The evil... was not a small-scale evil.... It was an evil of gigantic proportions, an evil which availed itself of state structures in order to accomplish its wicked work, an evil built up into a system" (p. 189). Might evil be invincible? Is it the ultimate power of history? Because of the experience of evil, for Pope Wojty³a the question of redemption became the essential and central question of his life and thought as a Christian.

Is there a limit against which the power of evil shatters? "Yes, there is", the Pope replies in this book of his, as well as in his Encyclical on redemption. The power that imposes a limit on evil is Divine Mercy. Violence, the display of evil, is opposed in history - as "the totally other" of God, God's own power - by Divine Mercy. The Lamb is stronger than the dragon, we could say together with the Book of Revelation.
At the end of the book, in a retrospective review of the attack of 13 May 1981 and on the basis of the experience of his journey with God and with the world, John Paul II further deepened this answer. What limits the force of evil, the power, in brief, which overcomes it - this is how he says it - is God's suffering, the suffering of the Son of God on the Cross: "The suffering of the Crucified God is not just one form of suffering alongside others.... In sacrificing himself for us all, Christ gave a new meaning to suffering, opening up a new dimension, a new order: the order of love.... The passion of Christ on the Cross gave a radically new meaning to suffering, transforming it from within.... It is this suffering which burns and consumes evil with the flame of love.... All human suffering, all pain, all infirmity contains within itself a promise of salvation;... evil is present in the world partly so as to awaken our love, our self-gift in generous and disinterested service to those visited by suffering.... Christ has redeemed the world: "By his wounds we are healed' (Is 53: 5)" (p. 189, ff.).

All this is not merely learned theology, but the expression of a faith lived and matured through suffering. Of course, we must do all we can to alleviate suffering and prevent the injustice that causes the suffering of the innocent. However, we must also do the utmost to ensure that people can discover the meaning of suffering and are thus able to accept their own suffering and to unite it with the suffering of Christ. In this way, it is merged with redemptive love and consequently becomes a force against the evil in the world.

The response across the world to the Pope's death was an overwhelming demonstration of gratitude for the fact that in his ministry he offered himself totally to God for the world; a thanksgiving for the fact that in a world full of hatred and violence he taught anew love and suffering in the service of others; he showed us, so to speak, in the flesh, the Redeemer, redemption, and gave us the certainty that indeed, evil does not have the last word in the world.

I would now like to mention, if briefly, another two events also initiated by Pope John Paul II: they are the World Youth Day celebrated in Cologne and the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist, which also ended the Year of the Eucharist inaugurated by Pope John Paul II.
The World Youth Day has lived on as a great gift in the memory of those present. More than a million young people gathered in the City of Cologne on the Rhine River and in the neighboring towns to listen together to the Word of God, to pray together, to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, to sing and to celebrate together, to rejoice in life and to worship and receive the Lord in the Eucharist during the great meetings on Saturday evening and Sunday. Joy simply reigned throughout those days.

Apart from keeping order, the police had nothing to do - the Lord had gathered his family, tangibly overcoming every frontier and barrier, and in the great communion between us, he made us experience his presence.

The motto chosen for those days - "We have come to worship him!", contained two great images which encouraged the right approach from the outset. First there was the image of the pilgrimage, the image of the person who, looking beyond his own affairs and daily life, sets out in search of his essential destination, the truth, the right life, God.

This image of the person on his way towards the goal of life contained another two clear indications. First of all, there was the invitation not to see the world that surrounds us solely as raw material with which we can do something, but to try to discover in it "the Creator's handwriting", the creative reason and the love from which the world was born and of which the universe speaks to us, if we pay attention, if our inner senses awaken and acquire perception of the deepest dimensions of reality.

As a second element there is a further invitation: to listen to the historical revelation which alone can offer us the key to the interpretation of the silent mystery of creation, pointing out to us the practical way towards the true Lord of the world and of history, who conceals himself in the poverty of the stable in Bethlehem.

The other image contained in the World Youth Day motto was the person worshipping: "We have come to worship him". Before any activity, before the world can change there must be worship. Worship alone sets us truly free; worship alone gives us the criteria for our action. Precisely in a world in which guiding criteria are absent and the threat exists that each
person will be a law unto himself, it is fundamentally necessary to stress worship.

For all those who were present the intense silence of that million young people remains unforgettable, a silence that united and uplifted us all when the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament was placed on the altar. Let us cherish in our hearts the images of Cologne: they are signs that continue to be valid. Without mentioning individual names, I would like on this occasion to thank everyone who made World Youth Day possible; but especially, let us together thank the Lord, for indeed, he alone could give us those days in the way in which we lived them.

The word "adoration" [worship] brings us to the second great event that I wish to talk about: the Synod of Bishops and the Year of the Eucharist. Pope John Paul II, with the Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia and the Apostolic Letter Mane Nobiscum Domine, gave us the essential clues and at the same time, with his personal experience of Eucharistic faith, put the Church's teaching into practice.

Moreover, the Congregation for Divine Worship, in close connection with the Encyclical, published the Instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum as a practical guide to the correct implementation of the conciliar Constitution on the liturgy and liturgical reform. In addition to all this, was it really possible to say anything new, to develop further the whole of this teaching?

This was exactly the great experience of the Synod, during which a reflection of the riches of the Eucharistic life of the Church today and the inexhaustibility of her Eucharistic faith could be perceived in the Fathers' contributions. What the Fathers thought and expressed must be presented, in close connection with the Propositiones of the Synod, in a Post-Synodal Document.

Here, once again, I only wish to underline that point which a little while ago we already mentioned in the context of World Youth Day: adoration of the Risen Lord, present in the Eucharist with flesh and blood, with body and soul, with divinity and humanity.

It is moving for me to see how everywhere in the Church the joy of Eucharistic adoration is reawakening and being fruitful. In the period of
liturgical reform, Mass and adoration outside it were often seen as in opposition to one another: it was thought that the Eucharistic Bread had not been given to us to be contemplated, but to be eaten, as a widespread objection claimed at that time.

The experience of the prayer of the Church has already shown how nonsensical this antithesis was. Augustine had formerly said: "...nemo autem illam carnem manducat, nisi prius adoraverit;... peccemus non adorando - No one should eat this flesh without first adoring it;... we should sin were we not to adore it" (cf. Enarr. in Ps 98: 9 CCL XXXIX 1385).

Indeed, we do not merely receive something in the Eucharist. It is the encounter and unification of persons; the person, however, who comes to meet us and desires to unite himself to us is the Son of God. Such unification can only be brought about by means of adoration.

Receiving the Eucharist means adoring the One whom we receive. Precisely in this way and only in this way do we become one with him. Therefore, the development of Eucharistic adoration, as it took shape during the Middle Ages, was the most consistent consequence of the Eucharistic mystery itself: only in adoration can profound and true acceptance develop. And it is precisely this personal act of encounter with the Lord that develops the social mission which is contained in the Eucharist and desires to break down barriers, not only the barriers between the Lord and us but also and above all those that separate us from one another.

The last event of this year on which I wish to reflect here is the celebration of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council 40 years ago. This memory prompts the question: What has been the result of the Council? Was it well received? What, in the acceptance of the Council, was good and what was inadequate or mistaken? What still remains to be done? No one can deny that in vast areas of the Church the implementation of the Council has been somewhat difficult, even without wishing to apply to what occurred in these years the description that St Basil, the great Doctor of the Church, made of the Church's situation after the Council of Nicea: he compares her situation to a naval battle in the darkness of the storm, saying among other things: "The raucous shouting of those who through
disagreement rise up against one another, the incomprehensible chatter, the confused din of uninterrupted clamoring, has now filled almost the whole of the Church, falsifying through excess or failure the right doctrine of the faith..." (De Spiritu Sancto, XXX, 77; PG 32, 213 A; SCh 17 ff., p. 524).

We do not want to apply precisely this dramatic description to the situation of the post-conciliar period, yet something from all that occurred is nevertheless reflected in it. The question arises: Why has the implementation of the Council, in large parts of the Church, thus far been so difficult?

Well, it all depends on the correct interpretation of the Council or - as we would say today - on its proper hermeneutics, the correct key to its interpretation and application. The problems in its implementation arose from the fact that two contrary hermeneutics came face to face and quarreled with each other. One caused confusion, the other, silently but more and more visibly, bore and is bearing fruit.

On the one hand, there is an interpretation that I would call "a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture"; it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media, and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the "hermeneutic of reform", of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-Church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying People of God.

The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church. It asserts that the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council. It claims that they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless. However, the true spirit of the Council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts.

These innovations alone were supposed to represent the true spirit of the Council, and starting from and in conformity with them, it would be possible to move ahead. Precisely because the texts would only imperfectly
reflect the true spirit of the Council and its newness, it would be necessary to go courageously beyond the texts and make room for the newness in which the Council's deepest intention would be expressed, even if it were still vague.

In a word: it would be necessary not to follow the texts of the Council but its spirit. In this way, obviously, a vast margin was left open for the question on how this spirit should subsequently be defined and room was consequently made for every whim.

The nature of a Council as such is therefore basically misunderstood. In this way, it is considered as a sort of constituent that eliminates an old constitution and creates a new one. However, the Constituent Assembly needs a mandator and then confirmation by the mandator, in other words, the people the constitution must serve. The Fathers had no such mandate and no one had ever given them one; nor could anyone have given them one because the essential constitution of the Church comes from the Lord and was given to us so that we might attain eternal life and, starting from this perspective, be able to illuminate life in time and time itself.

Through the Sacrament they have received, Bishops are stewards of the Lord's gift. They are "stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor 4: 1); as such, they must be found to be "faithful" and "wise" (cf. Lk 12: 41-48). This requires them to administer the Lord's gift in the right way, so that it is not left concealed in some hiding place but bears fruit, and the Lord may end by saying to the administrator: "Since you were dependable in a small matter I will put you in charge of larger affairs" (cf. Mt 25: 14-30; Lk 19: 11-27).

These Gospel parables express the dynamic of fidelity required in the Lord's service; and through them it becomes clear that, as in a Council, the dynamic and fidelity must converge.

The hermeneutic of discontinuity is countered by the hermeneutic of reform, as it was presented first by Pope John XXIII in his Speech inaugurating the Council on 11 October 1962 and later by Pope Paul VI in his Discourse for the Council's conclusion on 7 December 1965.

Here I shall cite only John XXIII's well-known words, which unequivocally express this hermeneutic when he says that the Council
wishes "to transmit the doctrine, pure and integral, without any attenuation or distortion". And he continues: "Our duty is not only to guard this precious treasure, as if we were concerned only with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us...". It is necessary that "adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness..." be presented in "faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another...", retaining the same meaning and message (The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbott, S.J., p. 715).

It is clear that this commitment to expressing a specific truth in a new way demands new thinking on this truth and a new and vital relationship with it; it is also clear that new words can only develop if they come from an informed understanding of the truth expressed, and on the other hand, that a reflection on faith also requires that this faith be lived. In this regard, the program that Pope John XXIII proposed was extremely demanding, indeed, just as the synthesis of fidelity and dynamic is demanding.

However, wherever this interpretation guided the implementation of the Council, new life developed and new fruit ripened. Forty years after the Council, we can show that the positive is far greater and livelier than it appeared to be in the turbulent years around 1968. Today, we see that although the good seed developed slowly, it is nonetheless growing; and our deep gratitude for the work done by the Council is likewise growing.

In his Discourse closing the Council, Paul VI pointed out a further specific reason why a hermeneutic of discontinuity can seem convincing.

In the great dispute about man which marks the modern epoch, the Council had to focus in particular on the theme of anthropology. It had to question the relationship between the Church and her faith on the one hand, and man and the contemporary world on the other (cf. ibid.). The question becomes even clearer if, instead of the generic term "contemporary world", we opt for another that is more precise: the Council had to
determine in a new way the relationship between the Church and the modern era.

This relationship had a somewhat stormy beginning with the Galileo case. It was then totally interrupted when Kant described "religion within pure reason" and when, in the radical phase of the French Revolution, an image of the State and the human being that practically no longer wanted to allow the Church any room was disseminated.

In the 19th century under Pius IX, the clash between the Church's faith and a radical liberalism and the natural sciences, which also claimed to embrace with their knowledge the whole of reality to its limit, stubbornly proposing to make the "hypothesis of God" superfluous, had elicited from the Church a bitter and radical condemnation of this spirit of the modern age. Thus, it seemed that there was no longer any milieu open to a positive and fruitful understanding, and the rejection by those who felt they were the representatives of the modern era was also drastic.

In the meantime, however, the modern age had also experienced developments. People came to realize that the American Revolution was offering a model of a modern State that differed from the theoretical model with radical tendencies that had emerged during the second phase of the French Revolution.

The natural sciences were beginning to reflect more and more clearly their own limitations imposed by their own method, which, despite achieving great things, was nevertheless unable to grasp the global nature of reality.

So it was that both parties were gradually beginning to open up to each other. In the period between the two World Wars and especially after the Second World War, Catholic statesmen demonstrated that a modern secular State could exist that was not neutral regarding values but alive, drawing from the great ethical sources opened by Christianity.

Catholic social doctrine, as it gradually developed, became an important model between radical liberalism and the Marxist theory of the State. The natural sciences, which without reservation professed a method of their own to which God was barred access, realized ever more clearly that this method did not include the whole of reality. Hence, they once
again opened their doors to God, knowing that reality is greater than the naturalistic method and all that it can encompass.

It might be said that three circles of questions had formed which then, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, were expecting an answer. First of all, the relationship between faith and modern science had to be redefined. Furthermore, this did not only concern the natural sciences but also historical science for, in a certain school, the historical-critical method claimed to have the last word on the interpretation of the Bible and, demanding total exclusivity for its interpretation of Sacred Scripture, was opposed to important points in the interpretation elaborated by the faith of the Church.

Secondly, it was necessary to give a new definition to the relationship between the Church and the modern State that would make room impartially for citizens of various religions and ideologies, merely assuming responsibility for an orderly and tolerant coexistence among them and for the freedom to practice their own religion.

Thirdly, linked more generally to this was the problem of religious tolerance - a question that required a new definition of the relationship between the Christian faith and the world religions. In particular, before the recent crimes of the Nazi regime and, in general, with a retrospective look at a long and difficult history, it was necessary to evaluate and define in a new way the relationship between the Church and the faith of Israel.

These are all subjects of great importance - they were the great themes of the second part of the Council - on which it is impossible to reflect more broadly in this context. It is clear that in all these sectors, which all together form a single problem, some kind of discontinuity might emerge. Indeed, a discontinuity had been revealed but in which, after the various distinctions between concrete historical situations and their requirements had been made, the continuity of principles proved not to have been abandoned. It is easy to miss this fact at a first glance.

It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists. In this process of innovation in continuity we must learn to understand more practically than before that the Church’s decisions on contingent matters - for
example, certain practical forms of liberalism or a free interpretation of the Bible - should necessarily be contingent themselves, precisely because they refer to a specific reality that is changeable in itself. It was necessary to learn to recognize that in these decisions it is only the principles that express the permanent aspect, since they remain as an undercurrent, motivating decisions from within.

On the other hand, not so permanent are the practical forms that depend on the historical situation and are therefore subject to change. Basic decisions, therefore, continue to be well-grounded, whereas the way they are applied to new contexts can change. Thus, for example, if religious freedom were to be considered an expression of the human inability to discover the truth and thus become a canonization of relativism, then this social and historical necessity is raised inappropriately to the metaphysical level and thus stripped of its true meaning. Consequently, it cannot be accepted by those who believe that the human person is capable of knowing the truth about God and, on the basis of the inner dignity of the truth, is bound to this knowledge.

It is quite different, on the other hand, to perceive religious freedom as a need that derives from human coexistence, or indeed, as an intrinsic consequence of the truth that cannot be externally imposed but that the person must adopt only through the process of conviction.

The Second Vatican Council, recognizing and making its own an essential principle of the modern State with the Decree on Religious Freedom, has recovered the deepest patrimony of the Church. By so doing she can be conscious of being in full harmony with the teaching of Jesus himself (cf. Mt 22: 21), as well as with the Church of the martyrs of all time. The ancient Church naturally prayed for the emperors and political leaders out of duty (cf. I Tm 2: 2); but while she prayed for the emperors, she refused to worship them and thereby clearly rejected the religion of the State.

The martyrs of the early Church died for their faith in that God who was revealed in Jesus Christ, and for this very reason they also died for freedom of conscience and the freedom to profess one's own faith - a profession that no State can impose but which, instead, can only be claimed
with God's grace in freedom of conscience. A missionary Church known for proclaiming her message to all peoples must necessarily work for the freedom of the faith. She desires to transmit the gift of the truth that exists for one and all.

At the same time, she assures peoples and their Governments that she does not wish to destroy their identity and culture by doing so, but to give them, on the contrary, a response which, in their innermost depths, they are waiting for - a response with which the multiplicity of cultures is not lost but instead unity between men and women increases and thus also peace between peoples.

The Second Vatican Council, with its new definition of the relationship between the faith of the Church and certain essential elements of modern thought, has reviewed or even corrected certain historical decisions, but in this apparent discontinuity it has actually preserved and deepened her inmost nature and true identity.

The Church, both before and after the Council, was and is the same Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, journeying on through time; she continues "her pilgrimage amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God", proclaiming the death of the Lord until he comes (cf. Lumen Gentium, n. 8).

Those who expected that with this fundamental "yes" to the modern era all tensions would be dispelled and that the "openness towards the world" accordingly achieved would transform everything into pure harmony, had underestimated the inner tensions as well as the contradictions inherent in the modern epoch.

They had underestimated the perilous frailty of human nature which has been a threat to human progress in all the periods of history and in every historical constellation. These dangers, with the new possibilities and new power of man over matter and over himself, did not disappear but instead acquired new dimensions: a look at the history of the present day shows this clearly.

In our time too, the Church remains a "sign that will be opposed" (Lk 2: 34) - not without reason did Pope John Paul II, then still a Cardinal, give this title to the theme for the Spiritual Exercises he preached in 1976
to Pope Paul VI and the Roman Curia. The Council could not have intended to abolish the Gospel's opposition to human dangers and errors.

On the contrary, it was certainly the Council's intention to overcome erroneous or superfluous contradictions in order to present to our world the requirement of the Gospel in its full greatness and purity.

The steps the Council took towards the modern era which had rather vaguely been presented as "openness to the world", belong in short to the perennial problem of the relationship between faith and reason that is re-emerging in ever new forms. The situation that the Council had to face can certainly be compared to events of previous epochs.

In his First Letter, St Peter urged Christians always to be ready to give an answer (apologia) to anyone who asked them for the logos, the reason for their faith (cf. 3: 15).

This meant that biblical faith had to be discussed and come into contact with Greek culture and learn to recognize through interpretation the separating line but also the convergence and the affinity between them in the one reason, given by God.

When, in the 13th century through the Jewish and Arab philosophers, Aristotelian thought came into contact with Medieval Christianity formed in the Platonic tradition and faith and reason risked entering an irreconcilable contradiction, it was above all St Thomas Aquinas who mediated the new encounter between faith and Aristotelian philosophy, thereby setting faith in a positive relationship with the form of reason prevalent in his time. There is no doubt that the wearing dispute between modern reason and the Christian faith, which had begun negatively with the Galileo case, went through many phases, but with the Second Vatican Council the time came when broad new thinking was required.

Its content was certainly only roughly traced in the conciliar texts, but this determined its essential direction, so that the dialogue between reason and faith, particularly important today, found its bearings on the basis of the Second Vatican Council.

This dialogue must now be developed with great open-mindedness but also with that clear discernment that the world rightly expects of us in this
very moment. Thus, today we can look with gratitude at the Second Vatican Council: if we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church.

Lastly, should I perhaps recall once again that 19 April this year on which, to my great surprise, the College of Cardinals elected me as the Successor of Pope John Paul II, as a Successor of St Peter on the chair of the Bishop of Rome? Such an office was far beyond anything I could ever have imagined as my vocation. It was, therefore, only with a great act of trust in God that I was able to say in obedience my "yes" to this choice. Now as then, I also ask you all for your prayer, on whose power and support I rely.

At the same time, I would like to warmly thank all those who have welcomed me and still welcome me with great trust, goodness and understanding, accompanying me day after day with their prayers.

Christmas is now at hand. The Lord God did not counter the threats of history with external power, as we human beings would expect according to the prospects of our world. His weapon is goodness. He revealed himself as a child, born in a stable. This is precisely how he counters with his power, completely different from the destructive powers of violence. In this very way he saves us. In this very way he shows us what saves.

In these days of Christmas, let us go to meet him full of trust, like the shepherds, like the Wise Men of the East. Let us ask Mary to lead us to the Lord. Let us ask him himself to make his face shine upon us. Let us ask him also to defeat the violence in the world and to make us experience the power of his goodness. With these sentiments, I warmly impart to you all my Apostolic Blessing.

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Homily for the World Youth Day, Marienfeld Esplanade, Cologne (August 21, 2005)
Dear Young Friends,

Yesterday evening we came together in the presence of the Sacred Host, in which Jesus becomes for us the bread that sustains and feeds us (cf. Jn 6: 35), and there we began our inner journey of adoration. In the Eucharist, adoration must become union.

At the celebration of the Eucharist, we find ourselves in the "hour" of Jesus, to use the language of John's Gospel. Through the Eucharist this "hour" of Jesus becomes our own hour, his presence in our midst. Together with the disciples he celebrated the Passover of Israel, the memorial of God's liberating action that led Israel from slavery to freedom. Jesus follows the rites of Israel. He recites over the bread the prayer of praise and blessing.

But then something new happens. He thanks God not only for the great works of the past; he thanks him for his own exaltation, soon to be accomplished through the Cross and Resurrection, and he speaks to the disciples in words that sum up the whole of the Law and the Prophets: "This is my Body, given in sacrifice for you. This cup is the New Covenant in my Blood". He then distributes the bread and the cup, and instructs them to repeat his words and actions of that moment over and over again in his memory.

What is happening? How can Jesus distribute his Body and his Blood?

By making the bread into his Body and the wine into his Blood, he anticipates his death, he accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence - the Crucifixion - from within becomes an act of total self-giving love. This is the substantial transformation which was accomplished at the Last Supper and was destined to set in motion a series of transformations leading ultimately to the transformation of the world when God will be all in all (cf. I Cor 15: 28).

In their hearts, people always and everywhere have somehow expected a change, a transformation of the world. Here now is the central act of transformation that alone can truly renew the world: violence is transformed into love, and death into life.
Since this act transmutes death into love, death as such is already conquered from within, the Resurrection is already present in it. Death is, so to speak, mortally wounded, so that it can no longer have the last word.

To use an image well known to us today, this is like inducing nuclear fission in the very heart of being - the victory of love over hatred, the victory of love over death. Only this intimate explosion of good conquering evil can then trigger off the series of transformations that little by little will change the world.

All other changes remain superficial and cannot save. For this reason we speak of redemption: what had to happen at the most intimate level has indeed happened, and we can enter into its dynamic. Jesus can distribute his Body, because he truly gives himself.

This first fundamental transformation of violence into love, of death into life, brings other changes in its wake. Bread and wine become his Body and Blood.

But it must not stop there; on the contrary, the process of transformation must now gather momentum. The Body and Blood of Christ are given to us so that we ourselves will be transformed in our turn. We are to become the Body of Christ, his own Flesh and Blood. We all eat the one bread, and this means that we ourselves become one. In this way, adoration, as we said earlier, becomes union. God no longer simply stands before us as the One who is totally Other. He is within us, and we are in him. His dynamic enters into us and then seeks to spread outwards to others until it fills the world, so that his love can truly become the dominant measure of the world.

I like to illustrate this new step urged upon us by the Last Supper by drawing out the different nuances of the word "adoration" in Greek and in Latin. The Greek word is proskynesis. It refers to the gesture of submission, the recognition of God as our true measure, supplying the norm that we choose to follow. It means that freedom is not simply about enjoying life in total autonomy, but rather about living by the measure of truth and goodness, so that we ourselves can become true and good. This gesture is necessary even if initially our yearning for freedom makes us inclined to resist it.
We can only fully accept it when we take the second step that the Last Supper proposes to us. The Latin word for adoration is *ad-oratio* - mouth to mouth contact, a kiss, an embrace, and hence, ultimately love. Submission becomes union, because he to whom we submit is Love. In this way submission acquires a meaning, because it does not impose anything on us from the outside, but liberates us deep within.

Let us return once more to the Last Supper. The new element to emerge here was the deeper meaning given to Israel's ancient prayer of blessing, which from that point on became the word of transformation, enabling us to participate in the "hour" of Christ. Jesus did not instruct us to repeat the Passover meal, which in any event, given that it is an anniversary, is not repeatable at will. He instructed us to enter into his "hour".

We enter into it through the sacred power of the words of consecration - a transformation brought about through the prayer of praise which places us in continuity with Israel and the whole of salvation history, and at the same time ushers in the new, to which the older prayer at its deepest level was pointing.

The new prayer - which the Church calls the "Eucharistic Prayer" - brings the Eucharist into being. It is the word of power which transforms the gifts of the earth in an entirely new way into God's gift of himself, and it draws us into this process of transformation. That is why we call this action "Eucharist", which is a translation of the Hebrew word *beracha* - thanksgiving, praise, blessing, and a transformation worked by the Lord: the presence of his "hour". Jesus' hour is the hour in which love triumphs. In other words: it is God who has triumphed, because he is Love.

Jesus' hour seeks to become our own hour and will indeed become so if we allow ourselves, through the celebration of the Eucharist, to be drawn into that process of transformation that the Lord intends to bring about. The Eucharist must become the centre of our lives.

If the Church tells us that the Eucharist is an essential part of Sunday, this is no mere positivism or thirst for power. On Easter morning, first the women and then the disciples had the grace of seeing the Lord. From that moment on, they knew that the first day of the week, Sunday, would be his
day, the day of Christ the Lord. The day when creation began became the
day when creation was renewed. Creation and redemption belong together.
That is why Sunday is so important.

It is good that today, in many cultures, Sunday is a free day, and is
often combined with Saturday so as to constitute a "week-end" of free time.
Yet this free time is empty if God is not present.

Dear friends! Sometimes, our initial impression is that having to
include time for Mass on a Sunday is rather inconvenient. But if you make
the effort, you will realize that this is what gives a proper focus to your free
time.

Do not be deterred from taking part in Sunday Mass, and help others
to discover it too. This is because the Eucharist releases the joy that we
need so much, and we must learn to grasp it ever more deeply, we must
learn to love it. Let us pledge ourselves to do this—it is worth the effort!

Let us discover the intimate riches of the Church's liturgy and its true
greatness: it is not we who are celebrating for ourselves, but it is the living
God himself who is preparing a banquet for us. Through your love for the
Eucharist you will also rediscover the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in
which the merciful goodness of God always allows us to make a fresh start
in our lives.

Anyone who has discovered Christ must lead others to him. A great joy
cannot be kept to oneself. It has to be passed on.

In vast areas of the world today there is a strange forgetfulness of God.
It seems as if everything would be just the same even without him. But at
the same time there is a feeling of frustration, a sense of dissatisfaction with
everyone and everything.

People tend to exclaim: "This cannot be what life is about!". Indeed
not. And so, together with forgetfulness of God there is a kind of new
explosion of religion. I have no wish to discredit all the manifestations of
this phenomenon. There may be sincere joy in the discovery. But to tell the
truth, religion often becomes almost a consumer product. People choose
what they like, and some are even able to make a profit from it.
But religion sought on a "do-it-yourself" basis cannot ultimately help us. It may be comfortable, but at times of crisis we are left to ourselves.

Help people to discover the true star which points out the way to us: Jesus Christ! Let us seek to know him better and better, so as to be able to guide others to him with conviction.

This is why love for Sacred Scripture is so important, and in consequence, it is important to know the faith of the Church which opens up for us the meaning of Scripture. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church as her faith grows, causing her to enter ever more deeply into the truth (cf. Jn 16: 13). Beloved Pope John Paul II gave us a wonderful work in which the faith of centuries is explained synthetically: the Catechism of the Catholic Church. I myself recently presented the Compendium of the Catechism, also prepared at the request of the late Holy Father. These are two fundamental texts which I recommend to all of you.

Obviously books alone are not enough. Form communities based on faith! In recent decades, movements and communities have come to birth in which the power of the Gospel is keenly felt. Seek communion in faith, like fellow travellers who continue together to follow the path of the great pilgrimage that the Magi from the East first pointed out to us. The spontaneity of new communities is important, but it is also important to preserve communion with the Pope and with the Bishops. It is they who guarantee that we are not seeking private paths, but instead are living as God's great family, founded by the Lord through the Twelve Apostles.

Once again, I must return to the Eucharist. "Because there is one bread, we, though many, are one body", says St Paul (I Cor 10: 17). By this he meant: since we receive the same Lord and he gathers us together and draws us into himself, we ourselves are one.

This must be evident in our lives. It must be seen in our capacity to forgive. It must be seen in our sensitivity to the needs of others. It must be seen in our willingness to share. It must be seen in our commitment to our neighbors, both those close at hand and those physically far away, whom we nevertheless consider to be close.

Today, there are many forms of voluntary assistance, models of mutual service, of which our society has urgent need. We must not, for example,
abandon the elderly to their solitude, we must not pass by when we meet people who are suffering. If we think and live according to our communion with Christ, then our eyes will be opened. Then we will no longer be content to scrape a living just for ourselves, but we will see where and how we are needed.

Living and acting thus, we will soon realize that it is much better to be useful and at the disposal of others than to be concerned only with the comforts that are offered to us.

I know that you as young people have great aspirations, that you want to pledge yourselves to build a better world. Let others see this, let the world see it, since this is exactly the witness that the world expects from the disciples of Jesus Christ; in this way, and through your love above all, the world will be able to discover the star that we follow as believers.

Let us go forward with Christ and let us live our lives as true worshippers of God! Amen.
Sanctissimae toto corde maximas acturum gratias pro hoc ineffabili Sacerdotii dono omnibusque eius beneficiis. Quapropter libentes arripimus singularem hanc occasionem ut felix hoc aureum iubilaeum tibi gratulemur Nostramque ostendamus aestimationem et caritatem.

Adolescens ad Opus Dei aggrediendum praesentiens te vocari suavem Domini vocem prompte secutus es. Aequa expleta institutione, sacerdotali insignitus es ordinatione die VII mensis Augusti anno MCMLV. Lauream etiam consecutus es in Iure Civili atque in Iure Canonico. Varia explevisti officia pastoralia et academica, ac duodeviginti per annos munere functus es a secretis eiusdem Operis Conditoris sancti Iosemariae Escrivá de Balaguer, cuius providum Opus nunc eodem spiritu fideliter moderari pergis.


Praelaturam tuam moderans et considerans in ea gratiam Dei, exemplo, scriptis, verbis atque pastoralibus itineribus hortari non desinis sodales omnes proposito cordis permanere in Domino (Act 11, 23). Personalis sanctitatis desiderium fovens zelumque apostolicum tuorum sacerdotum et laicorum, non solum contemplari potes augescentem gregis tibi concreditii numerum, sed validum Ecclesiae praebere auxilium in urgenti hodiernae societatis evangelizatione. In provincia culturae et scientiarum intendis nuntium christianum ubique ferendum, cuius clarum signum est Pontificia Studiorum Universitas Sanctae Crucis recens constituta. Cordi sunt tibi defensio vitae, familiae et matrimonii, sicut et iuvenum institutio et cura pastoralis.
Accipe ergo, Venerabilis Frater, hoc Nostrae caritatis et liberalis benevolentiae documentum una cum Benedictione Apostolica, quam, caelestis gratiae auspiciem, intercedentibus Dei Genetrice Beatissima Virgine Maria et sancto Iosemaria Escrivá de Balaguer, tibi in primis peramanter impertimus, deinde Episcopis, sacerdotibus, viris et mulieribus ad hanc carissimam Praelaturam personalem Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei pertinentibus cunctisque aliis tam singulare iubilaeum tuum summo cum gaudio celebrantibus.

Ex Aedibus Vaticanis, die IX mensis Iulii, anno MMV, Pontificatus Nostri primo.

BENEDITO P.P. XVI

Esteemed Brother

Javier Echevarría Rodríguez

Titular Bishop of Cilibia

Prelate of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei

As the joyous commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the start of your priestly life and activity draws near, we have received word, Esteemed Brother, that you plan to celebrate it solemnly, in union with the members of the personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, raising heartfelt thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity for the ineffable gift of the priesthood and for all its blessings. With great joy, we take advantage of this singular occasion to add our congratulations on this happy jubilee and express our esteem and affection.

While still young, on hearing God’s gentle voice calling you, you promptly followed it, coming to form part of Opus Dei. After the necessary formation, you received priestly ordination on August 7, 1955. You have obtained a doctorate in civil law and in canon law. You have carried out various pastoral and academic ministries. For twenty years you were the Secretary of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Founder of Opus Dei, and now you faithfully govern his providential Work with the same spirit.
Casting a glance back on the long priestly path you have followed, you will undoubtedly recall so many labors and difficulties overcome with divine grace; but, above all, so many joyful occasions granted by God to you and to your personal Prelature. As Secretary General, in 1982, you were present at the raising of Opus Dei to the status of a personal Prelature, of which you were immediately named Vicar General. Twelve years later, after the holy death of our Esteemed Brother Álvaro del Portillo, you were elected Prelate of the personal Prelature; and, in the same year, you were named titular bishop of Cilibia. In 1995, here in Rome, on the solemnity of our Lord’s Epiphany, our beloved Predecessor John Paul II conferred on you episcopal ordination, as a clear sign of his benevolence and trust.

Governing your Prelature and contemplating in it the action of God’s grace, you never cease exhorting its members—with your example, with your writings, with your words and your pastoral trips—to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose (Acts 11:23). When you foster the eagerness for personal sanctity and the apostolic zeal of your priests and lay people, not only do you see the flock that has been entrusted to you grow, but you provide an effective help to the Church in her urgent evangelization of present-day society. In the terrain of culture and the sciences, you strive to spread the Christian message in all environments, as is clearly seen in the recently established Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. You bear in your heart the defense of life, the family and marriage, and the formation and pastoral care of young people.

Therefore, Esteemed Brother, receive this proof of our love and benevolence, along with the Apostolic Benediction that, imploring divine grace, through the intercession of the Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, we impart to you with all our heart, and also to the bishops, priests, and men and women who form part of the beloved personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, and to all who, filled with joy, celebrate such an important jubilee.

From the Vatican, the 9th day of July of the year 2005, the first of Our Pontificate.

Benedict PP XVI
Address at the vigil with the young people,
World Youth Day, Marienfeld Esplanade,
Cologne (August 20, 2005)

Dear young friends,

In our pilgrimage with the mysterious Magi from the East, we have arrived at the moment which St Matthew describes in his Gospel with these words: "Going into the house (over which the star had halted), they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (Mt 2: 11). Outwardly, their journey was now over. They had reached their goal. But at this point a new journey began for them, an inner pilgrimage which changed their whole lives. Their mental picture of the infant King they were expecting to find must have been very different.

They had stopped at Jerusalem specifically in order to ask the King who lived there for news of the promised King who had been born. They knew that the world was in disorder, and for that reason their hearts were troubled. They were sure that God existed and that he was a just and gentle God. And perhaps they also knew of the great prophecies of Israel foretelling a King who would be intimately united with God, a King who would restore order to the world, acting for God and in his Name. It was in order to seek this King that they had set off on their journey: deep within themselves they felt prompted to go in search of the true justice that can only come from God, and they wanted to serve this King, to fall prostrate at his feet and so play their part in the renewal of the world. They were among those "who hunger and thirst for justice" (Mt 5: 6). This hunger and thirst had spurred them on in their pilgrimage - they had become pilgrims in search of the justice that they expected from God, intending to devote themselves to its service.

Even if those who had stayed at home may have considered them Utopian dreamers, they were actually people with their feet on the ground, and they knew that in order to change the world it is necessary to have power. Hence, they were hardly likely to seek the promised child anywhere
but in the King’s palace. Yet now they were bowing down before the child of poor people, and they soon came to realize that Herod, the King they had consulted, intended to use his power to lay a trap for him, forcing the family to flee into exile.

The new King, to whom they now paid homage, was quite unlike what they were expecting. In this way they had to learn that God is not as we usually imagine him to be.

This was where their inner journey began. It started at the very moment when they knelt down before this child and recognized him as the promised King. But they still had to assimilate these joyful gestures internally.

They had to change their ideas about power, about God and about man, and in so doing, they also had to change themselves. Now they were able to see that God's power is not like that of the powerful of this world. God's ways are not as we imagine them or as we might wish them to be. God does not enter into competition with earthly powers in this world. He does not marshal his divisions alongside other divisions. God did not send 12 legions of angels to assist Jesus in the Garden of Olives (cf. Mt 26: 53). He contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of this world with the defenceless power of love, which succumbs to death on the Cross and dies ever anew throughout history; yet it is this same love which constitutes the new divine intervention that opposes injustice and ushers in the Kingdom of God. God is different - this is what they now come to realize. And it means that they themselves must now become different, they must learn God's ways.

They had come to place themselves at the service of this King, to model their own kingship on his. That was the meaning of their act of homage, their adoration. Included in this were their gifts - gold, frankincense and myrrh - gifts offered to a King held to be divine. Adoration has a content and it involves giving. Through this act of adoration, these men from the East wished to recognize the child as their King and to place their own power and potential at his disposal, and in this they were certainly on the right path.
By serving and following him, they wanted, together with him, to serve the cause of good and the cause of justice in the world. In this they were right. Now, though, they have to learn that this cannot be achieved simply through issuing commands from a throne on high. Now they have to learn to give themselves - no lesser gift would be sufficient for this King. Now they have to learn that their lives must be conformed to this divine way of exercising power, to God's own way of being. They must become men of truth, of justice, of goodness, of forgiveness, of mercy. They will no longer ask: how can this serve me? Instead, they will have to ask: How can I serve God's presence in the world? They must learn to lose their life and in this way to find it. Having left Jerusalem behind, they must not deviate from the path marked out by the true King, as they follow Jesus.

Dear friends, what does all this mean for us?

What we have just been saying about the nature of God being different, and about the way our lives must be shaped accordingly, sounds very fine, but remains rather vague and unfocused. That is why God has given us examples. The Magi from the East are just the first in a long procession of men and women who have constantly tried to gaze upon God's star in their lives, going in search of the God who has drawn close to us and shows us the way. It is the great multitude of the saints - both known and unknown - in whose lives the Lord has opened up the Gospel before us and turned over the pages; he has done this throughout history and he still does so today. In their lives, as if in a great picture-book, the riches of the Gospel are revealed. They are the shining path which God himself has traced throughout history and is still tracing today. My venerable Predecessor Pope John Paul II, who is with us at this moment, beatified and canonized a great many people from both the distant and the recent past. Through these individuals he wanted to show us how to be Christian: how to live life as it should be lived - according to God's way. The saints and the blesseds did not doggedly seek their own happiness, but simply wanted to give themselves, because the light of Christ had shone upon them.

They show us the way to attain happiness, they show us how to be truly human. Through all the ups and downs of history, they were the true
reformers who constantly rescued it from plunging into the valley of darkness; it was they who constantly shed upon it the light that was needed to make sense - even in the midst of suffering - of God's words spoken at the end of the work of creation: "It is very good". One need only think of such figures as St Benedict, St Francis of Assisi, St Teresa of Avila, St Ignatius of Loyola, St Charles Borromeo, the founders of 19-century religious orders who inspired and guided the social movement, or the saints of our own day - Maximilian Kolbe, Edith Stein, Mother Teresa, Padre Pio. In contemplating these figures we learn what it means "to adore" and what it means to live according to the measure of the Child of Bethlehem, by the measure of Jesus Christ and of God himself.

The saints, as we said, are the true reformers. Now I want to express this in an even more radical way: only from the saints, only from God does true revolution come, the definitive way to change the world. In the last century we experienced revolutions with a common programme - expecting nothing more from God, they assumed total responsibility for the cause of the world in order to change it. And this, as we saw, meant that a human and partial point of view was always taken as an absolute guiding principle. Absolutizing what is not absolute but relative is called totalitarianism. It does not liberate man, but takes away his dignity and enslaves him. It is not ideologies that save the world, but only a return to the living God, our Creator, the guarantor of our freedom, the guarantor of what is really good and true. True revolution consists in simply turning to God who is the measure of what is right and who at the same time is everlasting love. And what could ever save us apart from love?

Dear friends! Allow me to add just two brief thoughts.

There are many who speak of God; some even preach hatred and perpetrate violence in God's Name. So it is important to discover the true face of God. The Magi from the East found it when they knelt down before the Child of Bethlehem. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father", said Jesus to Philip (Jn 14: 9). In Jesus Christ, who allowed his heart to be pierced for us, the true face of God is seen. We will follow him together with the great multitude of those who went before us. Then we will be travelling along the right path.
This means that we are not constructing a private God, we are not constructing a private Jesus, but that we believe and worship the Jesus who is manifested to us by the Sacred Scriptures and who reveals himself to be alive in the great procession of the faithful called the Church, always alongside us and always before us.

There is much that could be criticized in the Church. We know this and the Lord himself told us so: it is a net with good fish and bad fish, a field with wheat and darnel. Pope John Paul II, as well as revealing the true face of the Church in the many saints that he canonized, also asked pardon for the wrong that was done in the course of history through the words and deeds of members of the Church. In this way he showed us our own true image and urged us to take our place, with all our faults and weaknesses, in the procession of the saints that began with the Magi from the East.

It is actually consoling to realize that there is darnel in the Church. In this way, despite all our defects, we can still hope to be counted among the disciples of Jesus, who came to call sinners.

The Church is like a human family, but at the same time it is also the great family of God, through which he establishes an overarching communion and unity that embraces every continent, culture and nation. So we are glad to belong to this great family that we see here; we are glad to have brothers and friends all over the world.

Here in Cologne we discover the joy of belonging to a family as vast as the world, including Heaven and earth, the past, the present, the future and every part of the earth. In this great band of pilgrims we walk side by side with Christ, we walk with the star that enlightens our history.

"Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him" (Mt 2: 11). Dear friends, this is not a distant story that took place long ago. It is with us now. Here in the Sacred Host he is present before us and in our midst. As at that time, so now he is mysteriously veiled in a sacred silence; as at that time, it is here that the true face of God is revealed. For us he became a grain of wheat that falls on the ground and dies and bears fruit until the end of the world (cf. Jn 12: 24).

He is present now as he was then in Bethlehem. He invites us to that
inner pilgrimage which is called adoration. Let us set off on this pilgrimage of the spirit and let us ask him to be our guide. Amen.

Meditation at the Opening of the First General Congregation of the Synod (October 2, 2005)

Dear Brothers,

This text of the Hour of Terce today involves five imperatives and one promise. Let us try to understand a little better what the Apostle intends to tell us with these words.

The first imperative is very frequently found in St Paul's Letters; indeed, it might well be called the "cantus firmus" of his thought: "gaudete". Yet in a life as tormented as his own, a life filled with persecutions, hunger and all kinds of suffering, a key phrase was always present: "be glad".

Here the question arises: is it possible to command happiness? Joy, we would like to say, comes or does not come, but cannot be imposed as a duty. And here it is helpful for us to think of the best-known text on joy in the Pauline Letters, that of "Gaudete Sunday" in the heart of the Advent Liturgy: "Gaudete, iterum dico gaudete quia Dominus prope est". Here we understand the reason why Paul, in all his sufferings, in all his trials, could only tell others to "rejoice"; he could say this because joy was present within him: "Gaudete, Dominus enim prope est".

If the loved one, the love, the greatest gift of my life, is close to me; if I can be convinced that the person who loves me is beside me even in troubling situations, in the depths of my heart dwells a joy that is greater than all suffering. The Apostle could say "be happy" because the Lord is close to each one of us. Thus, this imperative is actually an invitation to feel the presence of the Lord close to us. It is a means of awakening an awareness of the Lord's presence. The Apostle wants to make us perceive
this hidden but very real presence of the Lord close to each one of us. To each one of us the words of the Book of Revelation apply: I am knocking at your door; hear me, let me in.

Thus, it is also an invitation to be sensitive to this presence of the Lord who is knocking at my door. We must not be deaf to him, because the ears of our heart are so full of the din of the world that we cannot hear this silent presence that is knocking at our door. Let us at the same time consider whether we really are prepared to open the doors of our heart; or perhaps this heart is crammed with so many other things that there is no room in it for the Lord, and for the time being we have no time for him. Thus, insensitive, dead to his presence, distracted by other things, we fail to hear the essential: the Lord, knocking at the door; he is close to us, hence, true joy, which is more powerful than all the sorrows of the world or of our lives, is at hand. Consequently, in the context of this first imperative, let us pray: "Lord, make us sensitive to your presence, help us to hear you, not to be deaf to you, help us to keep our hearts free, open to you".

The second imperative "perfecti estote", as we read in the Latin text, seems to coincide with the words that sum up the Sermon on the Mount: "perfecti estote sicut Pater vester caelestis perfectus est". These words invite us to be what we are: images of God, beings created in relation to the Lord, "mirrors" where the Lord's light is reflected. Not to live Christianity according to the letter, not to understand Sacred Scripture according to the letter is often difficult, historically disputable; but we must go beyond the letter, our present reality, towards the Lord who speaks to us and hence, to union with God.

However, if we see the Greek text, we find another verb, "catartizeste", and this word means to restore or repair an instrument, to make it function properly again. The most frequent example for the Apostles was mending a fishing net that was no longer in proper condition, that had so many holes in it that it could no longer be used; they had to repair the net so it could once again be used for fishing, restored to its perfect state as a tool for this trade. Another example: music can no longer be played properly on a stringed instrument with a broken string.
So in this imperative our soul is like an apostolic net but one that is frequently of little use because our own intentions have made a tear in it; or it is like a musical instrument that unfortunately has several broken strings, so that God's music which should echo in the depths of our soul can no longer ring out. We must repair this instrument, be familiar with its broken parts, the destruction, the negligence, the omissions, and seek to make it perfect and complete so that it will serve the purpose for which the Lord created it.

So it is that this imperative can also be an invitation to the regular examination of conscience, to see how this instrument of mine is going, to what point it has been neglected or is no longer in working order, in the attempt to make it function properly again. It is also an invitation to have recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where God himself repairs the instrument and restores us to integrity, perfection and functionality, so that in this soul praise of God may once again ring out. Then comes "exortamini invicem". Fraternal correction is a work of mercy. None of us sees himself or his shortcomings clearly. It is therefore an act of love to complement one another, to help one another see each other better, and correct each other.

I think that one of the very functions of collegiality is to help one another, also in the sense of the previous imperative, to know the shortcomings that we ourselves do not want to see - "ab occultis meis munda me", the Psalm says - to help one another to open ourselves and to see these things. Of course, this great work of mercy, helping one another so that each of us can truly rediscover his own integrity and functionality as an instrument of God, demands great humility and love.

Only if it comes from a humble heart that does not rank itself above others, that does not consider itself better than others but only a humble instrument to offer reciprocal help; only if we feel this true and deep humility, if we feel that these words come from common love, from the collegial affection in which we want to serve God together, can we help one another in this regard with a great act of love. Here too the Greek text adds some nuances. The Greek word is "paracaleisthe"; it is the same root as the word "Paracletos, paraclesis", to comfort. It does not only mean to correct
but also to comfort, to share the other's sufferings, to help him in his difficulties. And this also seems to me a great act of true collegial affection.

In the many problematic situations that emerge today in our pastoral work, some people truly feel somewhat desperate, they do not see how to advance. At that moment, they need comfort, they need someone to be with them in their inner loneliness and do the work of the Holy Spirit, the Consoler: to give courage, to support us, assisted by the Holy Spirit himself who is the great Paraclete, the Comforter, our Advocate who helps us. Therefore, it is an invitation to make ourselves "ad invicem" the work of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

"Idem sapite": behind the Latin word we can detect the word "taste". Have the same taste for things, have the same fundamental outlook on reality, with all the differences that are not only legitimate but also necessary; but have "eundem saporem", the same sensibility. The Greek text says "froneite", "the same". In other words, have essentially the same way of thinking.

How can we essentially have a common way of thinking that helps us to guide the Holy Church together unless we share together in the faith, which has not been invented by any one of us but is the faith of the Church, the common foundation which supports us, and on which we stand and work? Thus, it is an invitation to integrate ourselves anew in this common thinking, in this faith that precedes us. "Ne respicias peccata nostra sed fidelem Ecclesiae tuae": what the Lord seeks within us is the faith of the Church and also the forgiveness of sins. We must have this common faith. We can and must live this faith, each in his or her own way but always knowing that this faith precedes us. And we must communicate our common faith to everyone else. This element is already leading us on to the last imperative that gives us profound peace with each other.

At this point we can also think of "toto froneite" in another text of the Letter to the Philippians, at the beginning of the great hymn about the Lord, in which the Apostle tells us: "Your attitude must be that of Christ" (Phil 2: 5), you must enter into the "fronesis", the "fronein", the thinking of Christ. We will then be able to share together in the Church's faith,
because with this faith we enter into the Lord's thoughts and sentiments, to think together with Christ.

This is the last exhortation in the Apostle's recommendation: think with Christ's thoughts. And we can do so by reading Sacred Scripture in which Christ's thoughts are the Word, they speak to us. In this sense we must practise "Lectio divina", we must grasp Christ's way of thinking in the Scriptures, we must learn to think with Christ, to think Christ's thoughts and thus feel Christ's sentiments, to be able to convey Christ's thinking to others. And thus, the last imperative: "pacem habete", "eirhneuete", is almost a summation of the four previous imperatives, being in union with God who is our peace, with Christ who said: "pacem dabo vobis". We are in inner peace, because being in Christ's thought unifies our being. The problems, the differences of our soul are united, they are united to the original, to the One we are images of with the thought of Christ. So it is that inner peace is born, and only if we are grounded in deep inner peace can we also be men and women of peace in the world and for others. Here the question arises: is this promise conditioned by the imperatives? That is, is this God of peace with us only if we can achieve the imperatives? What is the relationship between imperative and promise? I would say that it is bilateral; in other words, the promise precedes the imperatives and makes it possible to achieve them and to follow up this achievement. That is, before everything we ourselves do, the God of love and peace opened himself to us, he was with us. In Revelation, which began in the Old Testament, God came to meet us with his love and his peace.

And finally, in the Incarnation, he became God-with-us, Emmanuel. This God of peace became flesh with our flesh, blood with our blood. He is a man with us and embraces the whole human being. And in the Crucifixion and his descent to death he became totally one with us, he precedes us with his love, he embraces first of all our action. And this is our great consolation. God goes before us. He has already done all things. He has given us peace, forgiveness and love. He is with us. And only because he is with us, because we have received his grace in Baptism, in Confirmation the Holy Spirit, in the Sacrament of Orders we received his mission, can we ourselves now cooperate with his presence that goes before
us. All our action, of which the five imperatives speak, consists in cooperation and collaboration with the God of peace who is with us.

But on the other hand, it applies to the extent in which we truly enter into this presence which he has given us, into this gift already present in our being. His presence among us, his being with us, grows naturally. And let us pray to the Lord that he will teach us to collaborate with his grace which precedes us, so that he may truly be with us for ever. Amen!

Catechetical meeting and prayer with First Communion Children, St. Peter's Square (October 15, 2005)

1. Andrea

Dear Pope, what are your memories of your First Communion day?

I would first like to say thank you for this celebration of faith that you are offering to me, for your presence and for your joy. I greet you and thank you for the hug I have received from some of you, a hug that, of course, symbolically stand for you all.

As for the question, of course I remember my First Communion day very well. It was a lovely Sunday in March 1936, 69 years ago. It was a sunny day, the church looked very beautiful, there was music.... There were so many beautiful things that I remember. There were about 30 of us, boys and girls from my little village of no more than 500 inhabitants. But at the heart of my joyful and beautiful memories is this one - and your spokesperson said the same thing: I understood that Jesus had entered my heart, he had actually visited me.

And with Jesus, God himself was with me. And I realized that this is a gift of love that is truly worth more than all the other things that life can give. So on that day I was really filled with great joy, because Jesus came to me and I realized that a new stage in my life was beginning, I was 9 years old, and that it was henceforth important to stay faithful to that encounter,
to that communion. I promised the Lord as best I could: "I always want to stay with you", and I prayed to him, "but above all, stay with me". So I went on living my life like that; thanks be to God, the Lord has always taken me by the hand and guided me, even in difficult situations.

Thus, that day of my First Communion was the beginning of a journey made together. I hope that for all of you too, the First Communion you have received in this Year of the Eucharist will be the beginning of a lifelong friendship with Jesus, the beginning of a journey together, because in walking with Jesus we do well and life becomes good.

2. **Livia**

Holy Father, before the day of my First Communion I went to confession. I have also been to confession on other occasions. I wanted to ask you: do I have to go to confession every time I receive Communion, even when I have committed the same sins? Because I realize that they are always the same.

I will tell you two things. The first, of course, is that you do not always have to go to confession before you receive Communion unless you have committed such serious sins that they need to be confessed. Therefore, it is not necessary to make one's confession before every Eucharistic Communion. This is the first point. It is only necessary when you have committed a really serious sin, when you have deeply offended Jesus, so that your friendship is destroyed and you have to start again. Only in that case, when you are in a state of "mortal" sin, in other words, grave (sin), is it necessary to go to confession before Communion. This is my first point.

My second point: even if, as I said, it is not necessary to go to confession before each Communion, it is very helpful to confess with a certain regularity. It is true: our sins are always the same, but we clean our homes, our rooms, at least once a week, even if the dirt is always the same; in order to live in cleanliness, in order to start again. Otherwise, the dirt might not be seen but it builds up. Something similar can be said about the soul, for me myself: if I never go to confession, my soul is neglected and in the end I am always pleased with myself and no longer understand that I must always work hard to improve, that I must make progress. And this cleansing of the soul which Jesus gives us in the Sacrament of Confession
helps us to make our consciences more alert, more open, and hence, it also helps us to mature spiritually and as human persons. Therefore, two things: confession is only necessary in the case of a serious sin, but it is very helpful to confess regularly in order to foster the cleanliness and beauty of the soul and to mature day by day in life.

3. Andrea

In preparing me for my First Communion day, my catechist told me that Jesus is present in the Eucharist. But how? I can't see him!

No, we cannot see him, but there are many things that we do not see but they exist and are essential. For example: we do not see our reason, yet we have reason. We do not see our intelligence and we have it. In a word: we do not see our soul and yet it exists and we see its effects, because we can speak, think and make decisions, etc. Nor do we see an electric current, for example, yet we see that it exists; we see this microphone, that it is working, and we see lights. Therefore, we do not see the very deepest things, those that really sustain life and the world, but we can see and feel their effects. This is also true for electricity; we do not see the electric current but we see the light.

So it is with the Risen Lord: we do not see him with our eyes but we see that wherever Jesus is, people change, they improve. A greater capacity for peace, for reconciliation, etc., is created. Therefore, we do not see the Lord himself but we see the effects of the Lord: so we can understand that Jesus is present. And as I said, it is precisely the invisible things that are the most profound, the most important. So let us go to meet this invisible but powerful Lord who helps us to live well.

4. Giulia

Your Holiness, everyone tells us that it is important to go to Mass on Sunday. We would gladly go to it, but often our parents do not take us because on Sundays they sleep. The parents of a friend of mine work in a shop, and we often go to the country to visit our grandparents. Could you say something to them, to make them understand that it is important to go to Mass together on Sundays?
I would think so, of course, with great love and great respect for your parents, because they certainly have a lot to do. However, with a daughter's respect and love, you could say to them: "Dear Mommy, dear Daddy, it is so important for us all, even for you, to meet Jesus. This encounter enriches us. It is an important element in our lives. Let's find a little time together, we can find an opportunity. Perhaps there is also a possibility where Grandmom lives". In brief, I would say, with great love and respect for your parents, I would tell them: "Please understand that this is not only important for me, it is not only catechists who say it, it is important for us all. And it will be the light of Sunday for all our family".

5. Alessandro

What good does it do for our everyday life to go to Holy Mass and receive Communion?

It centers our life. We live amid so many things. And the people who do not go to church, do not know that it is precisely Jesus they lack. But they feel that something is missing in their lives. If God is absent from my life, if Jesus is absent from my life, a guide, an essential friend is missing, even an important joy for life, the strength to grow as a man, to overcome my vices and mature as a human being.

Therefore, we cannot immediately see the effects of being with Jesus and of going to Communion. But with the passing of the weeks and years, we feel more and more keenly the absence of God, the absence of Jesus. It is a fundamental and destructive incompleteness. I could easily speak of countries where atheism has prevailed for years: how souls are destroyed, but also the earth. In this way we can see that it is important, and I would say fundamental, to be nourished by Jesus in Communion. It is he who gives us enlightenment, offers us guidance for our lives, a guidance that we need.

6. Anna

Dear Pope, can you explain to us what Jesus meant when he said to the people who were following him: "I am the bread of life"?

First of all, perhaps we should explain clearly what bread is. Today, we have a refined cuisine, rich in very different foods, but in simpler situations
bread is the basic source of nourishment; and when Jesus called himself the bread of life, the bread is, shall we say, the initial, an abbreviation that stands for all nourishment. And as we need to nourish our bodies in order to live, so we also need to nourish our spirits, our souls and our wills. As human persons, we do not only have bodies but also souls; we are thinking beings with minds and wills. We must also nourish our spirits and our souls, so that they can develop and truly attain their fulfillment.

And therefore, if Jesus says: "I am the bread of life", it means that Jesus himself is the nourishment we need for our soul, for our inner self, because the soul also needs food. And technical things do not suffice, although they are so important. We really need God's friendship, which helps us to make the right decisions. We need to mature as human beings. In other words: Jesus nourishes us so that we can truly become mature people and our lives become good.

7. Adriano

Holy Father, they've told us that today we will have Eucharistic Adoration. What is it? How is it done? Can you explain it to us? Thank you.

We will see straightaway what adoration is and how it is done, because everything has been properly prepared for it: we will say prayers, we will sing, kneel, and in this way we will be in Jesus' presence.

But of course, your question requires a deeper answer: not only how you do adoration but what adoration is. I would say: adoration is recognizing that Jesus is my Lord, that Jesus shows me the way to take, and that I will live well only if I know the road that Jesus points out and follow the path he shows me.

Therefore, adoration means saying: "Jesus, I am yours. I will follow you in my life, I never want to lose this friendship, this communion with you". I could also say that adoration is essentially an embrace with Jesus in which I say to him: "I am yours, and I ask you, please stay with me always".

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
AT THE CONCLUSION OF MEETING
Dear boys and girls, brothers and sisters, at the end of this very beautiful Meeting I can find one word only: thank you.

Thank you for this feast of faith. Thank you for this meeting with each other and with Jesus. And thank you, it goes without saying, to all those who made this celebration possible: to the catechists, the priests, the Sisters; to you all. I repeat at the end the words of the beginning of every liturgy and I say to you: "Peace be with you"; that is, may the Lord be with you, may joy be with you, and thus, may life be good. Have a good Sunday, good night and goodbye all together with the Lord. Thank you very much!

Homily for the closing of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican Basilica, Rome (October 23, 2005)

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time, our Eucharistic celebration is enriched for various reasons that impel us to give thanks to God.

The Year of the Eucharist and the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, dedicated precisely to the mystery of the Eucharist in the life and mission of the Church, have concurrently come to an end. And in a short while, five Blessed will be canonized: Archbishop Jozef Bilczewski; Gaetano Catanoso, Zygmunt Gorazdowski and Alberto Hurtado Cruchaga, priests; and Felix of Nicosia, a Religious Capuchin Friar. Furthermore, today is "World Mission Sunday", a yearly appointment that reawakens missionary ardor in the Ecclesial Community.

With joy I greet all who are present; first, the Synod Fathers, and then, the pilgrims who have come from various nations, together with their Pastors, to celebrate the new Saints. Today's liturgy invites us to contemplate the Eucharist as the source of holiness and spiritual
nourishment for our mission in the world: this supreme "gift and mystery" manifests and communicates to us the fullness of God's love.

The Word of the Lord, just proclaimed in the Gospel, has reminded us that all of divine law is summed up in love. The dual commandment to love God and neighbor contains the two aspects of a single dynamism of the heart and of life. Jesus thus brings to completion the ancient revelation, not by adding an unheard-of commandment, but by realizing in himself and in his work of salvation the living synthesis of the two great commands of the Old Covenant: "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart..." and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (cf. Deut 6: 5; Lev 19:18).

In the Eucharist we contemplate the Sacrament of this living synthesis of the law: Christ offers to us, in himself, the complete fulfillment of love for God and love for our brothers and sisters. He communicates his love to us when we are nourished by his Body and Blood. In this way, St Paul's words to the Thessalonians in today's Second Reading are brought to completion in us: "You turned to God from idols, to serve him who is the living and true God" (I Thes 1: 9). This conversion is the beginning of the walk of holiness that the Christian is called to achieve in his own life.

The saint is the person who is so fascinated by the beauty of God and by his perfect truth as to be progressively transformed by it. Because of this beauty and truth, he is ready to renounce everything, even himself. Love of God is enough for him, experienced in humble and disinterested service to one's neighbor, especially towards those who cannot give back in return.

In this perspective, how providential it is today that the Church points out to all her members five new saints who, nourished by Christ, the Living Bread, were converted to love; this marked their entire life! In different situations and with different charisms, they loved the Lord with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves, so as to become "a model for all believers" (I Thes 1: 6-7).

St Jozef Bilczewski was a man of prayer. The Holy Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, meditation, the Rosary and other pious practices formed part of his daily life. A particularly long time was dedicated to Eucharistic adoration.
St. Zygmunt Gorazdowski also became famous for his devotion founded on the celebration and adoration of the Eucharist. Living Christ's offering urged him toward the sick, the poor and the needy.

The deep knowledge of theology, faith and Eucharistic devotion of Jozef Bilczewski made him an example for priests and a witness for all the faithful. In founding the Association of Priests, the Congregation of the Sisters of St Joseph and many other charitable institutions, Zygmunt Gorazdowski always allowed himself to be guided by the spirit of communion, fully revealed in the Eucharist.

"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart.... You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22: 37, 39). This was the program of life of St Alberto Hurtado, who wished to identify himself with the Lord and to love the poor with this same love. The formation received in the Society of Jesus, strengthened by prayer and adoration of the Eucharist, allowed him to be won over by Christ, being a true contemplative in action. In love and in the total gift of self to God's will, he found strength for the apostolate. He founded El Hogar de Cristo for the most needy and the homeless, offering them a family atmosphere full of human warmth. In his priestly ministry he was distinguished for his simplicity and availability towards others, being a living image of the Teacher, "meek and humble of heart". In his last days, amid the strong pains caused by illness, he still had the strength to repeat: "I am content, Lord", thus expressing the joy with which he always lived.

St. Gaetano Catanoso was a lover and apostle of the Holy Face of Jesus. "The Holy Face", he affirmed, "is my life. He is my strength". With joyful intuition he joined this devotion to Eucharistic piety. He would say: "If we wish to adore the real Face of Jesus..., we can find it in the divine Eucharist, where with the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Face of Our Lord is hidden under the white veil of the Host". Daily Mass and frequent adoration of the Sacrament of the Altar were the soul of his priesthood: with ardent and untiring pastoral charity he dedicated himself to preaching, catechesis, the ministry of confession, and to the poor, the sick and the care of priestly vocations. To the Congregation of the Daughters of St Veronica, Missionaries of the Holy Face, which he founded, he transmitted the spirit of charity, humility and sacrifice which enlivened his entire life.
St. Felix of Nicosia loved to repeat in all situations, joyful or sad: "So be it, for the love of God". In this way we can well understand how intense and concrete his experience was of the love of God, revealed to humankind in Christ. This humble Capuchin Friar, illustrious son of the land of Sicily, austere and penitent, faithful to the most genuine expressions of the Franciscan tradition, was gradually shaped and transformed by God's love, lived and carried out in love of neighbor. Bro. Felix helps us to discover the value of the little things that make our lives more precious, and teaches us to understand the meaning of family and of service to our brothers and sisters, showing us that true and lasting joy, for which every human heart yearns, is the fruit of love.

Dear and venerable Synod Fathers, for three weeks we have lived together an atmosphere of renewed Eucharistic fervor. Now I would like, with you and in the name of the entire Episcopacy, to extend a fraternal greeting to the Bishops of the Church in China.

With deep sorrow we felt the absence of their representatives. Nevertheless, I want to assure all of the Chinese Bishops that, in prayer, we are close to them and to their priests and faithful. The painful journey of the communities entrusted to their pastoral care is present in our heart: it does not remain fruitless, because it is a participation in the Paschal Mystery, to the glory of the Father.

The work of the Synod enabled us to deepen the important aspects of this mystery, given to the Church from the beginning. Contemplation of the Eucharist must urge all the members of the Church, priests in the first place, ministers of the Eucharist, to revive their commitment of faithfulness. The celibacy that priests have received as a precious gift and the sign of undivided love towards God and neighbor is founded upon the mystery of the Eucharist, celebrated and adored.

For lay persons too, Eucharistic spirituality must be the interior motor of every activity, and no dichotomy is acceptable between faith and life in their mission of spreading the spirit of Christianity in the world. With the closing of the Year of the Eucharist, how can we not give thanks to God for the many gifts granted to the Church during this time? And how can we not take up once again the invitation of our beloved Pope John Paul II to
"start afresh from Christ"? Like the disciples of Emmaus, whose hearts were kindled by the words of the Risen One and enlightened by his living presence recognized in the breaking of the bread, who hurriedly returned to Jerusalem and became messengers of Christ's Resurrection, we too must take up the path again, enlivened by the fervent desire to witness to the mystery of this love that gives hope to the world.

It is in this Eucharistic perspective that today’s World Mission Sunday is well situated, to which the venerated Servant of God John Paul II gave as the theme for reflection: Mission: bread broken for the life of the world. When the Ecclesial Community celebrates the Eucharist, especially on Sunday, the Day of the Lord, it better understands that Christ’s sacrifice is "for all" (Mt 26: 28), and that the Eucharist urges Christians to be "bread broken" for others, to commit themselves to a more just and fraternal world. Even today, faced with the crowds, Christ continues to exhort his disciples: "Give them something to eat yourselves" (Mt 14: 16), and in his Name, missionaries proclaim and witness to the Gospel, sometimes with the sacrifice of their lives.

Dear friends, we must all start afresh from the Eucharist. Mary, Woman of the Eucharist, will help us to "fall in love" with it, she will help us to "remain" in Christ’s love, to be deeply renewed by him. Docile to the Spirit's action and attentive to the needs of others, the Church will be evermore a beacon of light, of true joy and hope, fully achieving its mission as "sign and instrument... of unity among all men" (Lumen Gentium, n. 1).
Dear Students,

I am very pleased to visit the Rome campus of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart to officially inaugurate the Academic Year 2005-2006. My thoughts turn at this moment to the other branches of the Athenaeum: to the main one in Milan, near the beautiful Basilica of St Ambrose, and to the ones in Brescia, Piacenza-Cremona and Campobasso.

I would like the whole family of the "Catholic University" to feel united beneath God's gaze at this moment, at the beginning of the new stretch on its journey of commitment to science and training.

With us here in spirit are Fr Gemelli and all the other men and women who forged the history of the Athenaeum with their enlightened dedication. We also feel the Popes close to us, from Benedict XV to John Paul II, who always had special ties with this University. My Visit today, in fact, is in continuity with the Visit my venerable Predecessor made five years ago to this seat of learning and for the same occasion.

I address a cordial greeting to Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, President of the Toniolo Institute, and to the Rector Magnificent, Prof. Lorenzo Ornaghi, and I thank them both for their courteous words to me on behalf of all those present. I extend my greeting with respect to the other distinguished religious and civil figures who have gathered here, particularly Sen. Emilio Colombo, who has been a member of the Permanent Committee of the Toniolo Institute for 48 years and its President from 1986 to 2003. I offer him my deep gratitude for all he has done to serve the University.

While we are gathered here, distinguished and dear friends, we cannot but think of the moments filled with anxiety and emotion that we lived through during John Paul II's last stays as a patient at this Polyclinic. In those days, the thoughts of Catholics in every part of the world - and not only Catholics - were focused on the Gemelli Hospital. From his two hospital rooms, the Pope imparted an incomparable lesson to all on the Christian meaning of life and suffering, witnessing in the first person to the truth of the Christian message. I therefore desire to express once again my grateful appreciation, and that of countless people, for the solicitous
Today, the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart has about 40,000 students enrolled in its five branches and 14 Faculties. The thought: "what a responsibility!" springs spontaneously to mind. Thousands and thousands of young people pass through the halls of the "Catholic University". How do they leave it? What culture did they encounter, assimilate or work out?

This is the great challenge, which concerns in the first place the group that directs the Athenaeum, the teaching Staff, hence, the students themselves: to give life to an authentic Catholic University that excels in the quality of its research and teaching and, at the same time, its fidelity to the Gospel and the Church's Magisterium.

In this regard, it is providential that the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart is structurally linked to the Holy See through the Toniolo Institute for Advanced Studies, whose task it was and is to guarantee the attainment of the institutional goals of this Athenaeum for Italian Catholics. This original definition, always confirmed by my Predecessors, collegially guarantees that the University is firmly anchored to the Chair of Peter and to the patrimony of values bequeathed as a legacy by the Founders. To all members of this praiseworthy Institution, I offer my heartfelt thanks.

So, let us return to the question: what culture? I am delighted that the Rector, in his presentation, placed the emphasis on the original and ever up to date "mission" of the Catholic University, that is, to undertake scientific research and teaching activities in accordance with a consistent cultural and formative project, at the service of the young generations and the human and Christian development of society. In this regard, the patrimony of teaching that Pope John Paul II bequeathed to us, which culminated in his Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* of 1990, is of great value. He always showed that the "Catholic" identity is in no way reductive but rather exalts the University. Indeed, if the fundamental mission of every university is "a continuous quest for the truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, n. 30), a Catholic academic community is distinguished by
the Christian inspiration of individuals and of the University Community itself, in the light of the faith that illuminates thought, for the fidelity to the Christian message as it is presented by the Church and for the institutional commitment to the service of the People of God (cf. ibid., n. 13).

The Catholic University is therefore a vast laboratory where, in accordance with the different disciplines, ever new areas of research are developed in a stimulating confrontation between faith and reason that aims to recover the harmonious synthesis achieved by Thomas Aquinas and other great Christian thinkers, a synthesis that is unfortunately challenged by important currents of modern philosophy. The consequence of this contestation has been that, as a criterion of rationality, empirical proof by experimentation has become ever more exclusive. The fundamental human questions - how to live and how to die - thus appear to be excluded from the context of rationality and are left to the sphere of subjectivity.

Consequently, the issue that brought universities into being - the question of the true and the good - in the end disappears to be replaced by the question of feasibility. This then is the great challenge to Catholic Universities: to impart knowledge in the perspective of true rationality, different from that of today which largely prevails, in accordance with a reason open to the question of the truth and to the great values inscribed in being itself, hence, open to the transcendent, to God.

We now know that this is possible precisely in the light of the revelation of Christ, who united in himself God and man, eternity and time, spirit and matter. "In the beginning was the Word", the Logos, creative reason... and "the Word became flesh" (Jn 1: 1, 14). The divine Logos, eternal reason, is the origin of the universe and was united once and for all with humanity, the world and history, in Christ. In the light of this capital truth of faith and of reason at the same time, it was once again possible, in 2000, to combine faith and knowledge.

The daily work of a Catholic University, I should say, takes place on this basis. Is this not an exciting adventure? Yes, it is, because one discovers, moving within this horizon of meaning, the intrinsic unity that links the different branches of knowledge: theology, philosophy, medicine,
economics, every discipline, even the most specialized technologies, since everything is connected.

Choosing a Catholic University means choosing this approach which, despite the inevitable historical limitations, characterizes the European culture, for whose formation the Universities were, not for nothing, born historically "ex corde Ecclesiae" [from the heart of the Church] and have made a fundamental contribution.

Therefore, dear friends, with renewed passion for the truth and for human beings, cast your nets into the deep, into the open seas of knowledge, trusting in Christ's words, even when it happens that you experience the exhaustion and disappointment of having "caught" nothing. In the vast ocean of culture Christ always needs "fishers of men", that is, knowledgeable and well-qualified people who put their professional skills at the service of good, ultimately at the service of the Kingdom of God.

If research work in a university is carried out in a faith perspective, it is also part of this service to the Kingdom and to humankind! I am thinking of all the research work being carried out in the many Institutes of the Catholic University: it is destined to the glory of God and to the spiritual and material promotion of humanity. At this moment, I am thinking in particular of the Scientific Institute that your Athenaeum wished to offer to Pope John Paul II on 9 November 2000, on the occasion of his Visit here to solemnly inaugurate the academic year.

I should like to state that I also have very much at heart the "Paul VI International Scientific Institute for Research on Human Fertility and Infertility" for responsible procreation (cf. L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 22 November 2000, p. 7). Indeed, because of its institutional goals, it is presented as an eloquent example of that synthesis of truth and love which constitutes the vital centre of Catholic culture. The Institute, which came into being in response to the appeal launched by Pope Paul VI in the Encyclical Humanae Vitae, suggested giving a stable scientific basis both to the natural regulation of human fertility and to the commitment to overcome possible infertility using natural methods. As I make my own my venerable Predecessor's grateful appreciation for this scientific initiative, I
hope that it will be able to find the support it needs to carry out its important research activities.

Distinguished Professors and dear students, the Academic Year we are inaugurating today is the 85th in the history of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart. In fact, lessons began in Milan in December 1921, with 100 students enrolled in the two faculties of social sciences and philosophy. As I thank the Lord with you for the long and fruitful journey completed, I urge you to stay faithful to the spirit of the beginnings as well as to the Statutes on which this Institution is founded. You will thus be able to achieve a fruitful and harmonious synthesis between Catholic identity and full insertion into the Italian university system, in accordance with the project of Giuseppe Toniolo and Fr Agostino Gemelli. This is the hope that I address to all of you today: continue to build the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart day by day, with enthusiasm and with joy. I accompany you in this task with my prayers and with a special Apostolic Blessing.

Address at the Church of St. Pantaleon, Cologne (August 19, 2005)

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Seminarians,

I greet all of you with great affection and gratitude for your festive welcome and particularly for the fact that you have come to this gathering from so many countries the world over. Here we are truly a spectacular image of the Catholic Church in the world.

I thank especially the seminarian, the priest and the Bishop who have given us their own personal witness. I must say that I was moved to see these paths on which the Lord has guided these men in an unexpected way and not according to their own projects.

I cordially thank you and am very pleased to have this meeting. I had asked - and this has already been said - that the programme of these days in
Cologne should include a special meeting with young seminarians, so that the vocational dimension would truly emerge in all of its importance, since it plays an evermore important role in the World Youth Days. It seems to be that the rain too that is falling down from heaven is a blessing. You are seminarians, that is to say, young people devoting an intense period of your lives to seeking a personal relationship with Christ, an encounter with him, in preparation for your important mission in the Church. This is what a seminary is: more than a place, it is a significant time in the life of a follower of Jesus. I can imagine the echo that resounds in your hearts from the words of the theme of this 20th World Youth Day - "We have come to worship him" - and the entire moving narration of the searching and finding of the Wise Men. Each in his own way - we consider the three witnesses we have just heard - like them, they see a star, set out on their journey, they too must face what is unclear and are able to arrive at their destination under God's guidance. This evangelical passage of the Wise Men who search out and find Jesus has a special meaning precisely for you, dear seminarians, because you are on an authentic journey, engaged in discerning - and this is a true journey - and confirming your call to the priesthood. Let us pause and reflect on this theme.

Why did the Magi set off from afar to go to Bethlehem? The answer has to do with the mystery of the "star" which they saw "in the East" and which they recognized as the star of the "King of the Jews", that is to say, the sign of the birth of the Messiah (cf. Mt 2: 2). So their journey was inspired by a powerful hope, strengthened and guided by the star, which led them towards the King of the Jews, towards the kingship of God himself. This is the meaning behind our journey: to serve the kingship of God in the world. The Magi set out because of a deep desire which prompted them to leave everything and begin a journey. It was as though they had always been waiting for that star. It was as if the journey had always been a part of their destiny, and was finally about to begin.

Dear friends, this is the mystery of God's call, the mystery of vocation. It is part of the life of every Christian, but it is particularly evident in those whom Christ asks to leave everything in order to follow him more closely. The seminarian experiences the beauty of that call in a moment of grace which could be defined as "falling in love". His soul is filled with
amazement, which makes him ask in prayer: "Lord, why me?". But love knows no "why"; it is a free gift to which one responds with the gift of self.

The seminary years are devoted to formation and discernment. Formation, as you well know, has different strands which converge in the unity of the person: it includes human, spiritual and cultural dimensions. Its deepest goal is to bring the student to an intimate knowledge of the God who has revealed his face in Jesus Christ.

For this, in-depth study of Sacred Scripture is needed, and also of the faith and life of the Church in which the Scripture dwells as the Word of life. This must all be linked with the questions prompted by our reason and with the broader context of modern life.

Such study can at times seem arduous, but it is an indispensable part of our encounter with Christ and our vocation to proclaim him.

All this is aimed at shaping a steady and balanced personality, one capable of receiving validly and fulfilling responsibly the priestly mission. The role of formators is decisive: the quality of the presbyterate in a particular Church depends greatly on that of the seminary, and consequently on the quality of those responsible for formation.

Dear seminarians, for this very reason we pray today with genuine gratitude for your superiors, professors and educators, who are spiritually present at this meeting. Let us ask the Lord to help them carry out as well as possible the important task entrusted to them. The seminary years are a time of journeying, of exploration, but above all of discovering Christ. It is only when a young man has had a personal experience of Christ that he can truly understand the Lord's will and consequently his own vocation. The better you know Jesus the more his mystery attracts you. The more you discover him, the more you are moved to seek him. This is a movement of the Spirit which lasts throughout life, and which makes the seminary a time of immense promise, a true "springtime".

When the Magi came to Bethlehem, "going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him" (*Mt* 2: 11). Here at last was the long-awaited moment: their encounter with Jesus. "Going into the house": this house in some sense represents the Church. In order to find the Saviour, one has to enter the house, which is
the Church. During his time in the seminary, a particularly important process of maturation takes place in the consciousness of the young seminarian: he no longer sees the Church "from the outside", but rather, as it were, "from the inside", and he comes to sense that she is his "home", inasmuch as she is the home of Christ, where "Mary his mother" dwells.

It is Mary who shows him Jesus her Son; she introduces him and in a sense enables him to see and touch Jesus, and to take him into his arms. Mary teaches the seminarian to contemplate Jesus with the eyes of the heart and to make Jesus his very life. Each moment of seminary life can be an opportunity for loving experience of the presence of Our Lady, who introduces everyone to an encounter with Christ in the silence of meditation, prayer and fraternity. Mary helps us to meet the Lord above all in the celebration of the Eucharist, when, in the Word and in the consecrated Bread, he becomes our daily spiritual nourishment.

"They fell down and worshiped him... and offered him gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh" (Mt 2: 11-12). Here is the culmination of the whole journey: encounter becomes adoration; it blossoms into an act of faith and love which acknowledges in Jesus, born of Mary, the Son of God made man. How can we fail to see prefigured in this gesture of the Magi the faith of Simon Peter and of the other Apostles, the faith of Paul and of all the saints, particularly of the many saintly seminarians and priests who have graced the 2,000 years of the Church's history?

The secret of holiness is friendship with Christ and faithful obedience to his will. St Ambrose said: "Christ is everything for us"; and St Benedict warned against putting anything before the love of Christ. May Christ be everything for you. Dear seminarians, be the first to offer him what is most precious to you, as Pope John Paul II suggested in his Message for this World Youth Day: the gold of your freedom, the incense of your ardent prayer, the myrrh of your most profound affection (cf. n. 4).

The seminary years are a time of preparing for mission. The Magi "departed for their own country" and most certainly bore witness to their encounter with the King of the Jews.

You too, after your long, necessary programme of seminary formation, will be sent forth as ministers of Christ; indeed, each of you will return as
an alter Christus. On their homeward journey, the Magi surely had to deal with dangers, weariness, disorientation, doubts. The star was no longer there to guide them! The light was now within them. Their task was to guard and nourish it in the constant memory of Christ, of his Holy Face, of his ineffable Love.

Dear seminarians! One day, God willing, by the consecration of the Holy Spirit you too will begin your mission. Remember always the words of Jesus: "Abide in my love" (Jn 15: 9). If you abide close to Christ, with Christ and in Christ, you will bear much fruit, just as he promised. You have not chosen him - we have just heard this in the witnesses given -, he has chosen you (cf. Jn 15: 16). Here is the secret of your vocation and your mission!

It is kept in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who watches over each one of you with a mother's love. Have recourse to Mary, often and with confidence.

I assure you of my affection and my daily prayers. And I bless all of you from my heart.

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Homily for the opening of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Rome (October 2, 2005)

Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The reading from the Prophet Isaiah and today's Gospel set before our eyes one of the great images of Sacred Scripture: the image of the vine. In Sacred Scripture, bread represents all that human beings need for their daily life. Water makes the earth fertile: it is the fundamental gift that makes life possible. Wine, on the other hand, expresses the excellence of creation and gives us the feast in which we go beyond the limits of our daily routine: wine, the Psalm says, "gladdens the heart". So it is that wine and
with it the vine have also become images of the gift of love in which we can
taste the savour of the Divine. Thus, the reading from the Prophet that we
have just heard begins like a canticle of love: God created a vineyard for
himself - this is an image of the history of love for humanity, of his love for
Israel which he chose. This is therefore the first thought in today's
readings: God instilled in men and women, created in his image, the
capacity for love, hence also the capacity for loving him, their Creator.

With the Prophet Isaiah's canticle of love God wants to speak to the
hearts of his people - and to each one of us. "I have created you in my
image and likeness", he says to us. "I myself am love and you are my image
to the extent that the splendor of love shines out in you, to the extent that
you respond lovingly to me". God is waiting for us. He wants us to love
him: should not our hearts be moved by this appeal? At this very moment
when we are celebrating the Eucharist, in which we are opening the Synod
on the Eucharist, he comes to meet us, he comes to meet me.

Will he find a response? Or will what happened to the vine of which
God says in Isaiah: "He waited for it to produce grapes but it yielded wild
grapes", also happen to us? Is not our Christian life often far more like
vinegar than wine? Self-pity, conflict, indifference?

With this we have automatically come to the second fundamental
thought in today's readings. As we have heard, they speak first of all of the
goodness of God's creation and of the greatness of the choice by which he
seeks us out and loves us. But they then also speak of the story that was
successively lived out - of the "fall" of man. God had planted the very best
vines, yet they yielded wild grapes. Let us ask ourselves: what do wild
grapes consist of? The good grapes that God was hoping for, the Prophet
sings, would have been justice and righteousness. Wild grapes instead bring
violence, bloodshed and oppression that make people groan under the yoke
of injustice. In the Gospel, the image changes: the vine produces good
grapes, but the tenants keep them for themselves. They are not willing to
hand them over to the owner of the vineyard. They beat and kill his
messengers and kill his son. Their motive is simple: they themselves want
to become owners; they take possession of what does not belong to them.
In the foreground of the Old Testament is the accusation of the violation of social justice, of contempt for human beings by human beings. In the background, however, it appears that with contempt for the Torah, for the law given by God, it is God himself who is despised. All people want is to enjoy their own power. This aspect is fully highlighted in Jesus' Parable: the tenants do not want to have a master - and these tenants are also a mirror of ourselves.

We men and women, to whom creation is as it were entrusted for its management, have usurped it. We ourselves want to dominate it in the first person and by ourselves. We want unlimited possession of the world and of our own lives. God is in our way. Either he is reduced merely to a few devout words, or he is denied in everything and banned from public life so as to lose all meaning.

The tolerance that admits God as it were as a private opinion but refuses him the public domain, the reality of the world and of our lives, is not tolerance but hypocrisy. But nowhere that the human being makes himself the one lord of the world and owner of himself can justice exist. There, it is only the desire for power and private interests that can prevail. Of course, one can chase the Son out of the vineyard and kill him, in order selfishly to taste the fruits of the earth alone. However, in no time at all the vineyard then reverts to being an uncultivated piece of land, trampled by wild boar as the Responsorial Psalm tells us (cf. Ps 80[79]: 14).

Thus, we reach a third element of today's readings. In the Old and New Testaments, the Lord proclaims judgment on the unfaithful vineyard. The judgment that Isaiah foresaw is brought about in the great wars and exiles for which the Assyrians and Babylonians were responsible. The judgment announced by the Lord Jesus refers above all to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. Yet the threat of judgment also concerns us, the Church in Europe, Europe and the West in general. With this Gospel, the Lord is also crying out to our ears the words that in the Book of Revelation he addresses to the Church of Ephesus: "If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place" (2: 5). Light can also be taken away from us and we do well to let this warning ring out with its full seriousness in our hearts, while crying to the Lord: "Help us to repent! Give all of us the grace of true renewal! Do not allow your light in
our midst to blow out! Strengthen our faith, our hope and our love, so that we can bear good fruit!"

At this point, however, we ask ourselves: "But is there no promise, no word of comfort in today's readings and Gospel? Is the threat the last word?" No! There is a promise, and this is the last, the essential word. We hear it in the Alleluia verse from John's Gospel: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him will produce abundantly" (Jn 15: 5). With these words of the Lord, John illustrates for us the final, true outcome of the history of God's vineyard. God does not fail. In the end he wins, love wins.

A veiled allusion to this can already be found in the Parable of the Tenants presented by today's Gospel and in the concluding words. There too, the death of the Son is not the end of history, even if the rest of the story is not directly recounted. But Jesus expresses this death through a new image taken from the Psalm: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone..." (cf. Mt 21: 42; Ps 118[117]: 22).

From the Son's death springs life, a new building is raised, a new vineyard. He, who at Cana changed water into wine, has transformed his Blood into the wine of true love and thus transforms the wine into his Blood. In the Upper Room he anticipated his death and transformed it into the gift of himself in an act of radical love. His Blood is a gift, it is love, and consequently it is the true wine that the Creator was expecting. In this way, Christ himself became the vine, and this vine always bears good fruit: the presence of his love for us which is indestructible.

These parables thus lead at the end to the mystery of the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives us the bread of life and the wine of his love and invites us to the banquet of his eternal love. We celebrate the Eucharist in the awareness that its price was the death of the Son - the sacrifice of his life that remains present in it. Every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes, St Paul says (cf. I Cor 11: 26).

But we also know that from this death springs life, because Jesus transformed it into a sacrificial gesture, an act of love, thereby profoundly changing it: love has overcome death. In the Holy Eucharist, from the
Cross, he draws us all to himself (cf. Jn 12:32) and makes us branches of the Vine that is Christ himself. If we abide in him, we will also bear fruit, and then from us will no longer come the vinegar of self-sufficiency, of dissatisfaction with God and his creation, but the good wine of joy in God and of love for our neighbor.

Let us pray to the Lord to give us his grace, so that in the three weeks of the Synod which we are about to begin, not only will we say beautiful things about the Eucharist but above all, we will live from its power. Let us invoke this gift through Mary, dear Synod Fathers whom I greet with deep affection as well as the various Communities from which you come and which you represent here, so that, docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, we may help the world become in Christ and with Christ the fruitful vine of God.

Amen.
PRELATE

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Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Echevarría, spent August 16-21 in Cologne for the occasion of the 20th World Youth Day. Convoked by Pope John Paul II, the gathering was presided over by Pope Benedict XVI, who was making his first trip outside of Italy.

The presence in Cologne of nine hundred bishops from all over the world was a manifestation of the unity of the People of God with their supreme Shepherd. It also made clear that the evangelization of young people is a common effort of the whole Church. The Prelate of Opus Dei, like many other bishops, took part in the principal ceremonies of the Congress: the opening Mass at Müngersdorf Stadium, presided over by Cardinal Joachim Meisner; the reception of the Pope on Thursday, August 18, at the Cathedral; the meeting with seminarians from all over the world in the parish of St. Pantaleon; the Saturday nocturnal vigil of prayer at Marienfeld; and again at Marienfeld, the Mass on Sunday, August 21, with more than a million young people taking part.

The Prelate also directed two catechetical meetings, on Wednesday the 17th and on Thursday the 18th, each with some five hundred Spanish-speaking young people: one in Bergisch Gladbach and the other in Dusseldorf. Both sessions had as their central theme the meeting with Christ and vocation. Bishop Echevarría pointed to the primary goal of everyone’s life: “seeking God and loving him, first here on earth and afterwards in a perfect way in heaven.” He developed this idea with the example of the Magi, venerated in the Cathedral of Cologne, and with the motto of the Congress, “We have come to worship him.” He also spoke about the sacraments and, above all, about drawing close to Jesus in the Eucharist.

On Wednesday, when he returned from Bergish Gladbach, he had two other meetings in Cologne with young people from all over the world—some six thousand in total—in the EXPO XXI Hall. These were for young men and women who take part in the Prelature’s apostolic
activities. Among other things, the Prelate encouraged them to give the Holy Father a lot of support by their prayer, to give heed to his teachings and to make them known, to see our Lord in the Eucharist as their best friend, and to foster in their hearts an attitude of availability in order to be in a position to truly serve all men and women.

On Friday afternoon the Prelate took part, as we have already noted, in a meeting of the Holy Father with some 4,000 seminarians in the parish of St. Pantaleon in the center of Cologne. The parish is entrusted to priests of the Prelature of Opus Dei. Accompanied by the pastor, Peter von Steinitz, the Prelate had an opportunity to show the Pope the chapel of St. Josemaría, recently installed in a lateral nave. During the entire week before World Youth Day, this parish church was the spiritual center for the seminarians, where they could adore the Blessed Sacrament day and night, participate in Holy Mass and receive the Sacrament of Penance. To highlight the spiritual significance of this occasion, two relics of the Holy Curé of Ars were brought from France: his heart and the monstrance that he used in his parish.

From August 23 to 31, the Prelate of Opus Dei was in Poland. On August 27 he participated in the solemn installation of the new Archbishop of Krakow, Stanislaw Dziwisz, with whom he has been friends for many years. During his stay in the land of the Vistula, he also greeted the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Józef Kowalczyk, and the bishops of the cities where Centers of the Prelature are located.

He held catechetical get-togethers in public auditoriums in Szczecin, Krakow and Warsaw. In the last mentioned city, more than three thousand people came to the Kongresowa Hall on Sunday August 28 to hear his words. In addition to the general gatherings, he had other smaller ones for young people, for groups involved in promoting apostolic initiatives, and for priests.

In the various meetings, he spoke of the Holy Father John Paul II and his rich spiritual legacy with a great sense of gratitude, and encouraged those present to pray for and be deeply united with Pope Benedict XVI. He
reminded those present of central teachings of the magisterium of the Church on marriage and the family, telling parents that their children are, as St. Josemaría used to say, “their best business.” He encouraged everyone to study and spread widely the teachings of the recently published *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. He exhorted them to carry out an incisive apostolate in all environments, also in those that present more difficulties or are further from the faith. In short, he asked everyone to renew their zeal to extend the work of the Church in Poland and from Poland. He also said it gave him great joy to meet people from various Eastern European countries who, after getting to know the Prelature in Poland, have discovered their vocation to Opus Dei.

In Warsaw he visited two high schools created by parents who have benefitted from the spiritual formation of the Prelature. He blessed a tabernacle in the Zagłę boys’ school and an image of our Lady in Strumieniec, the girls’ school. He encouraged the promoters and the teaching personnel of both educational centers to continue in their efforts and to put into operation similar initiatives in other cities.

During these days he visited all the Centers of the Prelature in Poland and received many families. He also dedicated the oratory of the Dworek Conference Center, situated near Minsk Mazowiecki, a city about 25 miles east of Warsaw.

On September 6, the Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Helsinki. That same day he received some members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who work in St. Petersburg.

On the afternoon of the 7th he met with more than 150 people at the Hotel Linna Palace. In a family conversation that lasted almost an hour the Prelate emphasized the beauty of Catholic moral teaching and the importance of the work of Christian and human formation that parents carry out in their homes. On the morning of the 8th he visited the Bishop of Helsinki, Jozef Wróbel. In the afternoon he left for Tallinn, the capital of Estonia.
On September 9th, he talked with faithful of the Prelature, Cooperators and other persons who take part in Opus Dei’s apostolates in Estonia. In the afternoon he had a meeting in the Rocca al Mare school with almost 200 people. The meeting was simultaneously translated into Estonian, Russian and English. In this family gathering the Prelate spoke about topics related to the Christian faith that were of interest to those attending.

On the morning of September 10th in the Church of St. Olaf, Archbishop Peter Zurbriggen, Apostolic Nuncio for the Baltic States, who presided at the ceremony, together with Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz of Moscow and the Prelate of Opus Dei, conferred episcopal consecration on the new Apostolic Administrator of Estonia, Philippe Jourdan, a priest of the Opus Dei Prelature. He is the first resident Catholic bishop in this Baltic Republic since the Second World War. Also assisting at the ceremony were a large number of bishops from Latvia, Lithuania and the United States.

That same evening, Bishop Echevarría took part in the installation in the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul, which everyone present found quite moving. On September 11, the Prelate flew back to Helsinki, and from there he returned to Rome at 12 noon.

From November 11 to 13, Bishop Echevarría was in Murcia, Spain, for the First International University Eucharistic Congress. The event, organized by the Catholic University of St. Anthony, brought together many ecclesiastical leaders.

In his lecture entitled, “The Eucharist and Penance,” given on Friday the 11th at the university, the Prelate of Opus Dei focused on the specific redemptive efficacy of the Eucharist and of Penance, and of the bonds that unite these two sacraments.

After the academic ceremony he went to pray at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fuensanta, Patroness of Murcia.
On Saturday morning he had several meetings with faithful of the Prelature. In the afternoon he celebrated the Eucharist at the Cathedral of Murcia. About a thousand people attended. In his homily he stressed the importance of Eucharistic adoration as the center of one’s Christian life. Citing Pope Benedict XVI, he encouraged the faithful to go more deeply into the meaning of Sunday for a Christian. “We should rediscover with pride,” he said, “the privilege of participating in the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of the renewed world.” At the end of the ceremony he dedicated some affectionate words to the Apostolic Administrator of the diocese, Archbishop Manuel Ureña.

In addition to receiving various families, on Sunday the 13th he held a get-together with more than eight thousand people, faithful of the Prelature, cooperators and friends at the Monteagudo High School. He spoke, among other topics, about love for the Roman Pontiff, the parents’ response to the vocation of their children, and the importance of catechesis.

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Dublin on the afternoon of Friday, December 16. From the airport he went to the seat of the Regional Commission, where he had a get-together with his sons who lived there.

On the morning of the 17th, accompanied by Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Vicar General of the Prelature, and Msgr. Robert Bucciarelli, Vicar of Opus Dei in Ireland, he went to visit the Nuncio. On the return trip, they stopped for a few minutes at the Nullamore university residence to greet the faithful of the Prelature living there.

Later he celebrated Mass at the Church of St. Teresa on Mount Merrion, one of the biggest churches in Dublin, with a large number of families in attendance. In his homily, preached in English, he spoke about Jesus’ genealogy, showing how our Lord seeks out an encounter with each one of us. “Pope John Paul II,” he said, “liked to say that Jesus, in becoming man, seeks out an encounter with each of us. No one is refused this happiness. Jesus does not reject anyone. He has time for everyone: the strong and the weak, saints and sinners, Jews and gentiles. As St. Josemaría used to say, our life and our work, our family and friends, our joys and
sorrows, have been transformed by our meeting with Jesus.” At the end of the ceremony he had a chance to greet families and bless a number of babies.

He had lunch at Cleraun, a nearby student residence, and had a family get-together with the residents and attended the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and singing of the Salve. From there he went to O’Reilly Hall at University College Dublin, in the middle of the modern campus, where a catechetical get-together was to take place.

The auditorium was filled to capacity. The Prelate reminded everyone of their responsibility to foster their relationship with God: “This land has been especially blessed by God. Don’t turn your back on him. Don’t leave him alone. Count on him more. Go to his protection. Go to tell him your joys and sorrows, everything that happens to you.” He also spoke about personal apostolate: “May the joy of the Nativity, such a marvelous feast day, also be reflected in your question: who can I speak to this Christmas to bring them closer to Christ, to bring them to Bethlehem? Your friends, your relatives, the people you meet, have a right to receive help from you.”

A young girl presented him with a parchment making him an honorary member of the Glenbeag Club, which she attends. The gesture pleased the Prelate, who took advantage of it to speak about the importance of the apostolic work being carried out throughout the world, through the inspiration of St. Josemaría, by means of clubs and schools started by fathers and mothers of families.

On Sunday, Bishop Echevarría once again met with several groups of faithful of the Prelature. In the morning he also went to a hospital to visit a priest who had had an operation a few days earlier and was still convalescing.

On Monday he had meetings with the two regional organs of government of the Prelature, for the men and the women respectively. Early in the afternoon he returned by plane to Rome.
Eucharistic Adoration in the Prelatic Church

On October 24 a ceremony of Eucharistic adoration was held in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace. The ceremony, which closed the Year of the Eucharist decreed by Pope John Paul II, consisted in a vigil before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance. The exposition began with the praying of the Rosary and a brief homily, and ended with Benediction, during which the Prelate was present.

Audience with the Holy Father

On October 27, the Holy Father granted a personal audience to the Prelate of Opus Dei. The interview took place in the morning in the Vatican apartments. It was the first time that the Holy Father Benedict XVI and the Prelate met in an official way. The Prelate distributed a photograph of this meeting to the Centers of the Work throughout the world to foster a love for the Vicar of Christ in the faithful of Opus Dei.

Participation in World Youth Day

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, participated as a catechist bishop in the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne. Bishop Echevarría’s catechesis took place on Wednesday, August 18, in the parish of St. Nikolaus (Bensberg), and on Thursday, the 19th, in that of St. Margarita (Düsseldorf-Niederrhein).

About 500 pilgrims took part in these activities. They came from Venezuela, Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and Uruguay, as well as from the dioceses of Huesca and Barbastro in Aragon (northern Spain).
Barbastro is the native city of the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá.

Bishop Echevarría, in his catechesis, emphasized docility to the action of the Holy Spirit, the joy of participating in Christ’s life and following in his footsteps, in response to the divine call. He counseled the young people to strive to model their lives on Jesus, by examining their personal conduct once and again.

Celebration of 50th Anniversary as a Priest

The ancient Basilica of St. Mary Major was the scene on September 22 of the celebration of a Thanksgiving Mass for the 50th anniversary of the priestly ordination of the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría. Six priests of the Prelature concelebrated with him. Among those assisting were cardinals and other churchmen, headed by the Cardinal Secretary of State, Archbishop Angelo Sodano. More than two thousand people accompanied the Prelate.

Before beginning Holy Mass, a letter from Pope Benedict XVI was read. The Holy Father congratulated the Prelate on his priestly jubilee and recalled the most significant moments in his human and priestly career. The Prelate’s homily was centered on some words of Don Álvaro del Portillo, his predecessor as head of Opus Dei: “Thank you! Forgive me! Help me more!” Bishop Echevarría also recalled the emotions St. Josemaría experienced when he celebrated his priestly golden anniversary in March 1975.

When Mass was over, the Prelate went to pray before the image of Our Lady Salus Populi Romani. Afterwards, in the Basilica residence, Bishop Echevarría greeted the distinguished guests.
Rome -- September 22, 2005

*At the Mass celebrating the*

50th anniversary of his priestly ordination, the Basilica of St. Mary Major, Rome.

1. The celebration of my fiftieth anniversary as a priest invites me to address this brief prayer to Our Lord: "Thank you, forgive me, help me more." It gives me an incentive to take the path of conversion and thanksgiving, the highway to a fuller identification with Christ. This is how I must follow in the footsteps of my predecessor as Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, who loved to address Our Lord with that same exclamation, especially on anniversaries and other significant dates in his life. We, too, can start each day with the same or similar words.

Thank you, Lord! As the years pass, one can see God’s mercy more clearly, and at the same time—not with sterile pessimism, but with realism—one becomes more aware of personal limitations. This does not shake our serenity, for like the first Apostles, it leads Our Lord to tell each one of us, "Ego sum, nolite timere" (*Mt* 14:27)—Be not afraid, it is I.

Taking a glance at the fifty years that have passed since priestly ordination, I recall a phrase of St. Josemaría from the 1930s: “How little a life is to offer to God...!”[1] Assenting to the truth of those words, I add: How brief is all of earthly existence to adequately thank the Triune God for being so near and so loving! How poorly we find ourselves able to respond to God’s love as He deserves!

I would like to address the Lord with the same deep gratitude I have admired in so many holy persons, especially in St. Josemaría. I know very well that I am very far from those lofty models, and yet it is what I truly desire. Therefore, I dare to make my own some words I heard from the Founder of Opus Dei on the eve of his own fiftieth anniversary as a priest.
It was March 27, 1975, which that year fell on Holy Thursday. A small group of his sons were at his side, adoring the Blessed Sacrament. Spontaneously, St. Josemaría began his personal prayer aloud. Toward the end of his earthly life, his praying had become continuous, day and night, for the Lord had granted that grace to him—as He did some of the Fathers of the Church—of prayer uninterrupted even by sleep.

On that occasion, we heard him say, along with other expressions of his confident dialogue with Jesus, present in the Sacred Host, something that deeply moved those of us who were there: “*Gratias, tibi, Deus, gratias tibi!* Everyone’s life has to be a canticle of thanksgiving. How else was Opus Dei made? You, Lord, have made it with four ‘rejects’—the *stulta mundi, infirma mundi, et ea quae non sunt*’ (the foolish, the weak, the low and despised, even things that are not [1 Cor. 1:27-28]). All of St. Paul’s teaching has been fulfilled: You sought completely illogical means, apt for nothing, and have extended the result throughout the world. People are giving thanks in all of Europe, in parts of Asia and Africa, in all of America, and in Oceania. They are giving thanks everyplace.”[2]

If a saint has expressed himself that way, what would my thoughts have to be, seeing myself so far removed from him, both in human gifts and in supernatural qualities? Nevertheless, I know that when he conferred upon me the ministerial priesthood, the Lord called me to be his own (Jn 15:15); He conferred on me the capacity to renew among men his divine Sacrifice on Calvary and to dispense its fruits in the other sacraments. I know well that he has granted me the power to proclaim the Word, to represent him before men, to be intimately united to Him, who desires to get close to everyone by using me as His instrument. Besides that—“*gratiam pro gratia!*” (grace upon grace [Jn 1:16])—He has entrusted to me the pastoral care of Opus Dei, this small portion of his “*pusillus grex*” (little flock [Lk12:32]), which is the Church. Help me to ask the Lord to know how to accomplish this mission fruitfully; deepening the furrow opened by my predecessors in the task of directing what is now the Prelature.

In some way, the Lord has subjected Himself to the will of priests. He has wanted to depend on our words and our gestures to make present in the Holy Mass the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection. He is, as St. Augustine said, “*intimior intimo meo,*” more intimate to us than we are to
ourselves.\[3\] We would want to experience every moment that presence of his in our souls in such a way that all twenty-four hours of the day we know ourselves, and feel ourselves, to be instruments completely his—priests, only priests, priests of Jesus Christ.

2. When each of us looks at his own life, he can discover a flawless love, ever young and new, that the Holy Trinity has given us. God has looked upon all of us with divine interest, with that exquisite attention that is given to important people in the world. Certainly, for God our Father every man and women is a person of inestimable importance. “Empti enim estis pretio” (You have been bought at a great price [1 Cor 6:20, 7:23]), as St. Paul puts it: We have been redeemed at an infinite price—the blood of his Only-begotten Son, who became man for our sake.

Nevertheless, on our part—on mine, at least—we have to recognize that our response has not always been adequate: so much is missing, so many lacks of love, in little things and in great. Hence the imperative need to ask pardon. Help me, too, to supplicate Our Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, for not having dealt with circumstances as they demanded, for not having caught on more completely to how it is that God finds his delight in being with the children of men—“deliciae meae esse cum filiis hominum” (Prov 8:31)—and desires to find solace in me, in all of us with greater intimacy. So often have we received him and conversed with him so wretchedly!

Once again making the words of St. Josemaria my own, I too must confess—and with more reason—that “after fifty years I am like a babbling child. I am beginning and beginning again every day. And so it will be until the end of my days: always beginning over. The Lord knows this so well, for it keeps us from having any reason to be proud of ourselves or entertaining foolish vanities. We have to be concentrating on him, on his every word, our ears attentive, and with a ready will to follow the divine inspirations.”\[4\]

If you want to be especially united to my prayer today, I beg you to ask the Lord that those words of a holy priest might take deep root in my heart so that I make them my own with complete sincerity. For my part, I promise to pray for all and each one of you every day. I ask everyone's
pardon for my failures to correspond, to serve, and for possible offenses I may have done to you, for the times I may have behaved toward anyone without taking into account the stupendous reality that we are most beloved children of God and brothers of Jesus Christ.

I ask Our Lady, who was so faithful at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:25), to help all of us advance along the highway of charity, knowing how to lift up the Holy Cross in our bodies and souls, so that the profound aspiration Our Lord himself engraved with fire in the spirit of Opus Dei’s Founder on a precise date in 1931 might become a reality in everyone.

That day, August 7, while celebrating Mass, St. Josemaría heard deep within his soul words of St. John’s Gospel according to the Vulgate version then used in the Liturgy: “et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum” (When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself [Jn 12:32]). God made him understand by means of a very clear intellectual light the meaning of the mission entrusted to the men and women of Opus Dei within the Church. Years later, he alluded to that divine locution in a meditation: “The poor priest hadn’t realized that Opus Dei was to be crowned that way, in such a divine way. But he had understood that at the summit of all human activities there would need to be men and women with the Cross of Christ in their lives and in their work—high up, visible, atoning, redeeming; a symbol of peace and of joy; a symbol of the Redemption, of the unity of the human race, of the love God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Trinity, has had and continues to have for mankind.”[5]

3. The Apostle teaches that “no one can say ‘Lord Jesus,’ except through the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). If St. Paul speaks that way, how much more help from heaven will we need, who find ourselves so poor in God’s presence! Well aware of the help that reaches me continuously, I tell Our Lord God again, to say it one more time, “Thank you, forgive me, help me more!” For this reason, I have chosen the figure of the Crucifix as a memento of my fiftieth anniversary of ordination. Thus, the conviction—real, practical, concrete—is rooted more incisively in my life and in the lives of all that our strength, our virtues, our accomplishments, come from God’s goodness alone, supremely manifested by Christ nailed to the Cross for our sins.
If we are to bring forward the new evangelization so much desired by John Paul II, and now by Pope Benedict XVI, we have to be men and women of the Cross. This world of ours requires it urgently. Let us try to live this ourselves and announce it to others: “lux in Cruce, requies in Cruce, gaudium in Cruce” (Our light is in the Cross, our rest is in the Cross, our joy is in the Cross).

Other considerations of Opus Dei’s Founder stand out in my memory. Near the end of that burning colloquy he carried on with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, which I mentioned earlier, he reminded those of us who were following his words—and the faithful of the Prelature of all times—of something he had taught many times: “We always have to be in heaven and on earth—not in between heaven and earth, because we are in the world. But at the same time in the world and in Paradise! This will be a kind of formula to express how we have to live our lives so long as we are ‘in hoc saeculo’: in heaven and on the earth, immersed in God, but knowing that we are in the world, that we are of the earth, with the fragility proper to the earth—a clay pot that the Lord has wanted to make use of for his service.”[6]

Before concluding, I feel a duty to give thanks to St. Josemaría, who called me to the priesthood and from whom I learned everything, and to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, at whose side I spent many years. He was for me a teacher of faithfulness to God. I also thank the faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei—men and women, lay people and priests—and the bishops and priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, as well as the cooperators and the innumerable young people who take part in the apostolates of the Work. With their prayers and sacrifices they are sustaining me and accompanying me day after day. I thank my parents, brothers and sisters, to whom I owe, humanly speaking, a very considerable part of my Christian and priestly vocation. I thank the innumerable persons whom I have known over these fifty years, who have also helped me with their prayers, their example, and their words. To all I express my heartfelt gratitude along with my promise of constant and uninterrupted prayer.

I wish to extend a special greeting to my brother bishops and priests here present, and to the many who could not accompany me physically on this day but are spiritually united to us. In a particular way, I give thanks to
the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, for the fatherly letter he sent me for this anniversary, and for the ways he has shown his affection for Opus Dei and for me. All of this is a stimulus to increase my affective and effective union with his Holiness and his intentions.

I also wish to acknowledge the previous Roman Pontiffs whom I have known. In a particular way my thoughts turn to our most beloved Pope John Paul II of venerable and happy memory, a true father for millions of people, as indicated by the enormous impact his death had on the entire world. Besides naming me a bishop and conferring on me episcopal ordination, he showed his interest and affection for the Prelature of Opus Dei so often and in so many ways. Full of confidence, I invoke his intercession before God.

Mary, “Woman of the Eucharist,” is also the faithful Woman beneath the Cross. With her “fiat!” at the Annunciation and prolonged without interruption in the course of her life, she corresponded to the love of God by a complete self-giving. Now she takes care of us, her children, with maternal love. I address her in words of the “Stabat Mater” sequence, recently recited on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows:

“Sancta Mater, istud agas, Crucifixi fige plagas cordi meo valide” (Holy Mother, pierce me through, in my heart each wound renew of my Saviour crucified). As a fruit of that identification with her crucified Son, I beg Holy Mary to teach me—to teach us all—to love Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit ever more. “Fac ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum” (Make my heart burn with the love of Christ our Lord). Amen.


Murcia -- November 12, 2005

Homily of Bishop Echevarría in the Cathedral of Murcia

At the Mass celebrated in connection with the International University Eucharistic Congress organized by the UCAM (the Catholic University of Murcia) November 12, 2005.

1. My dear brothers and sisters:

I am very grateful to have this opportunity to be here with you. I would especially like to thank Jose Luis Mendoza, rector of the Catholic University of St. Anthony, and Msgr. Ureña, the Apostolic Administrator, for organizing this Eucharistic Congress in Murcia. I am convinced that it will do great good for the Church and for souls.

As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the Church reminds us with great insistence of the reality of our eternal destiny. God has promised us a happiness without end, which Jesus has won for us through his passion, death and resurrection. The Holy Eucharist is a pledge of that future blessedness, reserved in the Tabernacles of our churches. There, beneath the sacramental species, one finds truly present the same glorious Christ who ascended into heaven: the same whom one day we will have the joy of contemplating face to face, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, if we are faithful to our Christian vocation till the end of our earthly life. The words of the entrance antiphon are truly a consoling reality: “I have plans of peace and not of affliction; you will call upon me and I will hear you. I will gather you from the lands where you are dispersed.”

How good is our Father God. How pleased he is with each of his sons and daughters, who have been reborn in Baptism and fed with his grace in the other sacraments, especially Penance and the Eucharist. Let us turn to him then, filled with gratitude, with the words of the collect from today’s Mass: “Lord, our God, grant us to live ever joyful in your service, because in serving you, the Creator of all that is good, we find our true joy.”
This joy, which saturates the lives of Christians, filling us with peace and serenity, is compatible with the thought that, at the end of our earthly days, our Lord will ask us for an account of the use we have made of his gifts. St. Paul reminds the faithful at Thessalonica and all Christians that we need to remain vigilant: “For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thess 5:2). Perhaps some will be surprised when that moment comes, because their steps have not been guided by the light brought by Jesus, who is the light of the world (Jn 8:12). “But you are not in darkness, brethren,” St. Paul continues, “for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess 5:4-6). Let us set aside all fear, because our God is the Lord of peace, who looks with predilection on those who fight to be faithful Christians day after day.

2. We find the same teaching in the parable of the talents in today’s Gospel. Let us consider it carefully.

Jesus speaks to us of a man who, before undertaking a long trip, entrusts the administration of his estate to his servants. He expects each of them, during his absence, to strive to make his goods bear fruit. Some earn more, others less, according to their capacities and the amount they have received. But all of them act with a sense of responsibility: all, except one, whom the owner calls negligent and lazy, because instead of investing the capital he received he hides it in the earth, leaving it unproductive. And thus when the others receive the recompense merited by their efforts, he does not receive a reward, but is thrown out of the kingdom of heaven into the exterior darkness, a place of moaning and grinding of teeth, of eternal sadness and sterile lament, because the time for meriting is over.

The teaching contained in this passage is clear. It is not enough to have received Baptism, to be in the Church, and then allow the years to pass; rather, one needs to work hard every day, with sincere joy, in a struggle for sanctity, both for oneself and for all men and women. Where? In the midst of the affairs of the world. How? By conversing with Jesus in the Bread and in the Word, in the Eucharist and in prayer, and fulfilling conscientiously the duties of one’s state, with human and supernatural effort, striving to draw profit from the talents we have received. The Christian vocation does
not separate us from the noble battles that our fellow men and women are immersed in; rather it places us in the midst of those activities, strengthened by grace, with the great and marvelous mission of converting them into instruments of personal sanctity and apostolate.

This truth was proclaimed forcefully by the Second Vatican Council and by the ecclesiastical magisterium in the years following, directing itself especially to the lay faithful. It is a teaching founded on the living experience of the Church, witnessed by the lives of some great saints, among whom we must in all justice recall St. Josemaría Escrivá. Indeed, since 1928, the Founder of Opus Dei untiringly preached this truth, while showing in practice how to carry it out. Basing himself on Sacred Scripture, with a special help from our Lord, he reminded Christians of the universal call to sanctity and told them, following St. Paul: all things are yours, you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. As he himself said: We have here an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord. And to make it clear that in that movement everything is included, even what seems most commonplace, St. Paul also wrote: ‘in eating, in drinking, do everything as for God’s glory’ (cf 1 Cor 10:32. (Conversations, no. 115).

Deo omnis gloria! I like to repeat: let us do everything for the glory of God, not to satisfy any paltry personal ambitions. The eagerness to prepare oneself as well as possible for professional life; the desire to acquire a deep formation, which will facilitate access to posts of responsibility in society; all noble and legitimate ambitions have to be measured by the standard of love for God and generous service to others. This is expressed by the responsorial psalm when it refers to the just man, the man who fears God, as Scripture says, and in the praise of the diligent woman, which we heard in the first reading. This fear is not something that terrifies us; rather it is the filial desire to never sadden our Father God.

3. This program of Christian life, although arduous like anything of great value, can be achieved thanks to the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ remains close to us in the Holy Eucharist. He is the Bread of Life, who offers Himself to us as food to strengthen our soul on the path towards heaven. As in Capharnaum, when he first announced this great mystery, he reminds us that although as human creatures we have a right to be...
concerned about material bread, it is more important to be concerned about our spiritual sustenance. *Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you, for on him has God the Father set his seal* (*Jn* 6:27).

Unfortunately today, as in all epochs, a temptation lies in wait for us: seeing as incompatible the earthly goal of work and its transcendent motive; finding an opposition between the work that we carry out to supply our needs in this world and our eternal life. This is the great temptation that St. Josemaría forcefully denounced before thousands of people in a well-known homily given on the campus of the University of Navarre. *No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot have a split personality, if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things* (*Conversations*, no. 114).

Our Lord, when he lived on this earth in Palestine, worked with a human heart and hands, as we do. First in Nazareth, for many years; later, when traveling along the roads of that land, preaching the Kingdom of God, working miracles, forming the apostles and the disciples. Finally, on the Cross: his passion and death were the greatest “works” that he carried out, to win a new life for all men and women. These holy endeavors of our Lord have radically changed the perspective of human activities, restoring the transcendent dimension hidden by sin.

Isn’t the Eucharist the sacramental actualization of the sacrifice of Calvary? And is there anything more ordinary and simple than bread and wine? Nevertheless, they make up the material for the Most Blessed Sacrament. Thanks to the power of Christ’s words at Mass and the power of the Holy Spirit, these sources of nourishment, so much a part of this world of ours, are converted into the Body and Blood of the Incarnate Word. Beneath those appearances is truly hidden the King of kings and the Lord of lords. If we unite our tasks, even the most material ones, to the Eucharistic Sacrifice, they acquire value for all eternity.

Dear brothers and sisters. Many reflections can be made regarding the august Sacrament of the Eucharist, as you have heard during this
International Eucharistic Congress. But no matter how much we try, we will never exhaust its content, for it is a prodigy of love that absolutely transcends our grasp. We can well apply to the Sacrifice of the Altar, with even greater reason, what theologians say about our Lady: *de Eucharistia numquam satis*. We can never reach an end in our knowledge of the Holy Eucharist; we can never adore Jesus adequately or thank him sufficiently for this proof of his love.

I offer you one specific practical suggestion, which might be a good conclusion to these days of greater intimacy with Jesus: the effort to put care into participation in Sunday Mass. In the words of the Holy Father, I encourage you to “rediscover the joy of Christian Sundays. We must proudly rediscover the privilege of sharing in the Eucharist, which is the sacrament of the renewed world. Christ’s Resurrection happened on the first day of the week, which in the Scriptures is the day of the world’s creation. For this very reason Sunday was considered by the early Christian community as the day on which the new world began, the one on which, with Christ’s victory over death, the new creation began” (Homily at the Italian Eucharistic Congress, Bari, May 29, 2005). These are the new heavens and the new earth that we are awaiting in accord with his promise, and that we are now preparing for with our work in the midst of the world, closely united to Christ in the Eucharist.

Let us go to the Most Holy Virgin, “the Eucharistic woman,” as John Paul II called her in his last encyclical, so that she, in heaven, where she lives for all eternity alongside her Son, will present to him our acts of thanksgiving, our resolutions, the deepest affections of our heart. Amen.

**Rome -- November 20, 2005**

1. My dear brothers and sisters:

   It is always gives me great joy to be with you in this parish church of St. John the Baptist *al Collatio*. Today, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of its liturgical dedication, that joy is joined to deep gratitude.
Let us give thanks to our Lord, for allowing me to share these moments with you.

I recall quite clearly that Sunday forty years ago, November 21, 1965, when Pope Paul VI came to dedicate and inaugurate this church. At that time this neighborhood was still under construction; hardly any of the streets were paved, and there was mud everywhere. The Holy Father, who felt a special bond with this section of the city, was filled with joy by the warm reception you gave him.

After Mass in the parish church, the Pope went to the Safi School and the Centro Elis. St. Josemaría gave an address thanking the Holy Father for his visit and explaining the objectives of these centers of formation directed by Opus Dei. His words are still very timely. I would like to recall them now, giving thanks once more to our Lord because in these past decades they have become a reality.

After recalling the nucleus of the spirit of Opus Dei, sanctification of work, St. Josemaría presented some thoughts that are very appropriate for today’s solemnity. He said that in these centers young people learn that sanctified and sanctifying work is an essential part of the vocation of a responsible Christian, who is aware of his dignity and knows that he has a duty to sanctify himself and help extend the kingdom of God precisely in and through that work, which contributes to the building up of the earthly city.\(^1\)

Those of you who are less young (I don't say old, because there are no “old” people here—we are all young at heart) perhaps remember the Holy Father’s deep emotion, at the end of that unforgettable day, when saying good-bye to St. Josemaría Escrivá, who had accompanied him in the parish and the adjoining centers. He gave him an embrace and told him: “Qui tutto e Opus Dei!” Here everything is the work of God.

Indeed, the apostolic work then taking its first steps for the glory of God, was aimed at serving all souls in this neighborhood without any distinctions. This work seeks to help all the families here, offering many young people the possibility of receiving a professional formation in order to earn a living. Today, on coming here, when I looked at the buildings and saw the daily vitality of the neighborhood, and especially when I saw your faces, I felt the need to give thanks again to our Lord for the wonders
that he has done in these years—wonders that he will keep on working if we all try to correspond generously to divine grace.

2. Next Sunday is the beginning of Advent, a time of preparation for Christmas. Today we are celebrating the solemnity of Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, closing the liturgical year. What is the meaning of today’s feast? The Entrance Antiphon in the Mass sums it up very well: The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive strength and divinity, wisdom and power and honor: to him be glory and power forever. It is only fitting that Jesus be recognized by all creation as Lord of heaven and earth, because, being the Eternal Son of God, he did not disdain to take on our flesh, to become true man, in order to die on the cross and rescue us sinners.

In the Gospel we have contemplated the scene of the final judgment. Our Lord, full of glory and majesty, will render judgment at the end of time in accord with each person’s deeds, dividing, as the Gospel says, the sheep from the goats. His judgment will not be subject to the criterion of the worldly success, but according to the divine measure of charity. Come, O blessed of my Father, he will say to the chosen ones, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me. And to the question about when all of this happened, Jesus will answer: Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

My brothers and sisters: there is nothing truer than the words spoken by Christ, by the one who is the eternal Word of the Father, Truth Himself. Let us examine, therefore, our relationships with our neighbor, starting with our family, our friends, our colleague at work. Let us ask ourselves if these are marked by the generous service that Jesus taught us, or if perhaps they are marred by selfishness, by seeking our own benefit, or by indifference. And if we discover that everything in our life is not pure gold, that there is still much that isn’t clean, we should not become discouraged. It is always possible to rectify, and today we truly have a special grace to convert once again.

The kingdom of Christ will reach its full reality at the end of time. Nevertheless, it is already present among us, in the intimacy of our hearts,
if we act as Jesus wants. But if we are trying to have Christ as our king we must be consistent. We must start by giving him our heart. Not to do that, and still talk about the kingdom of Christ would be completely hollow. There would be no real Christian substance in our behavior. We would be making an outward show of a faith which simply did not exist. We would be misusing God’s name to human advantage. And St. Josemaría continues, Christ should reign first and foremost in our soul. But how would we reply if he asked us: “How do you go about letting me reign in you?” I would reply that I need lots of his grace. Only that way can my every heartbeat and breath, my least intense look, my most ordinary word, my most basic feeling be transformed into a hosanna to Christ my king.

Our thoughts, intentions and deeds, our work, our daily tiredness in seeking our family’s welfare, all can and should be offered to God at Mass, in union with Christ’s sacrifice. Only thus will they acquire true value and help us attain eternal life, which in the end is the only thing that truly matters.

Let us not forget, however, that to serve others, for Christ’s sake, we need to be very human. If our life is less than human, God will not build anything on it, for he normally does not build on disorder, selfishness or emptiness. We have to understand everyone; we must live peaceably with everyone; we must forgive everyone. We shall not call injustice justice; we shall not say that an offence against God is not an offence against God, or that evil is good. When confronted by evil we shall not reply with another evil, but rather with sound doctrine and good actions: drowning evil in an abundance of good. Thus Christ will reign in our soul and in the souls of those around us.

3. In the first reading we listened to the prophet Ezekiel, who puts the following words in the mouth of the Lord: For thus says the Lord God: “I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.... I will feed them... and I will make them lie down.... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice.

I mentioned at the beginning Pope Paul VI’s visit here in 1965. He was the good Shepherd who was coming to meet with part of his flock. John Paul II did the same in January 1984, when he was received by our
beloved Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, my predecessor as Prelate of Opus Dei. Go to them both with confidence in your spiritual and material needs, and remember also to pray for me a bit.

But I would like to emphasize something we should never forget. The fact that this parish belongs to the Diocese of Rome puts you in a very special position: your Pastor is the Pope, the successor to the Prince of the Apostles in the Roman See, and also the Vicar of Christ for the universal Church, his representative on earth. For this reason I think that you have a greater responsibility towards him, which should be shown by a more intense prayer and a more generous mortification for him and for his intentions. At the beginning of a new pontificate, more effort to help the Holy Father is expected from the people of Rome, not only in their hearts, but also with the warmth of their physical closeness.

We have also witnessed how Benedict XVI, from the first day of his pontificate, has fully identified himself with the task to which he has been called. It is he who is leading all Catholics in our Lord’s name, as the good Shepherd of his flock. And he is also the good Shepherd—with the help of his Vicar for the city of Rome, Cardinal Camillo Ruini—for the part of his flock that lives in the Eternal City. In his heart he harbors, as we saw in the homily of the Mass with which he began his Petrine ministry, the holy restlessness of Christ. “For him,” for the good Shepherd, the Pope said on that occasion, “it is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.”[9]

In our beloved city of Rome, too, one can find these “deserts,” and we all have to strive to ensure they diminish. Who among us does not know of people with spiritual or material needs? Let us echo the Holy Father and be concerned about our neighbor, each in our own circumstances. Then, when Jesus calls us to his presence, we will hear his gentle and lovable voice saying to us: *Come O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.*[10]
Let us ask our Lady to always accompany us along the paths marked out by her Son, and which she has traveled before us. Paths of love for God and love for neighbor, two realities that are one, shown in specific deeds of fraternal service. Amen.


[6] Ibid.


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Torreciudad -- September 4, 2005

My dear brothers and sisters.

My dear deacon sons.

1. There is no doubt that St. Paul was speaking to all Christians when he told us: caritas Christi urget nos. “Christ’s love urges us on.” How often I heard St. Josemaría Escrivá use this expression! His concern for souls, for their salvation, weighed on him, and he was ready to give his life for them. In this, as in everything, he was following the example of Jesus, who exclaimed: “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were
already kindled!” (Lk 12:49). In his heart he always savored the words of St. John: “Love one another!” (cf. 1 Jn 3:11).

The Holy Father Benedict XVI, from the first moments of his pontificate, has stressed the holy concern that all Christians must have in the face of a world ever more distant from God, at least in our European and Western civilization. It is enough to open one’s eyes to realize that many people—men and women, youth and adults—are separating themselves from our Lord or do not know him, perhaps because they haven’t had at their side Christians who showed them, by their consistent example and words, the lovable face of our Redeemer. This zeal for souls must be for us a true restlessness, always alive in our hearts. But it must be a holy restlessness, which doesn’t take away our peace, or degenerate into pessimistic commentaries or sterile laments. Rather it has to be shown in specific apostolic initiatives, renewed each day in our contact with Jesus in the Word and in the Bread, in the Eucharist and in prayer.

The “Year of the Eucharist” is coming to a close, having been convoked by the Servant of God, John Paul II. In the two months that still remain, we should make a determined effort to attend Mass with greater love, to frequently accompany Jesus in the Tabernacle, to receive Communion with greater fruitfulness. Without forgetting that one must make a good confession, with true repentance for faults and sins, with resolutions to struggle, as a necessary preparation for receiving Communion, if one has had the misfortune of committing a mortal sin. In any case, this constitutes the best disposition to receive the Holy Eucharist.

Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us that Communion “is truly an encounter between two persons, it is allowing our lives to be penetrated by the life of the One who is the Lord, of the One who is my Creator and Redeemer.”[1] The same can be said of our contact with him outside of Mass: “Christ is truly present among us in the Eucharist. His presence is not static. It is a dynamic presence that takes hold of us, to make us his own, to assimilate us to him. Christ draws us to himself, he makes us come out of ourselves to make us all one with him. In this way he also integrates us in the communities of our brothers and sisters, and communion with the Lord is always also communion with our brothers and sisters.”[2]
2. In the framework of the intimacy with Jesus that is forged in the Eucharist and in prayer, one understands in depth the words that the Master directs to us in the Gospel of today's Mass: “You are the light of the world...You are the salt of the earth.” And also: “A city set on a hill cannot be hid.” Our Lord seeks—he longs!—to enter into our hearts, and therefore he draws close to each of us. We will be light that illuminates mankind, salt that gives savor to social institutions, leaven in the mass of humanity, if our Christian life is firmly based on the frequent reception of the sacraments and on personal contact with our Lord, fleeing from anonymity. Then, as the Holy Father also says, “from this intimacy that is a most personal gift of the Lord, the strength of the Sacrament of the Eucharist goes above and beyond the walls of our Churches. In this Sacrament, the Lord is always journeying to meet the world.”[3]

The task that we priests are called upon to carry out, in virtue of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, can be summed up as helping the faithful grow in intimacy with God. Only for this reason, so that all men and women may strive for sanctity (cf. Mt 5:40), are we granted the capacity to preach the word of God with authority, to make present on the altar the Sacrifice of the Cross, to administer grace through the other sacraments, to guide the people entrusted to us. In this way, identified sacramentally with Christ the Eternal High Priest, the sacred ministers—first of all the bishops, and the priests as their collaborators—become teachers and guides for the People of God.

Thanks to their priestly ministry, they fulfill to the letter in the Church the words of the responsorial Psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.” And each of the faithful can say with certainty that he is under God’s direct care: “He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

3. If Jesus invites every Christian to draw close to him, how much more does he do so with the apostles and those who are going to succeed them in their ministry: “I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” My deacon sons: being chosen for the
priesthood by our Lord is a sign of his loving predilection for you. Let us all meditate on the marvelous reality that St. Josemaría emphasized: when a priest validly celebrates Holy Mass, with the intention of consecrating, our Lord never refuses to come down into his hands, even though they are unworthy. Could there be greater self-giving, greater emptying of himself? More than in Bethlehem and on Calvary. Why? Because Christ’s Heart is weighed down by his redemptive longing, because he does not want anyone to be able to say that they have not been called, because he goes out to meet those who do not seek him.

Although we are all unworthy (as we sincerely tell our Lord at Mass, *Domine, non sum dignus* …), Jesus makes himself present on the altar, forgives sins in confession and guides souls along the paths of eternal life, ordinarily through the priest. This obliges us in a special way to strive, within our limitations, to always walk closely united to Jesus. My sons, put great care into your norms of piety, always, but especially when you find yourselves fully immersed in ministerial tasks.

When time is short, because you have a lot of work, it is precisely then that you have to put a special effort into everything that refers to your personal spiritual life. *Cura teipsum!* (2 Tim 14:15), take care of yourself, I remind you in the words of St. Paul to Timothy. Always treat Jesus in the Eucharist with the greatest refinement. Be very devoted to the Blessed Virgin. Go to the intercession of St. Josemaría, our beloved Father, so that he help you to be priests to the measure of the Heart of Christ.

Before finishing, I congratulate with all my heart the families, relatives and friends of the new priests. We thank God for this manifestation of his Providence, which always accompanies his pilgrim people. At the same time, since the harvest is great but the laborers few (cf. Mt 9:37), we beseech the Lord of the harvest to send more workers for his harvest, to grant to many men throughout the whole world a priestly vocation, and that those called may correspond with total generosity. I ask you also to pray for priests, that we be worthy ministers of our Lord: men of prayer, lovers of sacrifice, burning with zeal for the salvation of souls.

Let us pray above all for Pope Benedict XVI, who with such great dedication and docility to God has accepted the burden of the supreme
Pontificate, so that our Lord will make him very holy and render effective his work in the service of the Church and all humanity. Pray also for the bishop of this diocese and for his seminary; for me, who am so in need of your prayers; and for all the bishops. Let us entrust our prayers to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, Queen and Mother of each of us and of the whole Church, who here in Torreciudad we also invoke trustingly as Queen of the Angels. Amen.

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Addresses

Rome -- December 13, 2005

At the opening of the academic year of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

As we begin a new year in the life of this University, we are especially thankful to our Lord for the year that has just ended. We find in our heart the need to exclaim, with the Apostles Peter and John: *We cannot help but speak of what we have seen and heard.*[1] Indeed, the year just ended has been rich in expressions of God’s love for us. We have known the sorrow and the joy of seeing the passing of our beloved John Paul II and the abundant graces that God has poured out upon the Church and the world. With great hope we have lived through the days of the Conclave and have been filled with gratitude at the gift of the new Pope, Benedict XVI.

On the day following his election, the Holy Father said: “John Paul II’s funeral was a truly extraordinary experience in which, in a certain way, we glimpsed the power of God who, through his Church, wants to make a great family of all the peoples by means of the unifying power of Truth and Love.”[2] Yes, we have experienced this unifying force, and we find in it the nucleus of our task as a university: to unify in truth and in love.

We live in an age that experiences in a special way the desire for unity
among peoples, at times as a reaction to the fact of deep divisions. The
evidence of war and the multiple attacks against human life, both on the
individual and social level, have brought about in men of good will a
profound aspiration towards peace and concord. Nevertheless, a Christian
is spurred to foster unity not only for negative reasons. Each of us feels
spurred on by the charity of Christ, of which the Church is the sign and
instrument. Our Lord, who prayed to the Father ut omnes unum sint, that
we all might be one, has also left us the source and definitive
manifestation of unity: the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist.

We know how deeply John Paul II was concerned for the unity of
Christians, and how strongly our Holy Father Benedict XVI shares this
concern. Their pontificates have been symbolically united by the year of the
Eucharist, concluded two months ago with the Assembly of the Synod of
Bishops. This connection is not just a coincidence, because, as John Paul II
wrote, “in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of the faithful,
who form one body in Christ, is both expressed and brought about.”
Throughout this year we have found in the Eucharist inspiration and
strength, and now it must continue guiding our efforts to “unite in truth
and in love.”

All Christians are responsible for this unity, but the university
institution has a specific mission in this regard. Traditionally its task has
been to foster the interchange of experiences and cultural openness. This
effort is assisted by bringing together people from different geographical
areas, and, above all, by the encouragement of a spirit of universality. The
“universitas studiorum” does not simply involve offering a wide range of
studies; it requires in first place seeking to imbue all the students’ endeavors
with a universal outlook. This openness is easier to attain when one’s place
of study is Rome, rightfully called caput mundi. To study in the Eternal
City means, as our beloved John Paul II put it, “to learn Rome,” that is,
to impregnate oneself with Catholicity, to cultivate a universal spirit rooted
in the faith.

A cultural openness is characteristic of the Catholic spirit and finds its
basis in faith and charity. One cannot be open towards other cultures if one
is not faithful to the truth, if one does not love the truth. In this respect,
Benedict XVI has warned us against the “dictatorship of relativism.”
because when a person does not want to recognize the truth, he necessarily falls into arbitrariness and, in the end, the path to violence opens up. Therefore, we too want to place at the center of our daily work the motto chosen by the Pope for his episcopal ordination: “co-workers of the Truth.”

If we want to unite all men with one another and bring them to God, we need to undertake a deep study of revealed truth and of human culture, while striving each day to be faithful to the truth. To unite in truth and in love requires that we be united to the Truth, who is Christ. It is friendship with Christ—as the Holy Father said shortly before his election—that “opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth.”[9]

Therefore, our effort to unify in truth and in love requires a strong unity in our personal life, founded on the Eucharist. St. Josemaría Escrivá, untiring preacher of unity of life, was convinced that heaven and earth are united in the human heart, when we strive for holiness in our ordinary life.[10] He often said that “the Mass is the center and source of Christian life,”[11] and that we should struggle to put this truth into practice in our own life, “so your whole day will turn into an act of worship—an extension of the Mass you have attended and a preparation for the next. Your whole day will then be an act of worship that overflows in aspirations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the offering up of your professional work and your family life.”[12]

When opening the sessions for the recent Synod of Bishops, Benedict XVI asked the participants to study how they could intensify the connection between the Holy Mass and the daily life of the faithful. This is a call that we should see as especially addressed to ourselves, as university men and women. The Eucharist should be the foundation of our work, in the common struggle to unify in truth and in love. Allow me to say, therefore, with the Holy Father: “We should all begin again from the Eucharist.”

May Mary, the woman of the Eucharist, help us in our effort, and lead us by the hand to Jesus. Let us ask this of her in a special way during Advent, so that we will reach Christmas better prepared. Let us approach the Holy Eucharist, therefore, with greater love, where our Lord is awaiting...
us more helpless and defenseless than in the stable at Bethlehem. The tabernacle must be the permanent “Bethlehem” in our churches, towards which our Lady draws us with the strength of her love.

With Mary’s maternal intercession and the help of St. Josemaría, I declare the Academic Year 2005—2006 inaugurated.


[9] Ibid.


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**Vatican City -- September 14, 2005**

*During the ceremony of blessing the statue of St. Josemaria at St. Peter's Basilica*
With a deep joy and our heart filled with gratitude to God, we have gathered to unveil the marble statue of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei, which from now on will be venerated by the faithful in this exterior niche of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Our thoughts go first to John Paul II, of unforgettable memory, who elevated this zealous priest to the glory of the altars on October 6, 2002, and who approved the placing of his image here. As is logical, we are also deeply grateful to our beloved Pope Benedict XVI, who in a few moments will proceed to the blessing of the statue.

My thoughts are also directed to Cardinal Francesco Marchisano, Archpriest of the Basilica of St. Peter, to the other ecclesiastical dignitaries present here, to the authorities and to so many people from all over the world who, out of a filial devotion to St. Josemaría, would have liked to take part in this ceremony. I think that it is in good measure due to their prayers that we have the opportunity today to celebrate these festive moments.

There comes mind the first night that St. Josemaría spent in Rome, back in 1946. From the small terrace of an apartment overlooking Piazza di Città Leonina, not far from here, the Founder of Opus Dei spent the whole night in a vigil of prayer, praying for the Church and for the Roman Pontiff. He was about to fulfill one of the great dreams in his life: to come to Rome vedere Petrum, to see Peter, to visit the Apostle’s tomb and to be close to his successor, il dolce Cristo in terra, the gentle Christ on earth, as he liked to call the Pope, making use of a happy expression of St. Catherine of Siena. Despite this desire of his, he let several days go by before crossing the threshold of the Basilica, in order to offer our Lord a small but costly sacrifice. Divine Providence has willed that, from this day on, his statue be continually “attached,” so to speak, to the great Basilica that symbolizes the catholicity and “Romanness” of the Church. Let us give thanks to God!

In a certain way, this image synthesizes fundamental features of the spirit of Opus Dei. As far back as the early thirties, St. Josemaría wrote that the mission in the Church of what is now the Prelature of Opus Dei could be summed up in three aspirations that he frequently repeated throughout his life. The first is: Deo omnis gloria! All the glory to God. This was his
rule of conduct when he lived on earth, and it is what he continues to do now in heaven, with the perfection proper to souls who enjoy the vision of God. The image that we see today is an eloquent sign of this.

The second aspiration is: Regnare Christum volumus! We want Jesus to reign. It is an echo of a text from John’s Gospel—inscribed in the open book held by one of the angels—that St. Josemaría heard in his soul, in a particularly clear way, on one occasion when he was celebrating Mass: Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnes traham ad meipsum. He understood then with unusual clarity, as he wrote several times, the precise meaning of the mission of the men and women of Opus Dei in the heart of the Church: to contribute to placing Christ at the summit of all human activities by sanctifying their professional work and the ordinary circumstances of their life.

I have already referred indirectly to the third aspiration, which in some sense sums up Opus Dei’s whole mission, when I recalled St. Josemaría’s first night spent in Rome. It expresses his very close union with the Church and the Pope, a union to which the Prelature of Opus Dei feels itself specifically called: Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam! All with Peter to Jesus through Mary. This aspiration contains in it the “three great loves” of a Catholic. By God’s grace, it continues to resound daily in the hearts and on the lips of millions of people.

Before closing, I would like to thank the sculptor, Romano Cosci, for having captured so well a typical expression of St. Josemaría, a saint who always sought the protection of our Lady. I refer to his hands opened in a gesture of welcome, attentive to our needs. I see his gesture as an invitation to go to him in all the moments of our earthly pilgrimage, with the most lively confidence of being heard. Thank you.
Holy Father, venerable brothers in the episcopate, my dear brothers and sisters:

*Instrumentum Laboris*, in no. 34, emphasizes the importance of the sense of the sacred in the celebration of the Eucharist. I would like to present here some points for reflection that it might be useful to study, in order to find specific ways of helping the faithful to grasp more clearly the sacred character of the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The liturgy nourishes the faith of the people of God. Therefore, any loss or diminishing of the sacred character of the celebration of the Eucharist could affect faith in Christ’s presence in the Blessed Sacrament; while, in contrast, a renewed stress on the sacredness of this great mystery would help strengthen the faith of the People of God and assist them in their efforts to lead a holy life. This is the spirit of the Second Vatican Council which, in striving to increase Christian life among the faithful and foster the union of all who believe in Christ, felt the need to take a special interest in the liturgy.[1]

*Instrumentum Laboris* rightly affirms that the application of the liturgical reform according to the spirit of the Council has helped further the participation of the faithful in the celebration of the Christian mystery. Nevertheless, it also points out that mistakes have occurred, due precisely to a weakening of the sense of the sacred character of the celebration of the Eucharist. Because of its sacramental nature, the Eucharist demands certain specific signs and words, and these, therefore, must not be neglected or abandoned without prejudice to God’s plan for the sacrament.

As no. 42 in the General Dispositions for the Roman Missal emphasizes, one must take care to ensure that the established norms provide for the common spiritual good of the People of God, rather than for the personal tastes or preferences of the celebrant.

*Instrumentum Laboris* contains a list of abuses, and I think the need exists to try to eliminate them, through the application of the directives provided in the Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*. These abuses, which are mentioned in the document, should serve as a point of departure for our reflection. But it would also be opportune to examine certain norms
whose application, without being an abuse in itself, presents aspects that are clearly negative and that in fact favor abuses.

For example, some aspects involving Masses with a great number of concelebrants merit being considered more deeply, both to defend faith in the Eucharistic mystery, as well as to foster the sacred attitude, both interior and exterior, of the concelebrants. And this is not only a matter of the obvious difficulties of a practical nature. Because of the great number of priests, it can happen that many find themselves outside the sanctuary and, at times, are so far removed from the altar that they cannot even see it. In these cases the altar-priest relationship is very weak; the words *hoc/hic* of the consecration lose their significance, since they are not applicable to such distant realities. The difficulty of saying the words of the consecration simultaneously generates more than a few doubts of a symbolic/sacramental order. In addition, the presence of many concelebrants outside the sanctuary can cause in the faithful a certain confusion regarding the difference between the ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood.

Thinking also of celebrations where a large crowd of faithful is present, I ask myself—inspired by an idea expressed by the then Cardinal Ratzinger in his book *Guardare al Crocifisso*—if it might not be opportune to avoid general distribution of Communion when this cannot be done in a dignified manner.[2]

To confront these problems, and others that cannot be dealt with now in this brief presentation, perhaps it would be necessary to study the suitability of new norms, because experience shows that it is not enough to recall the present norms: that is to say, some of these ought to be revised.

A recovery of the sense of the sacred in Eucharistic celebrations, stemming from a true love for Christ and a sincere devotion, would foster in the whole Church an increase in Christian practice, in priestly vocations, and in missionary zeal, and also help strengthen the spiritual life of the People of God, both clergy and laity. If we restore the respect, devotion and love that we should always have towards the Mystery of the Eucharist, it would become a source of life and attraction for many souls who have distanced themselves from the faith, and also for non-Catholics and non-Christians.
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At the Eucharistic Congress held
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The Eucharist and Penance:
Theological and Pastoral Reflections

To begin my talk I would like to cite some words of St. Josemaría Escrivá, a holy priest who passionately loved the two sacraments that I will focus on. He was speaking at a time of the year quite close to the one in which we now find ourselves, because it was a time close to Christmas.

“Christmas season, first days of 1939. To be reborn and continue forward, to begin and carry on. In material things inertia means not changing: not moving what is at rest, not halting what is moving. But in spiritual matters, to carry on and continue forward is never inertia. We return to the same, always the same: God with us, the Christ Child. And, guided by the Angels, we go to adore the God Child, whom our Lady and St. Joseph present to us. Through all the ages, from every corner of the earth, weighed down and yet spurred on by the work of all human activities, magi will continue arriving at the Bethlehem ever present in the tabernacle. Put care into your work; prepare your offering—your work, your duty—for the Epiphany of each day.”[1]

This is my aim: to nourish our eagerness to draw close to “the Bethlehem ever present in the tabernacle,” in order to grow in our knowledge of the august sacrament of the Eucharist, protected by the love that Mary and Joseph had for Jesus. We will do so with an eagerness to speak to Emmanuel, God with us, and with the desire to receive him with our body and soul adorned with the greatest possible cleanliness, assisted by
the marvelous sacrament of forgiveness, which fills one with a foretaste of the happiness of heaven.

“The Church of the new Advent, the Church that is continually preparing for the new coming of the Lord, must be the Church of the Eucharist and of Penance. Only when viewed in this spiritual aspect of her life and activity is she seen to be the Church of the divine mission, the Church in statu missionis, as the Second Vatican Council has shown her to be.”[2] With these words, our beloved John Paul II, in his first encyclical Redemptor Hominis, stressed the central role of the Eucharist and Penance in the life of the Church on its pilgrimage through history. On earth the Church draws its life from the Eucharist. It grows and is strengthened thanks to the Eucharist; it is constantly called to conversion, purified and united more closely to Christ through the Eucharist and Penance. Thus the Body of Christ is truly built up and prepared for its definitive encounter with him.

In the recent Synod of Bishops dedicated to the Eucharist, the source and summit of the Christian life, there was ample reflection on the importance of these two sacraments in the Church’s life. It called attention to the fact that not a few faithful lack a deep knowledge of the treasures of grace that divine mercy grants us through the Eucharist and Penance, while also being deficient in their knowledge of the conditions for worthy reception of Holy Communion. Improved formation and effective pastoral action are therefore especially necessary, in order to strongly recover, as one reads in the seventh proposition of the Synod, “the pedagogy of conversion that is born of the Eucharist and that therefore frequent individual confession should be fostered.”[3]

Here I will speak of the specific redemptive efficacy of the celebration of the Eucharist and of the sacrament of Penance, with particular reference to the links uniting these two sacraments. In the first part, I will consider the Eucharist, the fount of reconciliation of mankind with God in Christ. In the second, I will discuss the relationship between the Eucharist and Penance, in our coming to share in the redemptive grace of the Cross. Finally, I will deal with the need for the sacrament of Penance in order to receive Holy Communion fruitfully.
The Eucharist, fount of reconciliaiton of mankind with God

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven,” said Jesus in Capharnaum, announcing the sacrament of the Eucharist that he would institute in the Cenacle at Jerusalem. And he added: “if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (Jn 6:51).

Jesus declares himself before men as sent by the Father to free us from the power of sin, to reconcile us with God (cf. Col 1:13-20) and to make us sharers in his own divine life. He wants to transform us into himself and enable us to participate in the communion of life and love in the Most Blessed Trinity (cf. Jn 17:22). He carries this out through the paschal mystery of his death and resurrection, anticipated sacramentally at the Last Supper. Since then, in Holy Mass, Jesus continues to carry out that mission: he brings love, forgiveness and God’s peace to the world. He grants these gifts to those who believe in him, to those who accept with faith the grace that he offers them, inspiring in their souls new dispositions which make them capable of growing in union and friendship with God.

Our Lord does so through the ministry of the Church, the organically structured priestly people. Throughout the centuries, the Church proclaims, as Christ himself did and with his authority, the Gospel of conversion and penance. It leads mankind, through words and example, towards Christ the Redeemer. It prepares them for a personal, intimate encounter with him, through its preaching and the celebration of the sacraments.

Christ carried out the redemption once and for all by his life, death and glorification. But he wants us men and women, created in his image and likeness, to collaborate personally and actively in the specific application of the work of salvation. He counts upon human freedom, according to the well-known affirmation of St. Augustine of Hippo: “He who made you without you, will not justify you without you.”[4] This transformation is carried out through faith and the sacraments, particularly in the Eucharist. Every time that Holy Mass is celebrated, the Sacrifice of the Cross, which has gained the grace of salvation for all mankind, is made present. Therefore the Holy Eucharist is found at the center and root of the divine
economy of pardon and reconciliation, precisely because it is the memorial of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The salvific reality of such an ineffable mystery has its origin in Christ’s love (cf. Jn 13:1), who instituted it to facilitate for people of all times a vital contact with his perfect holocaust: “Do this is memory of me” (Lk 22:19).

By such an august Mystery, we enter into communion with Christ and his redemptive work and, in a special way, with its deepest core: the perfect act of love and obedience to his Father’s will, by which he defeated the power of sin and death. In his last encyclical, Pope John Paul II pointed to this ineffable grace: “When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and ‘the work of our redemption is carried out.’ This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only after he had left us a means of sharing in it as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits.”[5]

The real Eucharist presence of the sacrifice of Christ builds up the Church. Each time that Christians gather to celebrate the Eucharist of the Lord, they celebrate and live the mystery of their own reconciliation, carried out once and for all in Christ’s Paschal sacrifice, but which reaches them here and now in the Church. This was emphasized forcefully by Pope Benedict XVI, in his first message to the Church after his election as successor to St. Peter: “The Eucharist makes constantly present the Risen Christ who continues to give himself to us, calling us to participate in the banquet of his Body and his Blood. From full communion with him flows every other element of the Church’s life,” because it constitutes the “heart of Christian life and the source of the Church’s evangelizing mission.”[6]

St. Josemaría Escrivá expressed the same reality with these words. “Because of the Blessed Trinity’s love for man, the presence of Christ in the Eucharist brings all graces to the Church and to mankind. This is the sacrifice announced by the prophet Malachi.... It is the sacrifice of Christ, offered to the Father with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit—an offering of infinite value, which perpetuates the work of the redemption in us and surpasses the sacrifices of the Old Law. The Holy Mass brings us face to face with one of the central mysteries of our faith, because it is the gift of
the Blessed Trinity to the Church. It is because of this that we can consider
the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life.”[7]

It is only through the Eucharist that we have access to Christ’s
redemptive sacrifice. This takes place not simply through a memorial filled
with faith, but especially through a real contact, through the sacramental
memorial instituted by the Redeemer himself. As John Paul II explained:
“The Mass makes present the sacrifice of the Cross; it does not add to that
sacrifice nor does it multiply it. What is repeated is its memorial
celebration, its ‘commemorative representation’ (memorialis demonstratio),
which makes Christ’s one, definitive, redemptive sacrifice always present in
time.”[8]

Thanks to this “making present” of Christ’s sacrifice and our direct
participation in its celebration, “men and the world are restored to God
through the paschal newness of the Redemption. This restoration,” John
Paul II writes in his letter Dominicae Cenae, “cannot cease to be: it is the
foundation of the ‘new and eternal covenant’ of God with man and of man
with God. If it were missing, one would have to question both the
excellence of the sacrifice of the Redemption, which in fact was perfect and
definitive, and also the sacrificial value of the Mass. In fact, the Eucharist,
being a true sacrifice, brings about this restoration to God.”[9]

Each time the Eucharist is celebrated, the Church beseeches the Father
that, in virtue of the redeeming sacrifice of the Son and through the action
of the Holy Spirit, salvation may reach all humanity. This is what we ask
for in the Eucharistic Prayers, which make frequent reference to the
reconciling work of Jesus, and in which we ask the Father that his Son’s
sacrifice may “advance the peace and salvation of all the world.”[10]

Nevertheless, in order to obtain the forgiveness freely offered by “God,
rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4), and ensure that the redemptive power of the
Cross reaches us, conversion and true penance are required on our part,
leading us to rectify not only our disordered sentiments and affections, but
also all our conduct, accepting the grace that God offers us and trying to
correspond fully to his love. Thus the importance of the Church’s prayer, in
the celebration of the Eucharist, that beseeches God the Father, in Christ
and with the Holy Spirit, for the grace of conversion for all men and women.

If we want to transform the world, so often lacerated by misunderstanding, injustice, hatred and violence, which stem ultimately from the personal sins of mankind, we must persevere in prayer to the Father, asking him, in the name of Jesus (cf. Jn 15:16) and with the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the conversion of sinners and the gift of charity for all men and women. This prayer to the Father, in Christ and with the Paraclete, constitutes the soul of the apostolate that we Christians have to carry out in the midst of the world.

In the Eucharist we find, therefore, the source of the gift of contrition, which changes hearts hardened by sin and makes possible a full conversion to God. With regard to this truth, we need to recall the magisterium of the Council of Trent, in which the Church reflected at length on and clarified the basic terms of the relationship between the Eucharist and Penance. That Council taught that the Sacrifice of the Mass “is truly propitiatory and has this effect, that if we, contrite and penitent, with sincere heart and upright faith, with fear and reverence, draw near to God, ‘we obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid’ (Heb 4:16). For, appeased by this sacrifice, the Lord grants the grace and gift of penitence and pardons even the gravest crimes and sins.”[11]

This text does not affirm that the Sacrifice of the Altar directly remits mortal sins, but that the forgiveness of sins is attributed to the gift of penitence that is prayed for and obtained in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and that always includes the necessity of receiving the sacrament of Penance.

This gift reaches us from heaven as a fruit of Christ’s charity: “The Eucharist signifies this charity, and therefore recalls it, makes it present and at the same time brings it about. Every time that we consciously share in it, there opens in our souls a real dimension of that unfathomable love that includes everything that God has done and continues to do for us human beings, as Christ says: ‘My Father goes on working, and so do I’ (Jn 5:17). Together with this unfathomable and free gift, which is charity revealed in its fullest degree in the saving sacrifice of the Son of God, the sacrifice of which the Eucharist is the indelible sign, there also springs up within us a
lively response of love. We not only know love; we ourselves begin to love. We enter, so to speak, upon the path of love and along this path make progress. Thanks to the Eucharist, the love that springs up within us from the Eucharist develops in us, becomes deeper, and grows stronger.”[12] Thus, by means of the love offered to us in the Eucharist, we grow in our union with Christ.

In short, each soul receives salvation to the extent that one enters into vital contact with the Redeemer, with his love and obedience to the Father, and makes the decision to die with Christ to sin in order to live with him in God (cf. Col 3:3). Certainly Christ’s Paschal sacrifice—his passion, death and resurrection—in itself was sufficient to forgive all the sins of mankind. Nevertheless, man attains the remission of his sins in accord with the mode in which he participates in the power of Christ’s sacrifice. And that mode is distinct in the Eucharist and in Penance.

The relationship between the Eucharist and Penance in our sharing in the redemptive grace of the Cross

In the holy sacrament of Penance, participation in the fruit of the Sacrifice of the Cross is brought about through the acts that pertain to the essence of the sacramental sign. These are, on the part of the subject, the acts of contrition, confession of sins and acceptance of penance; and on the part of the minister of Christ and the Church, the absolution. Thanks to these acts, a Christian is configured in a singular way with the death and resurrection of Christ. As John Paul II said: “Our reconciliation with God, our return to God’s house, is carried out through Christ. His passion and death on the Cross stands between every human conscience and every human sin, and the infinite love of the Father. This Love, quick to heal and forgive, is nothing other than Mercy. Each of us through our personal conversion, through repentance, through our firm resolution to return, finally, in confession, agrees to undertake a demanding personal spiritual journey, which is a prolongation and echo of the painful spiritual journey that our Redeemer undertook.”[13] Through the penitential acts of the subject and the absolution of the minister, the sinner is truly configured with Christ, Victor over sin, and reconciled with God.
In the case of the Eucharist, participation in the redemptive grace of the Cross requires faith in God the Savior, petition for divine pardon, acceptance of the gift of conversion and penance, and union with Christ and his brethren through charity. By participating in the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice with faith, hope and love for Christ the Redeemer, a Christian, moved to repentance by the power of the Holy Spirit, can obtain reconciliation with God. But this does not mean that the Eucharist is an alternative to the sacrament of Penance for obtaining the remission of grave sins. In other words, the Eucharist does not forgive our offenses against God; it gives us the grace to have recourse to the source of pardon in the sacrament of Penance.

John Paul II spoke clearly on various occasions in this regard. We can cite here, as an example, his words to a group of bishops on an *ad limina* visit in 1981: “The theory that the Eucharist forgives mortal sin without the sinner going to the sacrament of Penance is not compatible with the Magisterium of the Church. It is true that the Sacrifice of the Mass, through which all grace comes to the Church, obtains forgiveness for the sinner, but this does not mean that those who have committed mortal sin can approach Eucharistic communion without previously having reconciled themselves with God through the priestly ministry.”

The Eucharist, fount and summit of the Church’s entire life, and therefore of its penitential dimension and its struggle against sin, does not make the other sacraments superfluous. Nor can we view as superfluous deeds of penance and interior purification, among which figure preeminently prayer, fasting, alms, and other acts of mortification of the senses and the disordered passions.

Nor should one cease to stress that, for those who are separated from God by grave or mortal sin, reconciliation with God can only be had in the measure to which one accepts fully the gift of conversion and penance, which necessarily includes, at least implicitly, the intention of reconciling oneself with God through the ministry of reconciliation that Christ conferred on his Church. Conclusive in this respect is the teaching of the Council of Trent: “Though it happens sometimes that this contrition is perfect through charity and reconciles man to God before this sacrament is actually received, this reconciliation, nevertheless, is not to be ascribed to
the contrition itself without a desire of the sacrament, which desire is included in it.”[16] Jesus, in granting to the Church, through the apostles, the power of forgiving sins, thus linking his own forgiveness to the forgiveness granted by them (cf. Jn 20:22), made this sacrament the ordinary means of reconciliation and, therefore, of salvation for the Christian sinner. For this reason, the Magisterium of the Church has explicitly formulated—maternally, one should add—the need for the sacrament of Penance, making it clear that the baptized sinner cannot recover grace without confessing his sins at least in desire.[17]

A close relationship exists between Penance and the Eucharist. Penance leads to a desire for union with God in Christ, a union that in this world reaches its greatest expression in the Eucharist. And the Eucharist fosters, in turn, a constant call to conversion and penance. The One who is present in the Eucharistic mystery is the Son consubstantial with the Father, the One through whom everything has been made, the eternal Word, who took on our flesh in the womb of Holy Mary, ever Virgin, who suffered and died for us on the Cross, who rose and ascended gloriously to heaven, and who will come to judge the world at the end of time. When we consider the greatness of the gift that is offered to us (his very Person: body, blood, soul and divinity, overflowing with love for mankind, whom he wants to save), there is born in us almost spontaneously a sense of our own unworthiness, together with sorrow for our sins, the interior need for purification, and the desire to be more faithful, to fulfill what he expects and asks of us.

The saints have experienced in a singular manner this attraction of Christ’s love. Upon contemplating our Lord’s self-giving in the Eucharist, how often the Founder of Opus Dei exclaimed: “Jesus has remained in the Eucharist out of love for you.”[18] “Jesus has remained in the Sacred Host so as to stay by our side, to sustain us, to guide us. And love can only be repaid with love.”[19] In the face of Christ’s redemptive love, his complete self-giving, a person with faith remains as though overwhelmed, full of wonder. “I am awed by this mystery of Love,” exclaims St. Josemaría. “Here is the Lord seeking to use my heart as a throne, committed never to leave me, provided I don’t run away.”[20] And our amazement at this
superabundance, this “madness” of divine love, leads us to live in a state of continual conversion, to strive to be faithful at every moment of our life.

The call to conversion, to love, comes from Christ and leads us back to Christ in the Eucharist. Eucharistic piety reinforces our hope, our trust in the mercy of God. It also helps us to discover our miseries and sins, so that we will bring them to the sacrament of Penance, and thus, through the words of divine forgiveness, we will raise the Cross of our Lord victoriously over our lives, over our weaknesses.

“If the first word of Christ’s teaching, the first phrase of the Gospel Good News, was ‘Repent, and believe in the Gospel’ (metanoeite),” writes John Paul II, “the Sacrament of the Passion, Cross and Resurrection seems to strengthen and consolidate in an altogether special way this call in our souls. The Eucharist and Penance thus become in a sense two closely connected dimensions of authentic life in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel, of truly Christian life. The Christ who calls to the Eucharistic banquet is always the same Christ who exhorts us to penance and repeats his ‘Repent.’ Without this constant ever renewed endeavor for conversion, partaking of the Eucharist would lack its full redeeming effectiveness and there would be a loss or at least a weakening of the special readiness to offer God the spiritual sacrifice in which our sharing in the priesthood of Christ is expressed in an essential and universal manner. In Christ, priesthood is linked with his Sacrifice, his self-giving to the Father; and, precisely because it is without limit, that self-giving gives rise in us human beings subject to numerous limitations to the need to turn to God in an ever more mature way and with a constant, ever more profound, conversion.”[21]

In other words, in the unity of the Church’s sacramental organism, the Eucharist and Penance complement each other in the struggle against sin. They are two different sacraments, and, at the same time, closely and intimately united. Each has its own special effects and purpose, but with a relationship to the effects and purpose of the other. The Eucharist always proclaims a call to penance, to conversion, to correspondence to Christ’s love; and it leads sinners to sacramental Penance. Both the offering of the sacrifice and Holy Communion proclaim by their very nature that the enmity between the sinner and God has been objectively eliminated.
Penance prepares us to participate, with a pure heart, in the liturgical offering of the “pure, holy and immaculate Victim;” to offer our lives to the Father, in Christ, with the strength of the Holy Spirit, to receive his Body and Blood, his whole Person, in Holy Communion.

**Penance before Communion**

The relationship between the Eucharist and Penance receives a new and powerful light when we recall that the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation has developed, since the beginnings of Christianity, in function of participation in the Eucharist.

As early as the third century, speaking of Eucharistic Communion, Origen says “the advantage to him who uses it is that he partakes of the bread with undefiled mind and pure conscience.” And a few centuries later, at the end of the Patristic period in the West, St. Isidoro of Seville summed up as follows the universal position of the Church: “If there are such sins, which separate one, as dead, from the altar, one must first do penance, and only thus is one to receive this saving medicine. For whoever eats unworthily, ‘eats and drinks judgment upon himself’ (1 Cor 11:29)”

According to the living Tradition of the Church, for anyone who has sinned gravely after Baptism, reconciliation with God and with the Church by means of the sacrament of Penance is a required condition for receiving Eucharistic Communion. In this respect, ecclesiastical legislation states: “Anyone who is conscious of grave sin may not celebrate Mass or receive the Body of the Lord without previously having been to sacramental confession, unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, which includes the resolve to go to confession as soon as possible.”

Today there is a special need to recall this norm of the Church and to explain its dogmatic foundation. Many of the faithful seem to ignore it; some think that it is enough to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist to licitly receive Communion, without paying attention to the state of sin they might find themselves in. In fact, in many areas where the sacrament of Penance is seldom administered, there are often a large number of communions, and, on occasion, people who persist obstinately
in open and grave sin come to receive the Blessed Sacrament. It is enough to consider the faithful who contract only civil marriages, or who are in de facto unions, or those who have formally collaborated in the promotion, approval, or application of civil laws that gravely offend against the law of God, as is the case with laws that authorize abortion or euthanasia.\[26]\n
In addition, as a number of pastors during the last Synod of Bishops pointed out, many people have lost the authentic sense of sin. Often merely subjective criteria are used to distinguish between good and evil, and the state of mortal sin is reduced to a few situations in life where one adopts a “fundamental option,” understood as a direct and formal rejection of God. This position overlooks the gravity of transgressing the precepts of the Decalogue, and forgets that certain acts, included in the list of sins mentioned by St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-10), in the Letter to the Galatians (cf. Gal 5:19-21) and in the Letter to the Ephesians (cf. Eph 5:5), separate men from friendship with God and from the kingdom of heaven.

A number of specious reasons exist (falsely based on Sacred Scripture, because its meaning is twisted) that try to justify participation in sacramental Communion without prior confession of mortal sins. The then Cardinal Ratzinger, years ago, noted the danger of viewing the Eucharist as simply the continuation of the meals with sinners that Jesus took part in throughout his life to lead them to conversion by his friendship. According to this hypothesis, the Eucharist would be the “table of sinners,” open to everyone without conditions. Some have even gone so far as to say that the reception of the Eucharist should not have any prior conditions linked with the sacraments of Baptism or Penance. Cardinal Ratzinger has refuted these specious arguments, emphasizing that Christ’s Last Supper, which is perpetuated in the Eucharist, was not one of the meals our Lord had with publicans and sinners. On the contrary, it was a very special meal, the Paschal meal, which was celebrated with one’s family. Therefore Christ gathered that night only with the apostles, who constituted his spiritual family, and whom he had prepared with his words and with the washing of their feet to receive Communion from his hands. As Cardinal Ratzinger said, the Eucharist is not the Sacrament of Reconciliation, although it
presupposes this sacrament, but rather the “sacrament of the reconciled,” of those who are in God’s grace and are already in communion with him.[27]

In one of his first homilies as Roman Pontiff, Benedict XVI once again returned to this point. “By faith, the Eucharist is an intimate mystery. Our Lord instituted the Sacrament in the Upper Room, surrounded by his new family, by the twelve apostles, a prefiguration and anticipation of the Church of all times. And so, in the liturgy of the ancient Church, the distribution of Holy Communion was introduced with the words Sancta sanctis: the holy gift is intended for those who have been made holy. In this way a response was given to the exhortation of St. Paul to the Corinthians: ‘A man should examine himself first; only then should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup’ (1 Cor 11:28).”[28]

Therefore, it is especially urgent to enlighten people’s consciences with an integral catechesis both about sin and about reconciliation, and also about the preparation needed to receive the Eucharist. These topics should be brought up in homilies, and in the sacrament of Penance, for Confession is a privileged means for forming consciences. “Sacramental confession is not a human but a divine dialogue. It is a tribunal of divine justice and especially of mercy, with a loving judge who ‘has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; I desire that the wicked turn back from his way and live’ (Ezek 33:11).”[29] Not infrequently, referring to his own experience in confession, St. Josemaría would say: What a joy for my soul, to know that I have been forgiven by Jesus himself!

It is not a valid argument to say that one cannot find a text in Sacred Scripture that explicitly points out the need to confess grave sins to a minister of Reconciliation before going to communion. From the earliest times, it was always considered a grave offense, a sacrilege, to receive communion in mortal sin, since it directly involves the Body of Christ, which is holy and demands being received in a holy way, in accord with the words of St. Paul. “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27). That is to say, he who receives communion sacrilegiously will merit the punishment of one who mistreats the Body and Blood of Christ. “Let a man,” St. Paul continues, “examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats
and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor 11:28-29).

Throughout the centuries, Tradition has found in this text of St. Paul not only the general conditions required to receive the Eucharist worthily, but also the origin of the precept of confessing one’s sins to those who have the power to absolve them, before communicating. Receiving the Eucharist with due respect requires the desire to seek union with Christ, and therefore the determination to reject what is an obstacle. Thus anyone in a state of grave sin, before receiving communion, should have recourse to the sacrament of Penance.

The destruction of sin and all its consequence, the way of repairing disobedience against God and attaining God’s forgiveness, in the New Law was not left to man’s decision. Christ himself definitively established its basic features, through the sacrament of Penance. Therefore, contrition, if truly sincere, seeks to recover friendship with God and always leads, at least implicitly, to the desire to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Sorrow for sins would be false if it was united to the rejection of God’s command to confess them to the priest in the sacrament of Penance, since contrition comes from love for God, which is intrinsically incompatible with the rejection of a precept given by God himself: “If you love me,” Jesus said to his disciples, “you will keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15).

Very much to the point here are the words of St. Augustine: “No one says to himself: I alone will do my penance before God... For were his words without meaning: “what you loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven”? Were the keys to the Church of God given in vain? It is not sufficient, then, to confess to God; one needs to confess to those who have received from him the faculty and the power of binding and loosing.”[30]

Pope John Paul II repeatedly confirmed, with his warm and fatherly voice, the Church’s teaching in this matter. In his last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, he declared: “I therefore desire to reaffirm that in the Church there remains in force, now and in the future, the rule by which the Council of Trent gave concrete expression to the Apostle Paul’s stern warning when it affirmed that, in order to receive the Eucharist in a worthy
manner, ‘one must first confess one’s sins, when one is aware of mortal sin.’”[31]

This is a text of particular interest, since it authoritatively affirms the perennial validity of the penitential praxis prior to receiving Communion, while pointing out its dogmatic foundations: St. Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians, which the Council of Trent explained, basing itself on the living Tradition of the Church: “He who would communicate,” the Council teaches, “ought to recall to mind the precept of the Apostle St. Paul: ‘Let a man examine himself.’ Now ecclesiastical usage declares that an examination is required so that no one, conscious of mortal sin, however contrite he may seem to himself, approach to the sacred Eucharist without previous sacramental confession.”[32]

To preach and recall the need for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a sure criterion for pastoral efforts in regard to Penance. In this respect Pope John Paul II, in his Apostolic Letter Misericordia Dei, recommended “that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertised times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses, and even during Mass if there are other priests available, in order to meet the needs of the faithful.”[33]

Finally, I would like to mention another situation: that of the faithful who are in God’s grace, but who feel the weight of their own wretchedness and are saddened by their lack of correspondence. In this case, they should not stay away from Communion. One need not wait until one is “perfect”—for we are always waiting—in order to receive our Lord sacramentally. St. Josemaría used to stress: “He has stayed here for you. It is not reverence to omit going to Communion when well disposed. It’s irreverence only when you receive him unworthily.”[34] “Go to Communion. It doesn’t show lack of respect. Go this very day when you have just got over that ‘spot of trouble.’—Have you forgotten that Jesus said: It is not by those who are well, but by those who are sick, that the physician is needed?”[35] I saw in the life of that holy priest his sincere sorrow and penitence, without scruples, for what he considered a lack of love for our God. In that situation, he would say trustingly: “I hold on
strongly to the Mercy of God, who comes to me in Communion, so that He can provide what I don't know how to give Him.”

Here we do well to stress that union with our Lord in the Eucharist strengthens a Christian’s soul for the struggle against sin, so that one can always abide in Christ’s love, as he himself desires (cf. Jn 15:9). Hence the importance of the personal dispositions—faith, love, contrition, humility—needed to receive communion fruitfully. “It is not possible to ‘eat’ the Risen One, present under the sign of bread, as if it were a simple piece of bread. To eat this Bread is to communicate, to enter into communion with the person of the living Lord. This communion, this act of ‘eating,’ is truly an encounter between two persons; it is allowing our lives to be penetrated by the life of the One who is the Lord, of the One who is my Creator and Redeemer. The purpose of this communion, of this partaking, is the assimilation of my life with his, my transformation and conformation into the One who is living Love.”[36]

The faithful who accept with devotion the love that Jesus offers them in the Eucharist, obtain the strength needed to sever all disordered attachment to creatures. Thus they attain the remission of the venial sins of which they are repentant, and also are helped to promptly and decisively separate themselves from occasions of offending God. The Church teaches that the Eucharist is “an antidote whereby we may be freed from daily faults and be preserved from mortal sins.”[37]

“We go to Jesus—and we ‘return’ to him—through Mary,” [38] St. Josemaría used to say. If we allow ourselves to be taught by Mary, “the woman of the Eucharist,” she will always lead us to the Eucharistic Jesus. And if ever we have the misfortune of separating ourselves from him through sin, she will help us return to Jesus, with a contrite heart, with faith and hope in his infinite mercy, through the sacrament of Penance.


[16] Council of Trent, session 14, Doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance, ch. 4: Denz.—Sch. 1677.


[32] Council of Trent, session XIII, Decree on the Holy Eucharist, ch. 7; Denz.—Sch. 1646-1647.


[35] Ibid., no. 536.


[37] Council of Trent, session XIII, Decree on the Holy Eucharist, ch. 2; Denz.—Sch. 1646-1638.
Interview granted to teh COPE radio network

After the pilgrimage of so many young people from all over Germany, the Pope will meet with them today. What stands out among your experiences during these days?

What stands out, in the first place, is a reality that we can almost touch with our hands: that the Church is alive, that the Church is young. Not that we have to consider only the young people, because those who are older, the mature, the elderly, the sick, are equally young. But it is also a marvelous reality that young people from all over the world want to find and follow Christ.

What are the positive results that we can expect from this gathering with young people

I think it will bear a lot of fruit. In the first place, a personal conversion is taking place in each of them because they have set out to seek the truth. Specifically, after having lived through such a moving experience, being so close to the Pope, who is a great servant of the Church, they should be apostles of what they have seen here, in the places where they live.

Today’s youth are the victims of a relativism that runs counter to the defense of life, marriage and the family. How should an ordinary Catholic confront this situation?

He has to be, as any other Catholic, loyal to the faith. Each of us clearly has a great need to get to know Catholic doctrine, because we can’t
hold fast to what we don’t know.

In any case, even though we don’t digest everything, I specifically recommend that people should study the Catechism of the Catholic Church. If it seems too large or extensive to someone, we now have the Compendium, which is a beautiful source book for attaining a solid and rich formation. This doctrinal formation equips us very well for dealing with those around us. Not only in order to defend Catholic doctrine but also to defend the life and dignity of those who are in error.

Suppose that a friend comes up to us and says: “Listen, I want to change, I want to get closer to God but I don’t know how to do it. What do I have to do?”

What should we tell him?

To look at the one who is his true friend, at Jesus. To strive to get to know him. I, in the words of a saint that I had the privilege of living alongside for twenty-five years, would tell him: Get to know Jesus, who is your best Friend, the Friend who never betrays, the Friend who understands you, the Friend who forgives you, the Friend who is constantly coming to seek you. In that way, by getting to know him in the Gospel, you will realize that you are one more person in the Gospel scene, and that you can live as close to Christ as did those who listened to him and followed in his footsteps, even in the most difficult moments.

The listeners to the Cope network are following closely all the news from World Youth Day. What message would you like to send to the Spanish audience?

I think that we all uphold one another. I would like to tell the listeners of Cope that, precisely because they want to have a solid Christian formation, a human formation consistent with Christianity, they should support these young people with their prayer, with their mortification—which is not a matter of doing extraordinary things, although at times our Lord can ask for that. Specifically, with their ordinary life, their work, their life lived face to face with God, they can help these young people in the meeting they are now having with Christ through the dedication of the Pope, who is completely generous. He has come to Germany specifically to seek out these young people, as did John Paul II. He came to seek them so that they can also answer consistently,
responsibly. The Pope relies on them. May they learn to rely on Christ, who is the one the Pope represents.

Thank you very much, Bishop Javier.

Avvenire, Milan -- October 26, 2005

Ordinary work, offered on the altar

The assembly of the Synod of Bishops that has just concluded was convoked by John Paul II and presided over by his successor, Benedict XVI. Thus it represents, in a symbolic way, the “linking” of two pontificates. It is significant that the topic of this synod was precisely the Eucharist, the source of the Church’s unity.

On the opening day, Benedict XVI asked the participants to study how the connection between the Holy Mass and the daily life of Christians can be strengthened, so that these not be seen as two disconnected realities. As a result, the synod’s work included the study of specific recommendations to help Christians better understand that the Eucharist should inform their daily lives.

As an act of worship, the Eucharistic Sacrifice has to be as perfect as possible, since it is offered to God Himself. Any human action lovingly and carefully done in all it details is pleasing to others and shows respect towards them. How much more must this be true of any act offered to God. This is the tenor of many of the proposals introduced in the synod.

Priests and lay people should celebrate or attend Holy Mass with a firm doctrinal piety, with love and attention. In the Eucharist, where time and eternity meet, Christ offers Himself to the Father and gives Himself to us once again. Therefore we need to respond with all the love we can muster. God is not asking us simply for external devotion, but above all for our love. Only thus can our offering be perfect, pleasing to God.

But the presence of the Eucharist in a Christian’s life is not limited to the sublime moment of the Mass. We can bring to the altar our daily
actions, while striving throughout the day to direct our ordinary work to God in the Eucharist. Any honorable work can be a means to unite ourselves spiritually to Christ’s sacrifice in the Holy Mass. In this way, the Eucharist becomes the summit and source of our entire existence. This idea was expressed over and over during the synod, with the certainty that Christ wants to unite the Holy Mass to the salvation of all men and women.

These are thoughts that oriented my own reflections during the synod and that point to three areas in which Christians can help to make Eucharistic life flourish throughout the Church.

The first one pertains to priests: that we know how to celebrate the Eucharist with the greatest possible refinement. In other words, that we foster the *ars celebrandi*, the art of celebrating Holy Mass with the required dignity, which makes manifest the beauty and depth of the liturgy, lived for the glory of God and our edification.

The second is the need to stir all the faithful to an even more attentive participation in Holy Mass, with the awareness that it is the sublime moment to engage in the *ars orandi*, the art of prayer, which John Paul II stressed when the new millennium began.

And finally, we also need to rediscover every day the strong bonds between Holy Mass and daily life as we grasp ever more fully the *ars vivendi*, the art of spending each day in spiritual union with Jesus in the Eucharist. Thus we will discover a new horizon in our daily life: the marvelous adventure of meeting God.

The Holy Father will evaluate the proposals the synod fathers have presented and make the decisions he considers opportune. But we are already experiencing the positive effects of the synod. We bishops who took part in it have gone deeper into the infinite treasure of the Eucharist, in which “is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and the living bread which gives life to men” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 5).

It is my ardent hope that we take this truth to heart and spread it in concentric circles, and that its fruits be seen in the way many Catholics practice their Christian faith, especially in their participation in the Holy
Mass. Following the work and prayer of these days, I look forward to a new moment of grace for the whole Church.

+ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

Rome -- August 24, 2005

Interview granted to
the Zenit news agency.

As Prelate of Opus Dei you know people from all over the world, since your “diocese” is not limited territorially. Do they all share the same "hunger for God" that the archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Joachim Meisner, spoke about, or are people from the south naturally closer to God than the Germans and the northerners in general?

In the first place, I’d like to point out that Opus Dei is a personal prelature and, as such, forms part of the hierarchical structure of the Church; but it is not a diocese.

Yes, Opus Dei is indeed spread all over the world. The faithful of the prelature are from many different countries, but we all have one thing in common: the conviction that we are children of God with a "hunger to be in touch with God,” which we try to foster daily.

It’s fairly clear, I think, that people are different everywhere: people from the north and the south, from the east or the west. But we all strive joyfully to live our lives close to God.

This applies everywhere, without exception, it seems to me. In Germany, for example, there’s a great wealth of people who want to live close to God. Many people here, with all their German characteristics, try to bring God into their daily lives, into their family life, their work, their traveling back and forth, their social life and so on; and they try to help
others discover and live this great human ideal: to live one’s life close to God.

*What was special about these days in Cologne, for the world and especially for Germany?*

What was special for me is that the Successor of Peter was here, and that the whole Church gathered round him and, through the communion of saints, was united to the intentions of our common father, the Pope.

So, what happened in Cologne these days is very important for Germany and for the world, because it shows that the Church is alive, that the Church is young, with a youthfulness that is also true of older people, of the sick, of those less well-off. Being young at heart is what is important, and all these people are young at heart, and they bring God to others. That is what is really needed.

*Do you think the visit of the Holy Father will bring about a new spiritual springtime for the Church in Germany?*

Certainly. In the Church we are always in a growing situation. Although at times we may think that things seem to have come to a full stop, the truth is there are never any real full stops. Here in Germany, for example, in this wonderful country, we know that there are many, many ordinary men and women who are people of prayer.

The Church is not made up only of what we see with our eyes; there is also the wealth of the holiness of many people. There are certainly many holy people in Germany, who are grateful to God for belonging to the Catholic Church and who want to love all the people of Germany, and of the whole world, with the love of Christ.

*The Holy Father likes to point out that joy comes from being a Christian. What kind of joy is this?*

The Holy Father has been saying recently that contrary to what some people want others to think, Christianity is not a burden. Rather the opposite is true. As Pope Benedict XVI says: God’s precepts give us wings to fly! God’s precepts enable us to fly to our Creator, to our God, who is close to each of us.
Our joy, therefore, is knowing that no matter what the situation, God is our Father and he is always looking after us, he never abandons us.

There is no lack of pain and sacrifice in our lives, as there wasn’t in the life of our Lord, who is our model, or in the life of the person closest to him, his Mother, Mary. It’s not that self-denial is an end in itself. Rather it is a consequence of love. There is no true love without self-giving and sacrifice. Love means giving oneself joyfully for the good of others.

Your predecessor, St. Josemaría, founded Opus Dei to teach everybody that they can be saints, without doing extraordinary things. What is holiness, then? How does one become a saint?

St. Josemaría based everything on the teachings and preaching of Jesus Christ, who “coepit facere et docere.” Jesus began by doing things, and then he preached. He started with his humble birth, being born poor, in a cave, with the love of Mary and Joseph, and of the shepherds, men who were poor but who knew how to love.

And a little later, the Wise Men came to worship him. Although the Wise Men were probably better off, yet as we see them looking for the King of the Jews we realize that they too longed for God as much as the shepherds did.

Holiness is trying to see God in whatever we are doing at each moment. Holiness is striving to be Christlike without doing extraordinary things. We don’t need to do big or unusual penances, nor do we need to look for them. Though if our Lord allows them to come our way then we embrace them as best we can, with the help of his grace.

The important thing is to embrace God’s will, carrying out heroically the duty of each moment, without pulling back from what Christ is asking of us, whether it is pleasant or not.

What help does Opus Dei provide on the journey toward holiness

The task of Opus Dei is to reminds everybody that holiness is not something for a few special people, but rather that all of us can come close to God right where we are. Jesus Christ said to everyone: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
Opus Dei reminds us of the need to transform all our activities, even the apparently trivial ones, into a dialogue with God. And it also reminds us that we need to frequent the Sacraments, since without the Sacraments the life of grace cannot grow, given that the Sacraments are the means that our Lord left us, to renew us and to identify ourselves with him.

*The theme of World Youth Day is “We have come to worship Him” (Mt 2:2). Today we are living in radically changing times in which we can easily lose sight of what is essential in life, and recollection and silence are often considered to be unbearable. What do we need to do to adore God? What does adoration mean? How are we to talk to God?*

Before answering this question, I would like to mention something that is fundamental in the life of a Christian, in the life of a child of God: being optimistic. We mustn’t be pessimistic in the way we look at things or situations. Pessimism throws a cloud over people. A child of God knows he can transform everything with joy and optimism, even situations others might see as setbacks or tragedies.

We certainly need silence and recollection if we are to talk to God. Being recollected and talking to God should not be considered as something difficult or unattractive, just as you would never think it difficult to be with a person you love, or to talk to that person. And God loves each one of us. We are his favorite people. He himself tells us in the Old Testament that his delight is to be with the children of men. If we talk to God we will enjoy the happiness God wants us to have; we will share in his love God.

How are we to talk to God? As we talk to a friend or to a brother, with all simplicity and naturalness. St. Josemaría Escrivá encouraged us to talk to God about what’s happening in our life, because to pray is to talk about our soul, about our battles, whether big or small. God welcomes us and listens to us like the most caring of Fathers, with great affection, and he is keen to help us in whatever we need. Then, as a loving Father, he occasionally allows a trial or tribulation to come, precisely so that we become more mature and rely more on the help of his grace.

*The Holy Father granted all World Youth Day participants a plenary indulgence. What is the role of indulgences in the life of the Church? How do they*
relate to the sacrament of Penance?

Indulgences play a vital role, because they apply the infinite merits of the passion, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to our soul.

They enable us to share in the glorious Life to which we are all called. Indulgences make it easier for us to approach God, taking away the remaining punishment due to sins which have already been forgiven. So, they help us to be better disposed to go to receive grace in the sacrament of Confession, and to do so with greater ease and docility.

In Confession Christ completely forgives us our mortal sins. There is no other means of having our mortal sins forgiven, except in extraordinary circumstances, though the Church does teach that an act of perfect contrition remits sins, including mortal sins. However, who can be certain that his contrition is perfect? We need to know for certain that God has forgiven us, who listens to us, who cares for us, and who takes away the sadness of our failures through the sacrament of Confession.

What message does St. Josemaría give to the young people who have been in Cologne these days?

I would summarize St. Josemaría’s message in a few words he wrote as a very young priest. He was writing for everybody, adults and older people as well as young people, because any age is a good time to find God. But if he were alive today he would remind young people of what he wrote in those early years of the life of Opus Dei, when difficulties abounded. He wrote: “Upon whether you and I live our lives as God wants—don’t forget it!—many great things depend.”

Many great things depend on the good behavior of the young people who have been in Cologne these days: many great things for their souls and for the souls of the people who are in touch with them, and also for their countries and for souls all over the world.
Interview granted to the German Press Agency: DPA

How are you and the members and friends of Opus Dei planning to participate in World Youth Day?

Personally, I am going to Cologne filled with faith and hope, with the eagerness to experience once more that the Church is young, as the Holy Father has been saying since the first day of his pontificate. World Youth Day provides an opportunity to see the importance of the faith for young people and the great importance of young people for the Church. Those taking part will listen to the reflections of the Pope, and the Pope will listen to the hopes of the young people. I am sure that all of us will return from Cologne with a renewed desire to follow and love Jesus more fully. The faithful of Opus Dei (who will take part in the gathering without forming a special group, in quite varied ways, from different dioceses and organizations) will go with the same readiness to be open to a moment of grace.

How do you see the relationship between young people today and the Church? What does today's Church have to offer them?

If I may express it in this way, I would say that it is a matter of mutual dependence. Young people have a vital need for the Church, and the Church needs young people because they are an important part of the People of God. It is through the Church that young people get to know Jesus Christ: God who becomes man, the answer to our deepest yearnings, the source of true happiness. Young people give the Church new life, when they discover with enthusiasm the person and message of Christ and transmit their enthusiasm to new generations. In this sense, they themselves are the Church; they constitute, together with the poor and the sick, a special treasure. Certainly, the relationship of the Church with young people also presents obstacles and difficulties. On the one hand, during youth one experiences hope and generosity, but also more than a few anxieties. On the other hand, young people don’t always see the true nature of the Church in an adequate way, perhaps because of what we might call problems of communication proper to these times of ours, characterized by an excess of information and a lack of orientation. Thus Catholics are invited to act with the responsibility of someone who is aware
of being a child of God, and to strive to transmit the faith with consistency. To the youth who are seeking the meaning of life, we have to offer the sincere testimony of our joy and our commitment, each in our own circumstances.

*How would you describe Pope Benedict XVI?*

I see him, and I want to always see him, as a good Father of the Church. I will not go any further in my description, because that word—Father—sums up everything. Certainly, Divine Providence has been preparing him for his mission as Roman Pontiff. With all his years of ministry he has acquired a privileged knowledge of the Church's reality in the world; an acute perception of the challenges posed by contemporary culture; a clear vision of the whole which permits him to intuit the paths that God wants the Church to undertake in our time. If I had to sum up his profile in one expression, I would say: humble wisdom and contagious peace. Everyone can see in the Pope his great capacity to listen, to understand, and to seek answers that will satisfy the thirst for God of the women and men of today.

*How has your relationship with him been up to now? Does he know and appreciate Opus Dei as much as his predecessor?*

Before anything else, I would like to say that, in my opinion, any comparison would be out of place. In any case, I can tell you that at present Benedict XVI knows Opus Dei better than John Paul II did when he began his pontificate in 1978. But, I insist, the relationship of the Holy Father with the Catholic faithful and the institutions in the Church involves not only knowledge, but also communion and affection. And here there are no differences.

*How is the expansion of Opus Dei going in Germany? Did St. Josemaría have a special relationship with this country?*

Opus Dei grows in a natural way; its message is spread from person to person, one to one. The measure of the apostolate is a human measure, but the driving force of the apostolate is always God's grace, which has its own rhythm and logic. In Germany, the apostolic work of Opus Dei (as I think is happening throughout the whole Church) is spreading in a special way among young families. They are people who want to share the experience
of the faith, to take advantage of means of Christian formation compatible with their ordinary duties. I have heard that many people are taking part in our apostolic activities in various cities. In the Mass celebrated by Cardinal Meisner in January 2002, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of St. Josemaría, the Cologne Cathedral was packed with people. St. Josemaría visited Germany on a number of occasions. I had the good fortune of accompanying him, for the first time in 1958, and I saw his admiration for this country and for the people and their virtues. He had a great trust in the contribution that German Catholics could continue making to the Church's evangelizing work. Here too, as everywhere, he came to learn, to love, to serve.

**Opus Dei suffered strong attacks in the seventies and eighties from the media in Germany. With the passage of time, how does Opus Dei see those years?**

With serenity. On the one hand, it is obvious that the media are not infallible, and to suffer their attacks, when these have no basis, is not something worth worrying about. I don't want to give a negative picture of the media, which provides so many services to society. I refer to the fact that, like anything human, the people involved can commit errors. The same as in other fields, those who have been mistaken need to make amends in a noble way. On the other hand, attacks are nothing new, neither in the life of the Church in general, nor in Opus Dei in particular. If I may use the expression, they "come with the turf." My experience is that, in the end, they are a means for helping many people to get to know about Opus Dei.

**Could you briefly describe the Founder? What is the most important thing that you learned from him?**

Perhaps we could borrow the description that John Paul II gives in his book *Rise: Let Us Be on Our Way*. He was a holy priest, for today's world, because he recalled the importance of sanctity in ordinary life, especially now when we observe the split between faith and daily life that the Second Vatican Council and the recent Popes have pointed to as one of the greatest problems of our times. St. Josemaría's message can help us to remedy this personal and social division. It is always hard for me to sum up all that I learned from this holy priest. But certainly I can never forget his
capacity to love: he lived for God and for others, and he gave himself completely.

Rome -- August 13, 2005

*Ready to listen, prepared to respond, words about World Youth Day*

During the unforgettable welcoming encounter during World Youth Day 2000 in Rome, John Paul II asked the young people: “What have you come here to find? Who have you come here to find?” These were the ardent words of a man advanced in years but who loved with a youthful heart and who was capable of enkindling other young people with love for Christ. The World Youth Day has always drawn young people from all over the world who come to see the Pope, in search of Christ. This personal encounter with our Lord is the source of many marvelous benefits for the life of each one involved, and also for the life of the whole Church and of society.

Upon inaugurating his pontificate, Benedict XVI proclaimed that the Church is young, that the Church is alive. The Church is alive, he said, because Christ is alive. The “great” story of the Church is determined by the “personal” stories of friendship with Jesus. “Only in this friendship,” the Pope tells us, “are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.” We are going to Cologne with the hope of once more savoring the perennial youth of the Church, which is maintained thanks to friendship with Jesus. In the women and men of today, and especially in the youth, there is a great thirst for hope, dreams of happiness, an eagerness for meaning, a longing to find something it is worthwhile giving one’s life for. And at the same time one sees doubts, rebellion against injustice, awareness of one’s own weakness, and at times fear. These are yearnings that find their answer in Christ, and shadows that vanish in his light.
The Church guards in her heart the future of the world, as Benedict XVI also stressed at the beginning of his Pontificate. The future has a direct relationship with young people. The projection of the Church in space and in time depends to a great extent on the generosity of young people. They are the carriers of Christ’s message to their own generation and to the generations to come. They have to spread the seed of charity, the seed of chastity, which is an expression of authentic love. When the world seems to be distancing itself more and more from God, we need to realize that the world needs God more than ever: today, more than ever, the world needs the joy of young disciples of Christ. The Pope has granted the possibility of gaining a plenary indulgence to those who take part in this encounter. He is thus reminding us that personal friendship with Jesus, which is the font of joy, passes through the sacraments: Christ who pardons us in Confession and Christ who gives himself to us in the Eucharist.

The Sacrifice of the Altar is the center and theme of this World Youth Day, and of this entire year. The catechesis preceding the arrival of the Holy Father, the Saturday Vigil and the Mass on Sunday, all revolve around the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Pope has set as the theme for this encounter: “We have come to adore you,” as the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. I pray that all who take part in this gathering in Cologne may undergo a conversion, and first of all myself. We have to be convinced that it is always possible to convert anew, to transform our hearts. We have to feel the urgency of following Jesus closely, “in accordance with the vocation that God has indicated to each one” (Decree on Indulgences granted on the occasion of the 20th WYD, August 8, 2005).

God’s call resounds in one’s soul as an intimate and personal reality. And our response also has repercussions on those around us, on the society to which we belong. Saying yes to God means making our life one of service, putting ourselves at the disposition of others. Perhaps we will have to overcome a certain natural fear, which all of us experience in the face of great and binding decisions. “Be not afraid!” In these words of Christ, repeated by our beloved John Paul II, we find the daring that we need. Benedict XVI echoed them right from the first day: “If we let Christ into
our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. Christ gives everything and takes away nothing. It is worthwhile to confront this beautiful divine and human adventure.”

Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei

Rome -- October 11, 2005

*Interview granted to* La Gaceta de los Negocios.

The central headquarters of Opus Dei in the Eternal City is at Viale Bruno Buozzi 75. From the outside it looks like an apartment complex. Within, it is a conglomerate of edifices including the old Hungarian Embassy to the Holy See, which is easy to pick out, and other buildings of different styles and tastes. Taking up a whole block, it includes small interior gardens with fountains and sculptures. The interview with the Prelate of Opus Dei took place in one of these patios. I had sent him a questionnaire in advance, which he handed me as soon as we had greeted each other, but the interview continued while we took pictures and for quite some time afterwards. He spoke quickly and in a low voice, with an accent that reminded me of Italian. His look was quite intense. The first questions were, of course, about the synod of bishops set to begin the following day, in which the Prelate of Opus Dei was to participate at the express wish of Pope Benedict XVI.

*Your Excellency, there are those who think that this Synod will be characterized by a certain rigidity.*

Then they are mistaken. What the Holy Father wants to do is to listen to all the bishops of the world and the theologians and specialists who have been invited to attend. I am sure that questions will be discussed that will help everyone to live the sacrament of the Eucharist better, and that the decisions taken will be of great help for the universal Church.

*Benedict XVI’s meetings with Bernard Fellay, the leader of the LeFebvrists, and with Hans Küng, have given a different image of the present Pontiff. How do you interpret these audiences?*
Although we still have little specific information about their content, what is clear is that the Church continues to be open to everyone. The Pope is doing all he can to help people come closer to God, to recover souls for God. And those who seek the truth will find it.

*Bishop Echevarría, a few days ago Benedict XVI blessed a statue of the founder of Opus Dei in the Vatican. Will the Work’s relationship with this Pope be as good as with the previous one?*

In St. Peter’s Basilica there are 150 statues of saints from every epoch. I think that the blessing of these sculptures by the Popes has great symbolic value. It places before our eyes the reality that the saints contributed to the building up of the Church and adorned it with their virtues. At the same time, the Church presents Catholics with the attractive example of these faithful sons and daughters of hers.

*And what does this mean for Opus Dei?*

In the specific case of St. Josemaría, his statue on the Basilica wall also shows that the Prelature exists to serve the Church and that this commitment represents the most ardent desire of all its faithful.

*And the Pope blessed the statue…*

As you can imagine, the blessing imparted by Benedict XVI was a cause of great joy for me. At the same time, there came to my mind something that St. Josemaría said: every day, even the most extraordinary ones, we have to care for what is ordinary and small, which for many people passes unnoticed.

*What changes have taken place in the Prelature since the Founder died in 1975?*

Opus Dei is a living organism that grows and matures over time, with God’s grace and following his plans, with each one’s effort to struggle, and also with our personal mistakes, which are always a great school of learning.

*Despite the mistakes, you can’t deny that during the Pontificate of John Paul II the Work has grown in every facet.*

These thirty years have seen, as is natural, a growth in the number of people and countries, and new apostolic undertakings. The situation of the
Church and the world has changed; one need only consider what the Pontificate of John Paul II has meant. But what has not changed in Opus Dei is the substance: its foundational spirit, the implications of the call to holiness and apostolate in ordinary life, in professional work, and in the exercise of a Christian’s daily duties.

But what have been the most important changes?

Perhaps the most important changes—to use your words—have been the result of two events of great importance since 1975: the structuring of Opus Dei as a personal prelature, something that St. Josemaría had already foreseen from the beginning, and the canonization of that holy priest. These two milestones bring with them consequences that are to a certain extent incalculable. Among others, one could say that they have helped confirm, in a solemn way, the spiritual aim of Opus Dei in the heart of the Church.

And what did the canonization mean for the members of the Work

I think that, with the canonization, the faithful of the Prelature have seen themselves called upon to increase their responsibility, their evangelizing commitment. In the months preceding that event, I told myself that the canonization had to spur a new resolution of conversion, of seeking God.

Did that conversion have something to do with the new apostolates that the Work is now developing?

The apostolates depend upon the needs of each one’s environment. In accord with the new needs of society and souls, the appropriate apostolic works develop. Specifically, in the last few years many different initiatives have arisen in the area of the family. I have had the good fortune of hearing many people tell me about the projects they are developing, each in one’s own way: activities of spiritual formation for married women and men, courses on conjugal love or on raising one’s children.

It seems that the apostolates of the Prelature are centered on the family.

I think it’s only logical that so many initiatives of this sort should arise, since the family is a source of life and happiness, now and always. One sees each day more clearly the importance of the family, which brings the
indispensable environment of affection, and which at the same time strengthens civil society.

Is the family apostolate specific to Opus Dei?

In Opus Dei, apostolate is carried out from person to person, from friend to friend. The effectiveness of the evangelization does not depend just on structures or organizations. The key is that we Catholics know how to make Jesus present, that we help others discover the beauty and truth of his words, and that we deal charitably with those around us.

That is also the evangelizing work of all Christians.

Para servir, servir, to be useful, serve, as St. Josemaría often said. These words can also be applied to the evangelizing work of the Church: if we serve others we will be useful to the Church as transmitters of the Gospel. Thus we will present the credentials of a Christian.

How have you been affected by having two cardinals in your institution or, at present, two bishops in Spain, the archbishops of Burgos and Tarragona?

Before answering, I would like to correct the terms of your question, because the Prelature does not “have” cardinals or bishops. Cardinals and bishops depend on the Pope in their work. But I would go even further, even with the risk of appearing exaggerated: the word “have” is also not appropriate when referring to any of the faithful of the Prelature. Certainly, one usually says that a person “belongs” to Opus Dei, or that a diocese “has” a certain number of priests or faithful. But, as is obvious, this belonging does not mean property, but another kind of relationship.

I accept the correction.

No, forgive me. I’m making this point because it seems to me that occasionally one speaks mistakenly of the Church as an institution that in some way can “manage” its faithful, when in reality the Church is a home where one lives freely. And, in Opus Dei, the first defender of his own and other people’s freedom was always St. Josemaría.

But you can’t deny that these appointments affect the Work?

The fact that some priests of the Prelature are named cardinals and bishops amounts to a loss of manpower for the specific apostolates of
Opus Dei, which we accept with the joy of serving the universal Church also in this way.

Speaking of freedom. It is a fact that Spanish society is no longer Christian. Neither in its laws, nor in its customs. How do you see the future of our country?

I have serious doubts about whether one can make such an absolute statement. I believe that a good part of Spanish society is Christian and, in more than a few aspects, that almost the whole of Spanish society is such. It is enough to recall, for example, the numerous deeply-rooted and popular traditions with an eminently religious meaning. One should also make clear that in reality it is persons who are Christians.

Perhaps the fact is that in Spain some who call themselves Christians aren’t really such, or don’t act like they are.

Well, in what refers to the faith, the future is open. On the one hand, we Catholics trust above all in the grace and mercy of God, not in our human ability to persuade. On the other hand, since the faith is transmitted by means of apostolate, the future is in our hands. If we Catholics encourage one another to be loyal, cheerful, helpful, humble, upright, industrious; if we participate in the public life of our country, exercising our rights and duties as citizens, then the panorama of the Church in Spain is promising.

But you can’t deny that the environment isn’t Christian.

The external environment certainly has an influence, but the future of the faith depends above all on the faithfulness of Catholics.

Perhaps it is very different from what you have just seen in the gathering of young people in Cologne.

Those who took part in the meeting in Cologne experienced the desire to find Christ on the part of many hundreds of thousands of young people, and also on the part of older people who have been moved by this worldwide mobilization.

But, aside from Cologne, you can’t deny that the world is distancing itself from God.
You are right. Looking at the other side of the picture, one sees many symptoms of the fact that unfortunately, only too frequently, we men distance ourselves from God. It is not a matter of listing once more the causes of concern, the outbreaks of violence, the plague of loneliness, the lack of respect for life, the spread of a relativistic mentality, so clearly denounced by Benedict XVI, etc. But I don't want to focus on the evils found in today’s world, nor do I want to overlook the many positive elements in present day society.

But what can a Christian do in the face of this situation?

The way to respond to evil is not to complain or lament, but to make the humble and cheerful decision to provide our grain of sand to the collective construction of the good. There comes to mind another expression very much liked by St. Josemaría: “sowers of peace and joy.” That’s how we Christians have to respond.

There are still some people in Spain who are mistrustful of Opus Dei’s presence in public life, of its strength and power.

I think the attitude that you allude to on the part of some—not as many as one might think—reflects the problem I referred to earlier. The mistake of seeing Catholics in general, or the faithful of Opus Dei in particular, as pieces of a mechanism, part of an organization, blindly obeying orders coming from on high, and acting “en bloc” in political questions. Nothing is further from the truth. The millions of people who have known Opus Dei at first hand in Spain, in its almost 80 years of existence, give unanimous witness to the freedom that they find there.

Perhaps these people are unhappy with the presence of members of the Prelature in politics.

I think there is a need to understand better the freedom of Catholics in public life and politics, and to overcome ideological positions that belong to the past, or that result from rather closed mentalities. Then they will see that the faithful of Opus Dei enjoy the same freedom as other citizens, neither more nor less.

Do you think that the institutions in the Church have an important role to play in society?
One of the clearest signs of progress in our society is that the rights of the citizen, of the common man, are being given more and more importance. Human communities are formed through the free exercise of voting, through the payment of taxes, through competent professional work, etc. It is the citizens who make the decisions that determine the make up of society.

*And do you think the common man is interested in what religion has to offer him?*

Of course. There is nothing more logical than that the Church develop its work of proclaiming the Gospel among the laity, because it is their role, with freedom and responsibility, to bring the light of the faith into the heart of human activities, ennobling all human tasks, constructing a society to the measure of the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

*But what if people aren’t interested in what religion has to offer?*

The destiny of the Church and the destiny of the world are not opposed, or on separate paths. Both depend on the responsibility of the citizens, and of Catholics, especially the lay people.

*I see you as very optimistic.*

That’s because, rising above all contemporary events, our Lord’s promise provides a sure foundation for our hope. “I am with you always, to the close of the age.” These words fill me with great optimism, because the Truth always triumphs, despite the need to overcome suffering and opposition.

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**Interview granted to the Polish News Agency, KAI -- November 29, 2005**

*An interview granted by the Prelate of Opus Dei to Marcin Przeciszewski, director of KAI (Polish Catholic news agency). Bishop Echevarría speaks about a*
variety of topics, including holiness in the world, participation in public life, contemporary culture and the future of evangelization.

Marcin Przeciszewski,

November 29, 2005

Interview granted to the Polish News Agency, KAI

Your excellency, what is the core of Opus Dei’s message for the contemporary world?

Opus Dei’s message is simply an expression of the call of God’s love to all men and women to deeply live and spread the Christian message. What is special is its emphasis on the sanctification of one’s daily work and circumstances.

St. Josemaría Escrivá united two truths that have frequently been separated. On the one hand, he used to repeat that the world is not a negative reality. “God saw that it was good,” says the book of Genesis. On the other hand, and this is also taught by Genesis, man was placed in the world precisely in order to work.

Consequently, in order to fulfill God’s will, to live one’s faith fully, to be a saint, there is no need to abandon the world. One’s work and ordinary occupations can be converted into a means and an occasion to live, in a heroic manner, charity towards God and one’s neighbor.

*From its beginnings, Opus Dei has preached the idea of holiness in everyday realities carried out at each moment of one’s life. It is a beautiful ideal, but how can it be made a reality, amid so many problems that crop up each day and the dizzying rhythm of daily life?*

The first condition is to gracefully accept both the problems and the dizzying rhythm that you mentioned. If we refuse to be discouraged by the difficulties, we are already half way there.

But the essential thing is to cultivate a friendship with Jesus Christ each day, showing that we love him in truth, and not just in theory. We also need to dedicate some time every day to making personal contact with God: in Holy Mass, prayer, reading the Gospel... It isn’t that difficult. What’s needed is the decision to do so and the effort to organize oneself,
perhaps considering how we can make better use of our time, or give up some of the time devoted to television.

Jesus himself told us: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” If we allow God to enter our lives, our problems won’t go away but, shared with him, we will see them in a new light, as an opportunity to serve him and those around us. If we open the door of our heart to God, those around us will also enter.

Besides speaking with God, we also need to exercise the human virtues. St. Josemaría Escrivá always emphasized the importance of cultivating the virtues that make social life more pleasant: generosity, cheerfulness, a spirit of service, love for freedom.

Some members of Opus Dei carry out important functions in public life, including intellectuals, businessmen and politicians. How can one be a loyal and sincere Christian in politics? Politics has been defined as “the art of compromise.” And a Christian cannot “compromise” in matters of principle. How can you reconcile these two positions.

In the first place, one shouldn’t exaggerate. Being a loyal Christian can at times be difficult, but there’s no need to over dramatize it. Many non-Christians also act conscientiously, with firm reference points that they consider non-negotiable. Otherwise, they would be people without principles, and a man without principles is one in whom an upright person can place no trust. I have seen non-Christian politicians give up a cabinet post for reasons of conscience, because they disagreed with a decision of their government. If a Catholic, to defend his faith, were to see himself as morally obliged to take that step, he would not be doing something unheard of, although it would be a question of an exceptional case.

Politics, by its very nature, calls for debate, consensus, a seeking of agreement. But first it requires prudence and, in a special way, the desire to serve the common good, integrity. Given this foundation, the effort of politicians, including Catholics, requires working seriously, explaining one’s reasons clearly, listening to others’ points of view, even when one disagrees with them. To sanctify this work, one must carry it out well, with quality and with charity, rectifying when one makes a mistake. For Catholics,
political tasks are not an uncomfortable responsibility but an exciting challenge.

Permit me to add that most of the faithful in Opus Dei have quite normal jobs in society, although all of them try to discover the divine meaning hidden in every job when it is carried out with love for God and the desire to serve one’s neighbor.

Opus Dei places great value on confession. Nevertheless, this sacrament has almost disappeared in many countries and in some local churches. What is the role of confession in the life of someone who wants to be a Catholic?

Opus Dei does not place “great value” on confession, in the sense that this is a new point in its message. One only has to look briefly at the Catechism of the Catholic Church to realize that confession is something desired by God and encouraged by the Church. The Prelature has the duty of reminding the Catholic faithful that the possibility of making use of this sacrament is a great gift of God that we should be grateful for, not an annoying imposition. It is a means that we need.

In confession God forgives our sins. The word “sin” perhaps sounds a bit strong today, but the concept is as valid as that of “conscience.” In the life of each of us good and bad coexist, and it’s not to human justice that we have to answer for what is bad in us, but above all to God. The difference is that God does everything possible to forgive us.

So our faith teaches us that the Sacrament of Penance is an immense gift that liberates us. Confessions helps us to be realistic and to recognize our limitations without euphemisms. It shows us the love of a God who always forgives, because he is a Father. In addition, our experience of mercy invites us to sincerely practice mercy with everyone we meet.

How do you evaluate contemporary culture? The Church has always maintained a dialogue with culture, trying to evangelize it. As Catholics, which currents should we accept in contemporary culture, and which should we reject?

I don’t think it’s possible to make a generalized judgment about contemporary culture, because any evaluation requires a lot of qualifications. In regard to the second part of your question, I don’t think Catholics are faced with a choice between the currents of culture that they
should accept and those that they should reject. Throughout history Catholics have been creators of culture. They have known how to express their faith in the philosophy they help formulate, their hope in the art they foster, their charity in works of service. Christians now have a great responsibility to present their faith in cultural terms that are understandable and attractive to their fellow citizens.

Overcoming relativism, which Pope Benedict XVI has referred to a number of times, requires that Catholics, and specifically the laity, make a constructive contribution, not just a condemnation. In particular, this applies to what we might call “professional cultures”: the culture proper to the scientific or legal community, that of the world of film or fashion. In all morally sound professional cultures Christians have to be present, not only to carry on an external dialogue, as though from the outside, but to offer their contribution from within. They need to carry out scientific research that respects the dignity of the person and that improves the quality of life, encourage laws that protect the family, etc.

To use a metaphor, we have to “translate” into all the professional languages the great Christian lexicon, which also includes some of the most important accomplishments of human progress: truth, freedom, beauty, charity.

A few months ago Brother Roger Schutz of Taizé died, a great promoter of ecumenism. What is Opus Dei doing in this field? What should each of us do, as Christians, for Christian unity?

As far as the work of Opus Dei in the field of ecumenism is concerned, I could point out various things connected with the situation of the faithful of the Prelature. For example, I recently had the opportunity of participating in the episcopal ordination of a priest of the Prelature in Tallinn, Estonia, where an intense ecumenical activity is being carried out in a climate of fraternity with non-Catholic Christians and also with believers of other religions.

But I would like to refer to a more institutional aspect, very dear to St. Josemaría: the non-Catholic cooperators of Opus Dei. Since the Holy See granted its approval, in the times of Pius XII, thousands of persons of all religions have been cooperating with the work of Opus Dei all over the
world. The help they provide the Prelature represents, as is obvious, a sign of affection towards the Catholic Church, the overcoming of differences, a drawing close that prepares the path of unity.

*With your visit to Poland, how do you see our country and the Church here? What are the strong points in our Catholicism and in what points could we improve?*

I think the best way to answer your question is to recall the messages that John Paul II directed to the Poles, especially the addresses that he gave on his various trips.

I have had the opportunity to come to this beloved country on various occasions, to meet many Poles, to enjoy their hospitality. I can say that for me the history of the Church in Poland represents a constant source of encouragement. Its strength in the faith and its loyalty in the face of difficulties are a firm reference point. It is also good to see that God is rewarding this fidelity, with the flourishing of priestly vocations here.

Perhaps this is one of the challenges of the present moment. Circumstances have changed, freedom is no longer at stake. The moment has arrived to struggle for other goals. It is always the time for faithfulness.

*The Servant of God, John Paul II, has often encouraged Polish Catholics to undertake a “creative participation in the European scene.” What, in your opinion, should be the role of Polish Catholicism in the evangelization of Europe? And specifically, how should we carry out the mission of evangelizing Europe?*

Given what I have just said, I am convinced that Poland is called to play an important role in the new evangelization of Europe. As regards the way to carry this out, I think we need to take into account that we find ourselves faced with an evangelization that is new, as John Paul II repeated, and as Benedict XVI has also stressed. It is new because, for many Europeans, ours will be the first announcement that they receive of the good news of the Gospel. And it is new because we have to transmit the faith with new vigor, with renewed joy and eagerness. Europe not only has Christian roots; it also has a beautiful Christian future.

*The Holy Father John Paul II met with those in Opus Dei on various occasions and had a high regard for the Work. He elevated the Founder to the*
altars. Within the rich heritage of this Pope, what aspects do you consider especially important? How should we undertake the work that he has left to us?

John Paul II has left us with a very rich inheritance. He has bequeathed to us, among other things, the example of his courageous faith. It might seem paradoxical, but I think that he was a popular Pope because he knew how to be “unpopular” when, in defense of the truth, he was called upon to be so.

John Paul II was very aware that Christ has saved all mankind and therefore he traveled to the furthest corners of the planet to announce the Gospel. Anticipating the times, he took giant steps in “globalizing” the apostolate. His example moves us to not limit our zeal to the evangelization of Europe or the historic frontiers of Christianity, but to extend our concern to the whole world, with magnanimity. His holy life has helped highlight the perennial newness of the Christian message.

John Paul II has also passed on to us many more legacies, all exceedingly rich. I have only pointed out two because they present us with a gift and also a task. To make his legacy bear fruit, we can count on another great gift of his: his witness to hope. Certainly hope is a gift from God, but it is strengthened by the example of the saints. And John Paul II, day after day, offered our world a heroic witness to hope.

Books published

The Eucharist and Christian Life

*The Eucharist and Christian Life*

A new book by Bishop Javier Echevarría

In the year of the golden anniversary of his priestly ordination, which also coincided with the Year of the Eucharist proclaimed for the whole
Church by Pope John Paul II, the Prelate of Opus Dei has published a book of reflections on the Eucharistic Mystery. Its title is *Eucaristía y vida cristiana* (The Eucharist and Christian Life). In the words of its author, it tries to show “how the primacy of this divine gift is intimately related to the gift of divine filiation.”

These words also show that “Christian life” in this book means not only a set of pious practices or a certain moral conduct, but the ordinary life of a son or daughter of God, made up of work, dedication to one’s family, rest, the experience of suffering…. In each chapter, the Prelate of Opus Dei considers these varied elements of daily life in light of the great “mystery of faith and of love” (as St. Josemaría called it) that is the Eucharist.

For example, in connection with the topic of the family, the reader is invited to relive the miracle of the wedding feast at Cana, a prefiguration of the Eucharist (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1335), finding there a moving manifestation of Christ’s benevolence.

The book was published in Madrid by *Ediciones Rialp*.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
A Statue of St. Josemaria at St. Peter's Basilica

A statue of the founder of Opus Dei was installed on the exterior of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome on August 30. The sculpture, carved from a single block of Carrara marble, is approximately 5 meters (16 feet) in height, and is in a vaulted niche situated on the façade of the left transept of the Basilica, also known as the arm of St. Joseph, very close to the entrance to the sacristy. The niches in this section of the Basilica were destined by John Paul II for sculptures of saints and founders of our era. In the Vatican there are more than 150 statues of saints, including those situated on the colonnade around St. Peter’s Square.

The statue is the work of the Italian artist Romano Cosci, who worked in his studio in Pietrasanta, in the province of Lucca, in Tuscany. “It has been a great year of intense work to produce something very hard to make: the statue of a saint. An artist is almost never fully satisfied with his work. I wanted it to be pleasing to the faithful who see it, and to help them appreciate the figure of a priest who sought to fulfill God’s will in everything,” the sculptor said.

Cosci’s creation represents St. Josemaría dressed in the priestly vestments for Mass, with his arms slightly opened. Below are carved the papal shields of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, during whose pontificates the sculptor began and finished his work. At the saint’s feet are two angels, one of whom is presenting to St. Josemaría an open book, with words of Christ from the Gospel that the founder of Opus Dei had often meditated on: *si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnes traham ad meipsum*. “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (*Jn 12:32*).

On September 14, the Holy Father Benedict XVI blessed the statue in the presence of a festive audience of about a thousand people. Before the Holy Father arrived, there were addresses by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría; the Archpriest of the Vatican Basilica, Cardinal Francesco Marchisano; and the sculptor, Romano Cosci. Attending the ceremony were Cardinals Giovanni Cheli, Julian Herranz, and Claudio
Hummes, as well as Archbishop Angelo Comastri and Bishop Vittorio Lanzani.

The statue was unveiled when Pope Benedict XVI arrived. The Holy Father blessed it and said a brief prayer: “O God, who has chosen, in the Church, St. Josemaría, priest, to proclaim the universal call to sanctity and the apostolate, pour your blessing upon this statue and let all of those who see it be inspired to faithfully fulfill their daily work in the spirit of Christ and to serve with ardent love the work of the redemption. Through Christ our Lord.”

Benedict XVI then paused to pray for a few moments beneath the image, greeted the notables present and all of the faithful, and congratulated the sculptor.

Other News

On July 9, 2005 a solemn Mass in honor of St. Josemaría was held in the chapel of the Apostolic Nunciature in Jakarta. Presiding over the Eucharist was Archbishop Malcolm Ranjith, Apostolic Nuncio to Indonesia and East Timor. Concelebrating with him was Msgr. Ramon Lopez Mondejar, Regional Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Southeast Asia. Some 150 people attended the Mass.

A Mass of Thanksgiving in honor of St. Josemaría was also held in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, in Johore Bahru, Malaysia, on September 17. The celebrant was Father Michael Chang, a priest of Opus Dei of Malay origin. Some 100 people attended, a number of them coming from the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

On October 2, Msgr. Alex Amante, Vicar General of the Diocese of
San Pablo, in the province of Laguna, Philippines, blessed the new reredos for the chapel of the Seminary of San Pedro. The reredos features two priests side by side, St. Josemaría and St. Jean Marie Vianney: “Both were exemplary priests who inspired many other priests to sanctify themselves in the exercise of their ministry and to give themselves fully to God,” said Msgr. Amante, who ended his homily with an invitation to pray for their intercession. In addition to the seminarians and their families, many people from nearby cities who have devotion to St. Josemaría attended the ceremony.

The “Association of Friends of St. Josemaría” organized an exposition about the founder of Opus Dei in Rouen to celebrate the third anniversary of his canonization.

With the blessing of Archbishop Jean-Charles Descubes, and with the enthusiastic support of the pastor, the event took place in the Church of Saint Godard, one of the city’s architectural jewels.

The exhibit, which lasted four days, began on October 10 after Mass was celebrated. It included some twenty panels that described with photographs and explanatory texts the various stages of St. Josemaría’s life and the spirit of Opus Dei. Visitors could also watch a documentary video of the canonization ceremony.

An Illustrated Life of St. Josemaria published

Through the Mountains, an illustrated volume in comic book format presenting the life of St. Josemaría, has been published in seven languages: English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, and Dutch. The 80-page book was edited and printed in Belgium. The authors studied St. Josemaría’s life in depth in order to be able to illustrate it faithfully and
exactly. Belgium has a world wide reputation for the production of *bande dessinée* (illustrated volumes) of this type.

His determination to find God in everything he did, his love for our Lady, and his total trust in an active communion of the saints are the aspects of St. Josemaría’s life that most influenced the authors during their creative work. “He is a communicator of love,” was the reaction of the script writer Paule Fostroy.
News
Other News

Pastoral activities have begun in the temporary facilities of the Church dedicated to St. Josemaría in the Santa Fe district of Mexico City.

In addition to three Sunday Masses and a daily celebration of the Eucharist, catechesis has been started for children and adults.

Initiatives are also being carried out for the most needy in the adjoining impoverished neighborhoods, including an office for free legal aid, a psychological and educational consultative office, a medical clinic, soccer clinics for children and teenagers, and literacy courses for adults.

Since October 6, 2002, date of the canonization of the founder of Opus Dei, Archbishop Fernand Franck of Luxembourg has celebrated an annual Thanksgiving Mass in the Luxembourg Cathedral. On October 28, 2005, many families from the city of Luxembourg and the surrounding area were invited to attend this liturgical act. Two Luxembourg priests, Fathers Marcel Pündel and Michel Majerus, and two priests of the Opus Dei Prelature, Stéphane Seminckx of Brussels and Josef Arquer of Trier, concelebrated with the Archbishop.

Archbishop Franck referred in his homily especially to recent events in the life of the Church: the World Youth Day with the new Pope Benedict XVI in Cologne, from August 16 to 21, and the Synod of Bishops in Rome. Both events had as a central theme the mystery of the Eucharist. He asked those present to consider the motto of the World Youth Day: “We have come to worship him.” It is an invitation to visit Jesus frequently in the Tabernacles where he is present. He also cited a point from The Way: “Don’t omit the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. After your usual vocal prayer, tell Jesus, really present in the Tabernacle, of the cares and worries of your day. And you will receive light and strength for your life as a Christian” (The Way, no. 554).
On the occasion of the Year of St. James, in 2004, a sculptural display was erected on the Camino de Santiago, at the entrance to the Compostelan city, called the “Porta Itineris Sancti Jacobi” and also the European Door, which includes a bronze relief of St. Josemaría Escrivá together with 19 other personalities connected with the pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. James. In the summer of 2005, on its first anniversary, the Xunta (Governing Body) of Galicia published a commemorative book that includes sketches of the 20 people represented, including Pope John Paul II, St. Dominic de la Calzada, Pope Callistus II, Diego Gelmirez, Isabel of Portugal and Jan Van Eyck.

The three 20th century people represented on the Porta Itineris are: Cardinal Quiroga Palacios, Archbishop of Santiago, and two pilgrims, John Paul II and St. Josemaría Escrivá. “Both,” says the book, “bear witness to the contemporary concern to undertake a pilgrimage to the apostolic tomb.”

St. Josemaría was in Santiago de Compostela on various occasions. The first time was during the Holy Year in 1938.

New Centers of the Prelature

The Regional Vicars have established Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Buenos Aires (Argentina, 2 centers), Cáceres (Spain), Malmö (Sweden), Mérida (Venezuela), New York, Princeton (New Jersey), Sabadell (Spain), and Saint Augustine (Trinidad & Tobago).
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
ELIS: Forty Years Spent Forming Italian Youth

The ELIS Center offers courses in electronics, mechanics, multimedia technology, watch-making, telecommunications, logistics and hospitality services, among others. Inaugurated by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1965, it is located in the Tiburtino-Callatino area, then one of the poorest in Rome.

ELIS (Education, Labor, Instruction, Sports) covers an area of ten acres. It includes a residence for 120 students, class rooms and laboratories, a school of hospitality services and a sports school with more than 400 members. In addition, its library and the parish of San Giovanni Battista al Collatino, attached to ELIS, are important neighborhood reference points. With the assistance of a non-governmental organization, it carries out development projects in China, Vietnam, the Philippines and some countries in Latin America.

ELIS has helped educate more than 10,000 students. Currently, 97% of the young men who complete their studies find work in less than a year. The most recent developments at ELIS include a workshop aimed at creating new businesses and a program that prepares instructors for the Cisco Academy Training Center. Some 350 schools send their teachers to ELIS to take courses to improve their professional skills. In ELIS, students receive a human and Christian formation aimed at making their profession a service to others.

On the occasion of ELIS’s 40th anniversary, on November 20th, feast of Christ the King, Bishop Javier Echevarría celebrated the Eucharist there for more than 3,000 people, including students, alumni, teachers and staff.

Citing St. Josemaría, Bishop Echevarría said: “In a center such as this, young people learn the true value of work, because through work a Christian can attain sanctity.” At another point, he recalling the words that Paul VI spoke on the day of its inauguration: “in ELIS everything is Opus Dei. Here everything is God’s work.”

After the ceremony, the Prelate visited the facilities. In the vestibule of the school he saw the famous Pincio clock, a landmark in one of Rome’s most frequented tourist areas, which is being repaired by the watch-making
students. The Prelate received a cross made by students from the gold- and silver-smith program and a DVD prepared by future professionals in multi-media technology. He also visited the SAFI school of hospitality services, one of the ELIS programs. At the end of the morning, in one of the facilities in the sports complex, he met with the students and staff of ELIS and with families from all over Rome. Almost 6,000 people took part in this catechetical get-together.

In Brief

Zonnewende (Netherlands) -- A symposium on fashion, and a family day

In September a symposium dedicated to fashion was held at the Zonnewende conference center. The talk by Elisa Garcia focused on the anthropology of fashion, while Janet van der Does de Willebois spoke about the relationship between the religious beliefs of various African tribes and their way of dressing, based on her book *Bodywork: Dress as Cultural Tool*. The symposium ended with a practical session given by Inge van der Kuil-Kramer, a director and advisor for *Color Me Beautiful*.

A few days later, on October 2, the traditional “Family Day” brought together a good sized group of parents and children. The kids entertained themselves with sports, games and competitions. A family orientation session for the parents was entitled “Help! my son is entering adolescence.” It was directed by two pedagogues, the parents of five children. This meeting gave rise to an informal exchange of opinions and experiences among those present.
Belo Horizonte (Brazil) -- Constitutional law and moral values

Between June and October of 2005 a series of conferences on constitutional law was held at the Mangabeiras Cultural Center. Participants included professionals in the field of law and students in the final two years of law school.

The conference was opened by Professor Ives Gandra da Silva Martins, a specialist in constitutional law. Making reference to the national situation, he stressed the need to promote institutional and legislative changes in accord with an ethical perspective based on respect for the Constitution and for international accords.

This concern is especially timely in Brazilian society, since in recent months the government has sent to Congress proposals aimed at broadening the legal practice of abortion, experimentation with embryonic stem cells, etc.

Another participant in the conference was Dr. José Bonifácio de Andrade, a former federal Attorney General and presidential advisor, who is currently Attorney General for the State of Minas Gerais. His talk focused on the need to go deeper into the foundations of natural law as a condition for the moral legitimacy of possible constitutional reforms.

The conference included both seminars and case study sessions.

Manila -- A university Eucharistic procession

On October 7, the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in the Philippines presided at a solemn procession closing the Eucharistic Year at the University of Asia and the Pacific. This was the first time the university had organized a ceremony of this kind.
During the preceding weeks, the chaplaincy carried out an extensive catechesis regarding the significance of the ceremony to help students derive the greatest possible spiritual benefit, whether Catholics or not.

The response was very positive. Students filled the streets where the procession was held and greeted the passing of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament with reverence and piety. The procession began and ended at the Stella Orientis Oratory, the university’s chapel.

Dublin -- Study group on bioethics

The *Bioethics Study Group* (BSG) was begun in Dublin in the summer of 2002. Made up of doctors and academicians in disciplines related to bioethics, it is under the guidance of a six person executive committee.

Since 2002, the BSG has organized a yearly conference. In 2005, a conference entitled “Humanitarian Medicine” took place at *Trinity College*, Dublin. Participants in other cities were able to follow the event by videoconference. The program included a first session with three talks and, in the afternoon, a round table discussion of the topics dealt with in the morning.

Regular participants at the BSG conferences include the President of the *Royal College of Surgeons* of Ireland and the President of the *Medical Council*. A website, www.bsggroup.org, has been set up to announce conferences in advance and facilitate registration.

Valencia (Spain) -- Opening the Academic Year

The writer Juan Manuel de Prada, recipient of the 2004 National Prize for Narrative Literature, gave a lecture entitled “Literature, Culture and Faith in the 21st Century” in the ceremony opening the 2005/2006 school
year at the La Alameda Student Residence. His words were a reflection on the need for Western culture to recognize its Christian roots in order to recover its identity and once again produce true art. “If relativism has led us to give up believing in truth, then beauty and art become empty amusement, a nice veil behind which nothing lies. All that remains is superficiality and boredom.”

Although no one, de Prada stressed, can consider himself the owner of the truth, to renounce seeking it with the excuse that truth can never be possessed represents a grave desertion. He also spoke out against the cultural “ostracism” suffered by those who attempt to uphold the position that truth exists. Finally, after a dark diagnosis of the difficulties found in the postmodern world, he expressed confidence in the future and invited those present to take part in the “battle of ideas,” by defending the transcendental values and respect for the person that form an intrinsic part of the European tradition.
the school and a meeting with representatives from the 38 graduating classes (1500 students, in total).

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Madrid -- Closing the Year of the Eucharist

The Pontifical Basilica of St. Michael organized a number of ceremonies in October to honor the Most Blessed Sacrament and to pray for the fruitfulness of the Synod of Bishops then being held in Rome.

Julio Lozano, the Basilica’s organist, played a number of motets during the solemn exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. The organ of the Basilica of St. Michael, following its restoration, is considered one of the best baroque organs in Spain.

During the solemn exposition on Sundays, Eucharistic meditations were preached before the Blessed Sacrament by Auxiliary Bishop Cesar A. Franco Martínez of Madrid, Father Pedro Alvarez de Toledo, Vicar of Opus Dei for the Madrid-West delegation, and Fr. Alfonso Carrasco, Professor at the St. Damasus School of Theology in Madrid and Rector of the Major Seminary of the Archdiocese of Madrid.

The closing of the Eucharistic Year included the projection of a video showing scenes from the catechesis of St. Josemaría Escrivá on the Eucharist.

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Londrina (Brazil) -- MARE Project

MARÊ is a project of the Caravelas Cultural Center for students who need special assistance in the public schools of Londrina.

The project, which began in January 2002, is aimed at students who are having special difficulties in their classes of Portuguese, English and Mathematics.
Every week a group of high school and university volunteers go to the Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá public school, which is located in a poor neighborhood on the northern edge of the city. There the volunteers look over the assignments given by the teachers and help the children with the more difficult exercises. Besides the regular curriculum, the classes also provide an efficacious formation in Christian doctrine and life.

The project is showing good results. The children receive individualized attention, with a small number of students assigned to each volunteer. The goal of this social development work is to help each child achieve his maximum potential. The parents, who for the most part work outside the home all day and cannot give much time to their children's studies, have gratefully noticed the project’s benefits.

Yauyos (Peru) -- Solidarity Camp

During their vacation at the end of July, a dozen boys aged 14 and 15, who take part in the Costa Club’s activities, carried out social assistance projects in various villages located at an altitude of between 10,000 and 13,000 feet in the northern part of the province of Yauyos.

The biggest project was carried out in the village of Tomas, where the boys cleaned, sanded and painted the walls of the village school. On the final day they gave the children books, colored pencils, pictures, notebooks, dolls and toy autos. The mayor and the school principal expressed their gratitude to the boys.

The twelve participants in the 2005 Solidarity Camp returned home tired but happy after using their vacation for an activity that brought assistance to others.
Kimbondo (Congo) -- Conference for priests in CAFAS

In connection with the recent issuance of the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, on October 31 a study conference for priests was held at the Centre Africain de Formatrion et d’Action Sociale (CAFAS), at Kimbondo, near Kinshasa.

Msgr. Jacques-Marie Nzir, Secretary of the Bishops’ Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith, Fr. Marcel Ndjondjo, Professor of Canon Law, and Fr. Charles Kombe, head of the Catechesis Commission for the Archdiocese of Kinshasa, were the three speakers. They spoke of the need to rediscover the Catechism’s doctrinal value and its importance for the teaching of the faith.

There were many questions from the audience, above all in connection with practical aspects of the use of the Catechism in one’s own priestly life and in pastoral work. Among other topics, the speakers stressed the usefulness of the Catechism’s structure for communicating the faith: profession of faith, celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ, prayer.

Monterrey (Mexico) -- Social work in the mountains

From July 20 to 27, girls from the Alera Club took part in a social work project in the mountains of San Luis Potosi.

Their principal goal was to help strengthen the faith of the area inhabitants, Huasteco Indians who live in extreme poverty.

Leaders from four communities were given courses on how to teach catechism. The girls stressed the importance of the sacraments to parents and prepared a group of children for their First Holy Communion and to receive Confirmation. They also encouraged several couples to regularize
their family situation with the sacrament of matrimony. In addition, they gave a short course on human formation to families and carried out educational and recreational activities for the women and children.

The young women who participated in the project were very pleased with their work and, above all, renewed their own desire to live a more intense Christian life on their return to Monterrey.

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Querétero (Mexico) -- Thirteen years of rural development

A group of fifteen university women has added another link to the chain of rural development programs in the Sierra Gorda organized for the last thirteen years by the Amay Club in Querétero.

The project’s main objective is to provide social services to those in need, while giving the students an opportunity to grow humanly and spiritually.

This year the project took place in the village of Temascales, with the assistance of a group of young women from Canada.

Each morning the young women taking part gathered in a local school. There the tasks for the day were explained and catechism classes for children and their mothers were held.

The construction of drying ovens for fruit proved the most difficult part of the project. Many of the girls learned how to use spades, hammers and wheelbarrows for the first time.

The work days ended with the celebration of Mass in the recently refurbished village chapel.

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Almaty (Kazakhstan) -- Women's leadership

With the aim of helping to develop a generation of women in Kazakh society eager to participate actively in civic life, the Irtysh Cultural Center in Almaty organized a leadership seminar. In preparation for it, organizers visited ten universities around the country, inviting students to participate. Thirty young women signed up for the event.

A seminar entitled “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” was given in April and May. The objective was to prepare the young women to transmit what they learned to their respective universities. In addition to attending the seminar, they took part throughout the year in various cultural meetings on topics such as “Human Rights,” “Good Use of Time,” “Society and the Person,” “The Special Contribution of Women to Society,” “Women at Work,” “Women in the Home,” and “How to Speak in Public.” The program also included a motion picture forum and other formative activities.

In the final phase, participants presented what they had learned in seminars organized by themselves in Almaty and in other cities of Kazakhstan such as Pavoldar, Astana, Kazylorda and Aktobe, and also in Kirghistan (Osh). More than 500 students attended these seminars.

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Santiago (Chile) -- Seminar for Schools of Communication

A group of journalists and teachers in the field of communications from Uruguay, Argentina, Peru and Chile gathered on August 16, 2005 in the Curacavi Conference Center for the first seminar for Schools of Communication in the “Southern Cone” of Latin America. The purpose of the conference was to exchange ideas and experiences about the social responsibility of professionals in the communication media and their role in the re-Christianization of culture.
The opening address was given by Eileen Hudson, dean of the School of Communication in the University of Montevideo (Uruguay), who spoke on the need to give a Christian meaning to the various activities related to the formation of journalists. Taking part in the roundtable held at midday were Isabel Gálvez, dean of the School of Communication in the University of Piura (Peru), Maria Ignacia Errázuriz, dean of the School of Communication in the University of the Andes (Chile), and Cristina Fernández, a member of the Board of Directors of the School of Communication at Austral University (Argentina). The speakers explained the institutional profile of their respective academic centers, as reflected in their programs of study, relations between teachers and students, university extension programs, and research projects.

The conference ended with an address by María José Lecaros, vice-rector of the University of the Andes, on the Christian identity that marks Opus Dei’s works of corporate apostolate.

Vancouver (Canada) -- Study weekend

Crestwell Study Centre organized a study weekend for high school girls from September 9 to 11, 2005. It was held in Sooke on the island of Vancouver. Some thirty girls from the city and nearby localities took part.

One of the activities involved analyzing passages from the book *The Little Prince* by Saint-Exupery, applying these to today’s world, and reflecting on the personal contribution each one could make to society in such areas as style of dressing, catechesis, work in the home, and public opinion.

In addition, the girls received classes in anthropology, along with the opportunity to attend Mass each day.
San Salvador (El Salvador) -- Program of Academic Assistance

Wednesday, September 21, 2005, was the tenth anniversary of the Programa de Complementación Académica (PCA), organized by the Sherpas Club. The anniversary was marked by a ceremony attended by the President of the Republic and other important figures. The PCA organizes formative activities for students from various universities. Since 1995 some 1100 young men have taken part in the program.

During the celebration, the President of El Salvador remarked: “I think the excellent academic preparation, the strong attitude of service and concern for society in one’s profession, will help make the students involved in PCA the future leaders that El Salvador needs.”

Kinshasa (Congo) -- Workshop for seminarians

A workshop for seminarians was held from August 1 to 5 at the Yangambi Center, near Kinshasa.

Taking part were young candidates for the priesthood from Kinshasa and other dioceses such as Inongo, Lisala, northeast of the capital, and Tshumbe, in the center of the country. The main theme was “The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Priest’s Life,” very appropriate for the Year of the Eucharist. Several conferences were held, combined with periods of study to reread recent magisterial documents on the Blessed Sacrament, including the Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia and the instruction Redemptionis Sacramentum, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

Several panel discussions among seminarians were held, moderated by a priest. There was also time for sports and walks through the surrounding countryside. The daily timetable included Mass, praying the Liturgy of the Hours, and Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament.
Paris -- A conference at the Garnelles Cultural Center

On Thursday, October 27, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran gave a conference on the controversial question “Does the Holy See have political power?”

Before an audience of a hundred, mostly young people, Cardinal Tauran, who until a few years ago was in charge of relations between the Holy See and other states, unraveled the various questions implicit in the title of his talk. He considered the meaning of political power, the application to international law of the adage *pacta sunt servanda*, “treaties must be observed,” the proper balance of nations in international organisms as a necessary means for the maintenance of a lasting peace, the definition of a just war, the question of disarmament, respect for human rights, etc. His conclusion was that the Holy See is not a state like others: it is a “fellow traveler,” “the voice that mankind’s conscience hopes for, which seeks not to conquer but to convince.” It can only be considered a power if, with Pascal, one affirms that “the role of power is to protect.”

During the question and answer session there was time to consider the Christian roots of Europe, democracy as a form of government, and the situation of Christians in countries undergoing conflict. There were also many references to Pope Benedict XVI. Referring to what a woman in Rome had told him, Cardinal Tauran said: “our new Pope is extraordinary; he says very profound things and people can understand everything he says.”

Cologne -- Open doors for WYD

During the week of August 15 to 21, 2005, the Müngersdorf International Student Residence quadrupled its usual capacity to accept
some three hundred young women participating in World Youth Day from thirteen different countries. The WYD this year, under providential circumstances, was held in Germany with a newly elected German Pope.

A team of about seventy volunteers, mostly German, arrived a week earlier for a training seminar for WYD activities. Organized in teams of ten, the volunteers were given such tasks as preparation and distribution of food, preparing activities for young people in Leverkusen and Düsseldorf, and overseeing the so-called “Adoration Centers” in various churches of Cologne.

The other young women who stayed at the residence followed a program provided by the organizing committee, including daily sessions of catechesis and prayer directed by a priest, and the possibility to attend Holy Mass. Those who so desired were also offered the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Penance. The groups, divided by languages, made use of all the available rooms in the residence as well as the oratory.

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Nairobi (Kenya) -- Strengthening the family in Africa

Strathmore University, Family Network, Family Enrichment Kenya, Strathmore School, Kianda School and Pied Piper Family Entertainment organized a congress on the family from August 19 to 21, 2005. The theme was “Strengthening the Family in Africa.” The role of the family as the basic cell of society was stressed, as well as its potential for furthering national development and helping to solve problems such as AIDS and poverty.

The congress was inaugurated by the Chilean ambassador to Kenya, Pedro Undurraga. Dr. Margaret Ogola spoke on the prevention and treatment of AIDS. Marina Roben spoke about what Africa can learn from the challenges that Europe is confronting. Caesar Mwangi passed on his experience regarding families that emigrate to other countries. Dr. Amon Kasambala, director of the organization “Focus on the Family in Africa,”
suggested various ways that governments could help families contribute in a more direct way to the solution of crucial social problems. Richard Wilkins, an American law professor and director of the “World Center for Family Policies,” spoke on the effects that various laws have on families. Other speakers focused on topics such as the African love for children, the role of the father, and courses for family development.

The audience represented 18 countries. At the end of the congress an award was given to Barclays Bank for its outstanding pro-family policies. The congress was also the inaugural activity for the new organization “Voice of the Family in Africa,” which will dedicate its efforts to putting into effect the initiatives discussed during these days.

Rome -- Tales of suffering: pages of literature

On Tuesday, October 18, in the Protomoteca Hall of the Campidoglio in Rome, a book presentation took place for *Il dolore narrato: pagine di letteratura* (*Tales of Suffering: Pages of Literature*), authored by two women professors from the Campus Biomedico University: Paola Binetti, Director of the Department of Educational Research, and Maria Grazia de Marinis, Dean of the School of Nursing.

The moderator was Domenico Delle Foglie, assistant director of the *Avvenire* newspaper. Also taking part were Maria Pia Garavaglia, deputy to the Mayor of Rome, and Francesco D’Agostino, President of the National Committee on Bioethics.

The book, published by Critical Medicine Publishing, is meant for all who are interested in understanding more deeply the mystery of human suffering. It seeks to help people raise their sights and open themselves up to hope. Coming close to suffering through literature is a specific way of bringing the human sciences to bear in the formation of doctors and nurses and giving them a greater understanding of suffering.
Rio de Janeiro -- Student gathering in Mira-Serra

From September 3 to 7, 2005, a gathering of students took place in the Mira-Serra Conference Center in Petropolis, in the state of Rio de Janeiro. The purpose was to study two important topics: “Citizenship and Public Opinion,” and “The Meaning of Human Love.”

The first address was by Ana Cecilia de Campos Sampaio, an economist. Her topic was the “spiral of silence”: the process whereby the majority becomes mute when a minority of persons presents an unacceptable view on a vital subject such as love, marriage, the family, etc. As a result of the passive role of the majority, this opinion can then come to prevail in society.

There was a practical class on ways to defend the faith and moral values in society. In a heavily populated country like Brazil, any letter or commentary that reaches a means of communication represents the opinion of thousands of persons who fail to take the initiative to express their opinion or don’t know how to do so.

Professor Flor Martha Ferreira spoke on human love. Using literary examples, she explained the Christian and natural moral law principles that govern human affection. She thus showed that human love is on a plane far superior to mere instinct, since it possesses a spiritual dimension.
IN PACE
Faithful of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who died in the second half of the year 2005

In the second half of 2005, 273 faithful of the Prelature and 18 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

The suffrages stipulated by Saint Josemaría 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 and neighbor 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
Christ's Church Subsists in the Catholic Church

Unicity, Subsistence of the Church

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz

Christ founded only one Church—his Church—on Peter, with the guarantee of indefectibility in the face of the persecutions, divisions and obstacles of every kind which she would encounter in the course of history (cf. Mt 16:18). Therefore, only one Church exists, which we confess in the Creed as "one, holy, Catholic and apostolic"[1].

The Second Vatican Council, in n. 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, stated that "this Church, constituted and organized as a society in this present world, subsists in (subsistit in) the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although (licet) many elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside her structure; such elements, as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, impel towards Catholic unity".

As is well known, this famous expression "subsistit in" was subsequently the object of many and contradictory interpretations. The notion became quite widespread that the Council had not wanted to adopt as its own the traditional statement according to which the Church of Christ is (est) the Catholic Church—as was stated in the preparatory schema[2]—so as to be able to say that the Church of Christ subsists also in Christian communities separated from Rome.

In reality, however an analysis of the Council proceedings leads to the conclusion that "[t]he phrase subsistit in is intended, not, only to reconfirm the meaning of the term est, that is, the identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church. Above all, it reaffirms that the Church of Christ, imbued with the fullness of all the means instituted by Christ, perdures (continues, remains) forever in the Catholic Church"[3].

This meaning of the term subsistit coincides with the common language of Western culture and is consistent with classical philosophical
language from Aristotle to St Thomas: that which exists in itself and not in something else is said to subsist\textsuperscript{[4]}. 

"Subsisting is a special case of being. It is being in the form of a subject standing on its own. This is the issue here. The Council wants to tell us that the Church of Jesus Christ as a concrete subject in the present world can be encountered in the Catholic Church. This can occur only once and the notion that subsistit could be multiplied misses precisely what was intended. With the word subsistit, the Council wanted to express the singularity and non-multiplicability of the Catholic Church"\textsuperscript{[5]}.

In this Document of the Council, the assertion of the subsistence of Church of Christ in the Catholic Church is followed by the famous phrase about the presence of many elements of sanctification and truth, belonging to the Church, outside her visible structure.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, already in 1985, in the face of erroneous interpretations, made the following statement in this regard: "...the Council chose the word subsistit precisely in order to make it clear that exists a single 'subsistence' of the Church, while outside her visible structure only elementa ecclesiae exist, which —as elements of the Church— tend and lead toward the Catholic Church"\textsuperscript{[6]}.

More recently, the same Congregation declared: "The interpretation of those who would derive from the formula subsistit in the thesis that the one Church of Christ could subsist also in non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities is therefore contrary to the authentic meaning of Lumen Gentium"\textsuperscript{[7]}.

**Subsistence: universal, particular**

From the context and the meaning of subsistit in in Lumen Gentium, n. 8, it is evident that this subsistence is predicated of the universal Church. However, at times, the notion of "the Church's subsistence" has been applied in a different sense —not univocal but analogical— to particular Churches as well.

Thus, for example, John Paul II wrote of "particular Churches in which there subsists the fullness of the universal Church"\textsuperscript{[8]} or that the "Catholic
Church herself subsists in each particular Church"[9]. The fullness of the universal Church can indeed be predicated of every particular Church, in the sense that, in each particular Church, "the Church universal with all her essential elements is made present"[10]. Therefore, each particular Church is constituted "in the image of the universal Church"[11] and, in each one, "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is truly present and operative (inest et operatur)"[12].

This fullness of the particular Church, however, does not come from its particularity, but rather from the presence in it of all the essential elements of ecclesiality, including the Primacy of the Successor of Peter and the College of Bishops. Indeed, these elements, though not originating in the particularity of the Churches, are interior to them[13]. In order that such a fullness might exist, the particular Church must be inserted into the universal Communio Ecclesiarum, which in turn is not possible without communion with the Roman See and its Bishop[14].

However, this ecclesial fullness is not sufficient to predicate the subsistence of the local Church in the sense of Lumen Gentium, n. 8, since subsistence implies not only the presence of all the essential elements of the Church of Christ, but also their indefectible permanence. And no particular Church has such a guaranteed permanence.

Particular Churches may even disappear, as has happened many times in the course of history. In this sense, it is more accurate to say, with Christus Dominus, that, in a particular Church, the Church of Christ is present and operative (inest et operatur) or that, in the particular Churches, the universal Church exists (exsistit)[15].

Unicity of the Church, existence of non-Catholic Churches

It is important to note that Lumen Gentium, n. 8, in affirming the subsistence of the Church of Christ in the Catholic Church governed by the Successor of Peter and the Bishops in communion with him (and, as already noted, solely in her), refers explicitly to the Church as constituted and organized in this present world, and then immediately adds that outside her visible structure there are many elements of sanctification and truth. This leads us to consider the Church not only in her social
dimension, but also in her mystical-sacramental dimension, as the Mystical Body of Christ\[16\].

The Second Vatican Council, following the usage that was already traditional, employs the term *Church* also for those non-Catholic Christian communities that have preserved the episcopate and a valid Eucharist. Regarding the term *Church*, attributed to these communities, one of the relators in the Commission for the elaboration of the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* explained that it was not their intention to treat the disputed question of what conditions are required for a Christian community to be, in the theological sense, a Church\[17\].

It would seem, therefore, that the intention was only to attribute a sociological, or rather honorific, sense to the term when applied to non-Catholic Christian communities. In reality this does not seem to have been the case, because the same Decree on ecumenism — without making explicit all the conditions required to be a Church — states that "through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in these individual Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows"\[18\]. This expression is to be interpreted in the light of *Lumen Gentium*, that is to say, in the sense that, in these Churches many elements of sanctification and truth exist which belong to the one Church of Christ (the Catholic Church)\[19\].

Later doctrinal and magisterial developments on this topic have led to attributing the title of *particular Churches*, which is certainly of a theological nature, to non-Catholic communities that have preserved the episcopate and the Eucharist\[20\]. With regard to magisterial texts, the most notable pronouncements on this question have been two Documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: the Letter *Communionis Notio* of 1992 which stated that these communities "merit the title of particular Churches"\[21\], and the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* of 2000 which stated that they are "true particular Churches"\[22\].

It is easy to see that where Christ is made present in the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and his Blood, there the Church is present as the Body of Christ, through which Christ effects salvation in history. However, not any and every form of the Church's operative presence constitutes a particular Church, but only this presence with all its essential elements.
Therefore, for a Christian community to be truly a particular Church, "there must be present in it, as a proper element, the supreme authority of the Church: the Episcopal College 'together with its head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him' (Lumen Gentium, n. 22)"[23]. This might seem an insurmountable obstacle to the possibility of affirming that non-Catholic particular Churches are "true particular Churches", and certainly there is much in this area that calls for deeper study.

One possible path for reflection, however, would be the real presence of the Petrine Primacy (and of the Episcopal College) in non-Catholic Churches, based on the unity of the "one and undivided" episcopate[24]: a unity that cannot exist without the Bishop of Rome. Where, on account of apostolic succession, a valid episcopate exists, the Episcopal College with its Head is objectively present as supreme authority (even if, in fact, that authority is not, recognized).

Furthermore, in every valid celebration of the Eucharist, there is an objective reference to the universal communion with the Successor of Peter and with the entire Church[25], independent of subjective convictions.

Perhaps it will be possible along these lines to arrive at a deeper understanding of the fact that these communities, while being separated from Rome, are "true particular Churches". However, it must be remembered that the fact of being not in full communion with the Pope implies a wound in their ecclesiality[26], which is not only of a disciplinary or canonical nature, but is also related to the not full profession of the Catholic faith. Therefore, what is lacking for a non-Catholic particular Church to be fully a Church is not only a belonging to the visible manifestation (in an exterior sense) of the full Christian communion[27].

It is necessary to return always to what the Catholic faith teaches about the unicity of the one Church of Christ so as not to overlook another aspect of capital importance: non-Catholic particular Churches are true Churches on account of what is Catholic in them. Their ecclesiality is based on the fact that "the one Church of Christ has an operative presence in them"[28], and they are not fully Churches —their ecclesiality is wounded— because they lack elements proper to the Catholic Church. In other words, recognizing that these communities, which are not in full communion with the
Catholic Church, have the character of Churches also means necessarily that these Churches are—in an apparent paradox—portions of the one Church, that is to say, of the one Catholic Church, portions in an anomalous theological and canonical situation. One could say similarly that theirs is a "participated ecclesiality according to an imperfect and limited presence of the Church of Christ"[29].

The ecumenical relevance of these ecclesiological topics is obvious; they still need to be more clearly delineated and studied. The commitment to ecumenism, which the Church neither can nor wishes to relinquish, is not limited to doctrinal aspects[30].

"But what is most urgently needed is that 'purification of memory', so often recalled ' by John Paul II, which alone can dispose souls to accept the full truth of Christ"[31].

Certainly, obstacles remain, but there is always room for prayer, thanksgiving, dialogue and hope in the action of the Holy Spirit.[32]


[3] K.J. Becker, "'Subsistit in' — (Lumen Gentium, n. 8)" (cf. L'Osservatore Romano English edition [ORE], 14 December, pp. 11-14). So also the conclusion of Fr U. Betti: "The word 'subsists' has no other meaning than 'continue to exist'. If, therefore, the Church of Christ I continues to exist' (subsistit in) in the Catholic Church, the continuity in existence means a substantial identity of essence" ("Chiesa di Cristo e Chiesa Cattolica" in Antonianum 61 [1986], 743).


[7] Ibid., Declaration Dominus Iesus, n. 6, August 2000, footnote 56.


[9] Ibid., Address to the Bishops of the U.S.A.: "The Catholic Church herself subsists in each particular Church" (Insegnamenti X, 3 [1987], 555).


[12] Decree Christus Dominus, n. 11. For a full and documented analysis of the magisterial and theological development on the topic of particular Churches, see, for example: A. Cattaneo, La Chiesa locale (Citta del Vaticano, 2003).

[13] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter Communionis Notio, n. 13. "In this perspective too, we must see the ministry of the Successor of Peter not only as a 'global' service, reaching each particular Church from 'outside' as it were, but as belonging already to the essence of each particular Church from 'within'" (John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of the U.S.A., 16 September 1987: Insegnamenti X, 3 [1987], 556).


[18] Unitatis Redintegratio, n. 15.

Already in the discussions of the Second Vatican Council on the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, some of the Council Fathers had used this term: see, for example, *Acta Synodalia*, II/V, 567, 3.

*Communionis Notio*, n. 17.

*Dominus Iesus*, n. 17.

*Communionis Notio*, n. 13.

Cf. First Vatican Council, Constitution *Pastor Aeternus, proemio*; also *Lumen Gentium*, n. 18.


*Cf. ibid., n. 17.*


*Ut Unum Sint*, n. 11.

P. Rodriguez e J.R. Villar, op. cit, 608.

*Cf. Unitatis Redintegratio*, nn., 5-12.

Benedict XVI, Initial Message, 20 April 2005, n. 5; *ORE*, 27 April, p. 3.

*Cf. Ut Unum Sint*, no.102

Secularity of the Lay Faithful: Living Expression of Christian Hope

*Considerations along the Lines of St. Josemaría’s Teachings*

Jorge Miras

I. SECULARISM AS A FALSIFICATION OF HOPE

The interventions of the Pontifical magisterium at the beginning of the third millennium are characterized, among other things, by an insistent and
ever more explicit appeal to Christian hope. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* the very structure of the document is built on the consideration of the present and the future of Europe from the perspective of that theological virtue.

One of the passages that the Post-Synodal Exhortation dedicates to the diagnosis of the cultural and sociological situation of the old continent—which is indeed perfectly transferable to other geographic and human areas—describes with intense flourishes some of the symptoms of a marked “dimming of hope”: “by a kind of practical agnosticism and religious indifference whereby many Europeans give the impression of living without spiritual roots—somewhat like heirs who have squandered a patrimony entrusted to them by history.... Many people are no longer able to integrate the Gospel message into their daily experience; living one's faith in Jesus becomes increasingly difficult in a social and cultural setting in which that faith is constantly challenged and threatened. In many social settings it is easier to identify oneself as an agnostic than as a believer. The impression is given that unbelief is self-explanatory, whereas belief needs some kind of social legitimization which is neither obvious nor taken for granted.”[1]

It is not difficult to relate this description to that which Pope John Paul II sketched, years back, of secularism,[2] a vision of the world and of all that is human that—by theoretical persuasion, or by methodical pragmatism—closes itself in an immanent perspective, restricting in a dramatic way the sense of temporal realities and the existential horizon of man. “It is therefore no wonder,” *Ecclesia in Europa* recapitulates, “that in this context a vast field has opened for the unrestrained development of nihilism[3] in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality, and of pragmatism — and even a cynical hedonism — in daily life,’ European culture gives the impression of ‘silent apostasy’ on the part of people who have all that they need and who live as if God does not exist.”[4]

The relationship between this distancing from faith and the adulteration of hope is immediate: “as the Synod Fathers made clear, ‘man cannot live without hope: life would become meaningless and unbearable.’ Often those in need of hope think that they can find peace in fleeting and insubstantial things.”[5]
And the consequences of this disorientation of hope has direct consequences on the right order of love. Thus, after enumerating some of the more widespread versions of an “alternative hope, elaborated as a successor to that which is true,” John Paul II concluded: “All these, however, show themselves profoundly illusory and incapable of satisfying that yearning for happiness which the human heart continues to harbor. The disturbing signs of growing hopelessness thus continue and intensify.”[6]

This is the same vicious circle faced by the parched traveler who, lost in the desert,[7] sees in the distance a mirage that leads him to spend his waning energies in running, on the wings of a false hope, towards a goal that overwhelms him when it proves deceptive, perhaps until, looking once more at the horizon, he thinks he sees another oasis and forces himself to run towards it, exhausting his ever growing weakness more and more… It is no paradox to say that, if true hope is lacking, the more intensely a man is involved in temporal realities, the greater becomes the hope that he puts in them, the more he separates himself from their meaning and the meaning of his own life, in a spiral of despair that is no less damaging because of his activity or even hyperactivity.

The Founder of Opus Dei, in a homily given in 1968 and later published under the title *The Christian’s Hope*, reflected in this sense on the indispensable function of that virtue in earthly life: “I am always moved to respect and even to admiration by the tenacity of those who work wholeheartedly for noble ideals. Nevertheless, I consider I have a duty to remind you that everything we undertake in this life, if we see it exclusively as our own work, bears from the outset the stamp of perishability…. This precariousness does not stifle hope. On the contrary, once we recognize the insignificant and contingent nature of our earthly endeavors, the way is then open for true hope, a hope which elevates all human work and turns it into a meeting point with God. An inexhaustible light then bathes everything we do and chases away the dark shadows of disappointment. But if we transform our temporal projects into ends in themselves and blot out from our horizon our eternal dwelling place and the end for which we have been created, which is to love and praise the Lord and then to possess
him forever in heaven, then our most brilliant endeavors turn traitor, and can even become a means of degrading our fellow creatures.”[8]

Indeed, the secularist vision not only ignores the wisdom of the faith in dealing with human realities, but, by shutting up the person in a perspective “restricted to this world and closed to transcendence,”[9] twists hope and denatures true charity, beginning with a proper love for the world.[10] Hence the assertion which closes the cited passage from the preaching of St. Josemaría: “Perhaps there is no greater tragedy for man than the sense of disillusionment he suffers when he has corrupted or falsified his hope, by placing it in something other than the one Love which satisfies without ever satiating.”[11]

II. CHRISTIAN SECULARITY: IN THE HEART OF THE “GOSPEL OF HOPE”

In confronting the urgent task of announcing the “Gospel of hope,”[12] to which the whole Church finds itself called, it seems especially fruitful to consider the fact that secularism is diametrically opposed to Christian secularity. This is an attitude towards the world that comes out of the faith, radically determined by authentic hope and, for this reason, capable of accepting the world and all that is human[13] in a love which does not turn traitor, but which enables the person to be fulfilled in the proper order of his fundamental vocation to love.[14] And this above and beyond the characteristic ambiguity[15] with which—precisely because of the proper truth and consistency that they contain[16]—earthly realities present themselves for our evaluation.

The proper attitude towards this persistent ambivalence of the world is, undoubtedly, one of the keys to authentic Christian secularity, to the extent to which it requires one to give meaning to one’s own life[17] and to prove the consistency of one’s faith through one’s everyday life. Only true hope permits one to resolve, in a manner respectful towards the truth of creation and without rupture, the tension between earthly life and the beyond, because “this conviction spurs me on to grasp that only those things that bear the imprint of God can display the indelible sign of eternity and have lasting value. Therefore, far from separating me from the things of this earth, hope draws me closer to these realities in a new way, a Christian
way, which seeks to discover in everything the relation between our fallen
nature and God, our Creator and Redeemer.[18]

This new drawing close to earthly things, an unmistakable fruit of
hope,[19] is a determining factor which informs Christian secularity: “The
ture Christian, who acts according to his faith, always has his sights set on
God. His outlook is supernatural. He works in this world of ours, which he
loves passionately; he is involved in all its challenges, but all the while his
eyes are fixed on heaven.”[20]

Certainly, given that the Church lives in the world and appears before
it as the sign or universal sacrament of salvation,[21] one can speak of a
secularity of the Church itself; and one might also consider the secular
dimension (that is to say the relationship with secular realities), of the
Christian life of each of the faithful—with its corresponding features and
hues according to its various conditions and vocations. For everyone, sacred
ministers, consecrated faithful and laity, participate, each in his or her own
way, in the mission of the Church for the life of the world. Nevertheless, as
is known, the Second Vatican Council, at the time that it proclaimed the
call to sanctity of all of the faithful[22]—a teaching which Pope Paul VI
considered “the most special characteristic and final goal of the whole
Conciliar magisterium”[23]—spoke of secularity as the “specific
characteristic” of the lay faithful.[24] In the case of the laity, therefore,
secularity—the secular characteristic of their Christian life—appears as the
precise feature that defines their proper and specific way of seeking sanctity
and of participating in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

From this point of view, the circumstances that characterize the
beginning of the third millennium—that theoretical and practical dimming
of hope to which I referred—emphasize in a special way the evangelizing
transcendence of the Christian mission and vocation of the laity[25] “It is to
the laity, though not exclusively to them, that secular duties and activity
properly belong.”[26] This is how Pope John Paul II emphasized it in his
recent Post-Synodal Exhortation for Europe: “The contribution of the lay
faithful to the life of the Church is essential: they have an irreplaceable role
in the proclamation and the service of the Gospel of hope, since ‘through
them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the
world, as a sign and source of hope and of love.’[27] As full sharers in the
Church's mission in the world, they are called to testify that the Christian faith constitutes the only complete response to the questions which life sets before every individual and every society, and they are able to imbue the world with the values of the Kingdom of God, the promise and guarantee of a hope which does not disappoint.”[28]

Here is the special responsibility of the lay faithful, in the service of mankind and the world; to revitalize all earthly realities, vivifying them and contributing to shaping them in conformity with that hope that does not defraud,[29] a mission which will be greatly aided by a right understanding of the meaning of the secular nature of the Christian vocation.[30]

III. A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Most Catholics are immersed in the vicissitudes of the world, involved in the dynamic of temporal realities which absorb most of their time and energy. This fact makes up a complex human and Christian reality, whose diverse aspects should be evaluated together in order to discern their meaning in God’s plan of salvation. One of those aspects, of course, is the negative influence of “the world,” insofar as it has been disordered by sin: creatures, who tried to raise themselves as rivals to the Creator, and also to one another; those perishable goods and interests which, if they are considered as absolutes, blind and mislead hearts; earthly interests, mean or otherwise, which trap a person in a tangled web of demands and passions, threaten to turn his eyes away from the only interest capable of fulfilling his anxiety for the good. In that sense, “the world,” as the sphere of influence of “the prince of his world”[31] in rebellion against the plan of God, is an enemy of the soul, because not only does it not favor Christian life, but rather opposes it.

Nevertheless, Christian reflection on the world has to necessarily take into account also other aspects—particularly its original goodness in the plan of God and the consequences, not only of sin, but also of the redemption.[32] A theological evaluation of the world which unilaterally accentuated, or simply emphasized, its negative aspect, would necessarily lead to intensifying the opposition between the realities of this world and those of the next, and to the consideration of life in the world as an obstacle, or at least as a heavy burden for holiness. It would, therefore
constitute in practice, a falsification of hope, in a way opposed to that induced by secularism, but equally un-welcome.

Throughout history various manifestations of that outlook have appeared in the theory and practice of Christian life,[33] although their vital consequences, which took various forms and intensities, were not normally very extreme. In any case, it is undeniable that a predominantly negative evaluation of the world, more or less explicit, would tend to give rise to the limitation of sanctity, as a real and effective possibility, to only a part of Christianity. Although without denying the sanctifying power derived from the condition of being baptized, it would lead one to feel, nevertheless that the world, understood as the circumstances, the surroundings, the hostile place in which the life of many faithful develops, conditions and makes difficult (in the best of cases), the full development of Christian life towards perfection. This outlook also led to a “devaluing” of the ordinary faithful when it came to consciously and actively taking up their indispensable role in the mission of evangelizing.

In contrast, a deep and efficacious understanding of the truth of the vocation of the laity to sanctity and apostolate, as the natural, and therefore attainable, goal of their Christian life, requires as a prerequisite a renewed theological evaluation of the world, to avoid reducing the unequivocal call which resounds in the preaching of Christ to an exhortation which is as beautiful and inspiring as it is unattainable in practice, because of an irreconcilable opposition between the world and holiness.

The key to that understanding can be uncovered through analyzing the teaching of the Second Vatican Council as a whole on the reality of the universal call to holiness and the condition of the lay faithful who live in the world.

IV. THE VOCATION AND MISSION OF THE LAITY IN THE CONCILIAR TEACHING

When the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* refers specifically to the laity, it begins by emphasizing what they have in common with all of the faithful: “These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetical, and kingly functions of Christ; and they
carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in
the Church and in the world.”[34] The Council thus confirms that the laity, incorporated in Christ, are called like all the other faithful to be saints and to carry out the apostolic mission of the Church; but it clarifies at the same time that they do this in their own special manner: “in their own way.”

The Conciliar text goes on immediately to describe this special manner in which the laity carry out their Christian vocation: “What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature.... The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.”[35]

In the pages that follow I will note some considerations[36] that can contribute to the assimilation of this Conciliar text. But before going into these, it seems useful to note that, in order to adequately appreciate the significance and range of this teaching, it is first necessary to understand that the universal call to holiness is for each of the faithful a true “personal vocation.”[37] In that perspective, the secular nature of the lay faithful appears in all of its depth as the basic key to a true and effective renewal of the meaning of his or her life as a Christian vocation.

1. THE SECULAR CONDITION OF THE LAY PEOPLE AS A MODE OF THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION.

The Conciliar affirmation that “what specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature” should not be considered the mere rhetorical expression of an obvious fact (that the lay faithful live in the world and
dedicate themselves to secular tasks and realities). On the contrary, this is a doctrinal declaration of great importance, which contains in essence the theological evaluation of secular realities that underlies the universality of the Christian vocation to holiness and apostolate. With those words the Council is trying to indicate precisely that the secular condition of the lay life should not be understood as a simple fact, nor as “simply an external and environmental framework, but as a reality destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning,”[38] because that reality configures a form of the Christian life, a way of being a Christian. In the words of John Paul II, “among the lay faithful this one baptismal dignity takes on a manner of life which sets a person apart, without, however, bringing about a separation from the ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious. The Second Vatican Council has described this manner of life as the “secular character.”[39]

If one keeps in mind the earlier comment about the call to holiness as a true personal vocation, one will understand better why secularity cannot be understood as simple environmental data (that is, as a group of circumstances which of course, have an influence on the life of the lay faithful, but from without: as in a landscape in which their history evolves). Actually, in each existing lay faithful the vocation to holiness and the secular character of their life are inseparable. It is not a matter of having a Christian vocation on the one hand and on the other hand, as a merely coincidental circumstance, the fact of living in the world. The condition of being a Christian and the secular character are intertwined in the unity and totality of the personal vocation.

This is expressed in these words of St. Josemaría Escrivá: “I dream—and the dream has come true — of multitudes of God’s children, sanctifying themselves as ordinary citizens, sharing the ambitions and endeavors of their colleagues and friends. I want to shout to them about this divine truth: if you are there in the middle of ordinary life, it doesn’t mean Christ has forgotten about you or hasn’t called you. He has invited you to stay among the activities and concerns of the world. He wants you to know that your human vocation, your profession, your talents, are not omitted from his divine plans. He has sanctified them and made them a most acceptable offering to his Father.”[40]
And so, in this context, the expression “secular character,” or more briefly, “secularity,” means precisely the \textit{proper manner of being Christian} of the lay faithful. Consequently, the fact of being in the world and occupied with the affairs of the world and of being Christian cannot be understood as two conflicting realities that, when they occur in one and the same person, tend to enter into conflict and reciprocally limit each other in such a way that the increase of one of them is in detriment to the other. A similar error would be found in the more or less conscious conviction that one cannot be fully secular if one is fully Christian, or fully Christian in a life which is fully secular.

If a member of the lay faithful were to have a poor understanding of secularity or of the Christian vocation, or of both, there could easily enter into his life a tension, a disjuncture between those aspects of his Christian life. And a conflict with those characteristics cannot last a long time but would sooner or later result in either giving up one of the alternatives or, what is no less bad, reaching the false solution of establishing a precarious compromise between one’s Christian and one’s everyday life. This could take any of its well-known versions (a superficial “compatibility,” or a distinction and division, no less superficial, between public and private life; between spiritual and “real life”; between obligations and devotions; belief and science; logic of faith and logic of immediate realities). Naturally, in either of those two cases, rupture or compromise, the transforming force of the Christian vocation would be sadly neutralized.

The truth however is that there is no contradiction nor is there a purely casual or accommodated relationship between secularity and the Christian vocation. Far from it: for the lay faithful, secularity is their special \textit{form} of both sanctity and the evangelizing mission. The affirmation of John Paul II, cited earlier, that the secular character provides a “form of the baptismal dignity” (or, that is, of the Christian vocation), is the equivalent of saying that the vocation to holiness and the apostolate—which, by its proper nature affects all of life and not just a part of it\footnote{[41]}—\textit{is shown in the lay faithful specifically as secularity}. Therefore the “secular character” of the lay faithful is not a mere external factor, either sociological or environmental, but a feature which has a vocational \textit{density}.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD AS THE \textit{“PLACE”} OF
VOCATION Obviously, this affirmation of the secularity of the laity as a vocational category implies a profoundly positive evaluation of the world and of temporal realities: not a negative one, nor a merely neutral one either.

A neutral vision of the world would see temporal realities as not having a definite meaning, neither good nor bad, in relationship with God and his plan of salvation, so that its ordination to God would always be extrinsic—put there exclusively by man. Thus the vocation and mission of the laity of “ordering” temporal things “according to God” would seem to be an attempt to do violence to the realities of the world, attributing to them, according to Christian believe, a meaning which of themselves they did not have; and of imposing this meaning also on those who profess other beliefs or do not profess any. From this point of view, if a lay faithful tried to have his faith influence the configuration of the reality of the world, he would be diluting his “secular nature,” the logic that was proper to him, at the same time as his personal condition as a man or woman of the world. His or her secularity would be a simple disguise, a pretext for mixing without hindrance into the dynamic of those realities while pursuing confessional ends. But as we have seen one should understand the relationship of the lay faithful with the world “not simply an external and environmental framework, but as a reality destined to find in Jesus Christ the fullness of its meaning.”[42] Well then, it is precisely that meaning in Jesus Christ that provides the ultimate meaning of the secularity of the laity as a vocational reality.

The book of Genesis tells us that God, after creating the world and man, saw that all that he had created was good, that it was very good.[43] From the beginning, all of material creation formed part of the loving plan of God for man: it is intrinsically ordered, oriented to his good. According to its design from the beginning, the world, and all the realities of the world showed forth, in its way the glory of the Creator: enclosing in itself a harmony, a goodness, which refers man to God.[44]

Genesis also tells of the original fall, by which sin and disorder entered into the heart of man and, in consequence, also into the world. Earthly realities then lost their original transparency and became opaque, capable of blinding man, holding back his sight and hiding God from him. With the
proliferation of sin the disintegration of that original harmony spread out and deepened.

But God did not abandon man to his fate nor allow him to be definitively lost: he sent his own Son, “through whom everything had been made,” so that, as true God and true man, he redeemed man and restored the whole of creation. This explains the fact that in order to understand the meaning of secularity it is necessary to consider the meaning of the world, of created things, in the light of the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the re-creation of all things in Christ.[45]

Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth.... He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”[46] And God, who “was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself,”[47] had commended to the Church the “ministry of reconciliation.”[48] He wanted each Christian, incorporated into Christ by baptism, to be associated to that redemptive mission of his Son, which extended also to the primordial restoration of the meaning of all creation, in such a way that the world and all created things would once more show forth, with the newness of the risen Jesus,[49] the glory of God and attract mankind towards him.

This mystery of vocation in Christ is the motive and theme of the hymn of benediction with which the letter to the Ephesians begins: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.... For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”[50]

The positive evaluation of the world which is a the base of Christian secularity is not, therefore, either an exercise of good natured ingenuousness, nor a resigned acceptance of the reality of evil present in the
world, adduced as an expedient to justify a less exigent Christian life, acquiescent towards the inevitable. On the contrary, that optimistic evaluation derives from the unbreakable faith of the Church in the radical restorative power of the redemption; and it translates into a firm vision of secularity and, with its own features, the secular character of the laity, as a vocation to co-redeem the world with Christ. “We must love the world and work and all human things. For the world is good. Adam’s sin destroyed the divine balance of creation; but God the Father sent his only Son to re-establish peace, so that we, his children by adoption, might free creation from disorder and reconcile all things to God.”

This is the precise meaning of the affirmation, made earlier, with which no. 31 of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* indicates the intimate interpenetration of secularity with the Christian vocation of the laity: “They are called there by God (that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations [and] in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life).” The world, thus understood, is the place of the Christian vocation. But it is not only a physical place, a sort of stage or milieu in which they play a role—the life of a Christian—which does not necessarily have a real relationship with it (a neutral vision of the world); but rather, in the expression of the Council, the existence of the lay faithful, assumed in each and every one of its facets by divine vocation, “is as though interwoven” with secular reality. Therefore, the divine vocation of the laity is not a call to save themselves by fleeing or distancing themselves from those realities (a negative vision of the world): “They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism does not take them from the world at all... on the contrary, He entrusts a vocation to them that properly concerns their situation in the world.”

3. CHRISTIANS ARE IN THE WORLD AS LEAVEN IN THE MASS The expressions that describe the vocation-mission of the laity, in the Conciliar passae that we are dealing with, speak of “ordering” temporal realities “according to God;” of “illuminating and ordering them so that they come to be and develop constantly according to Christ.” The nature of that illumination and ordination should also be understood in the light of the consequences that result from considering the relationship of the lay faithful with the world, their secularity, from the mystery of the
Incarnation. As we have seen, human realities are not neutral, but really possess a meaning: an order and an opening to transcendence which are intrinsic, that is to say, which constitute the most radical key to their truth and their goodness. When that order was broken by sin, all of those realities, which were linked by the Creator’s plan for the fate of mankind, experienced a deterioration also “from within”: their intrinsic truth was falsified, and with it their goodness itself was affected. This deterioration, that is, made it difficult and at times prevented human realities from being sent to God.[54]

But those conditions of present human life are not foreign to the lay faithful, since their personal life, with all of its vocational meaning and with all the revitalizing power that the newness of Christ brings with it—is interwoven with them. Even more: the vocation-mission of the laity forms part of the redemptive plan of God, of his immovable faithfulness which does not allow him to abandon man and the world. In effect, if one considers the meaning of secularity in the light of the Incarnation, one understands immediately that the Christian is not an alien: that he has not come to the world from without, to take possession of something that does not belong to him, in the name of his faith. On the contrary, Christians “already are” in the world: the world belongs to them as much as it does to others—more, in a certain sense, because it belongs to Christ, whom they form a part of.[55] And “that is where God called them,” not to supplant the truth of the world by some other “logic” that is alien to it, but to restore, recuperate and bring to its fullness its original truth and meaning, intrinsic to human realities, with the regenerating power of the redemption. “By the very fact of being a man, a Christian has a full right to live in the world. If he lets Christ live and reign in his heart, he will feel — quite noticeably — the saving effectiveness of our Lord in everything he does.”[56]

The Gospel simile of fermentation, of the leaven,[57] evoked by the Conciliar passage that we have been considering, is especially fitting to explain how that mission of the laity is carried out: realizing their proper function in the world, contributing “to the sanctification of the world from within, like a leaven.” Indeed, the leaven does not change the nature of the dough, but it lets it make the best of itself. It is not within it as a foreign body, but perfectly mixed, forming a homogeneous part of the dough itself,
it is dough; and uniting its beneficent influence to the natural good qualities of the other ingredients, it becomes transformed, with all of them, without distinction, into a single loaf of bread. The leaven alone is not bread, but the quality of bread depends to a great extent, on its action.

V. NEUTRALIZING TEMPTATIONS OF THE LAY VOCATION

The image of leaven also illustrates two necessary characteristics of the vocation and mission of the laity. For leaven to fulfill its function it is necessary, above all, that it not remain outside of the mass of dough, but that it be perfectly mixed into it; and, in addition, that it be in good condition, that it has not deteriorated and lost its capacity to ferment.\[58\]

The aptness of the example is obvious if one considers it in relation to these words of Pope John Paul II: “The post-conciliar path of the lay faithful has not been without its difficulties and dangers. In particular, two temptations can be cited which they have not always known how to avoid: the temptation of being so strongly interested in Church services and tasks that some fail to become actively engaged in their responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world; and the temptation of legitimizing the unwarranted separation of faith from life, that is, a separation of the Gospel's acceptance from the actual living of the Gospel in various situations in the world.”\[59\]

The gravity of those temptations is due to their capacity to neutralize the divine efficacy of the vocation of the laity. If, as we are considering, the lay condition is a specific modality of the Christian life whose proper mission—for which it possesses therefore, a specific supernatural power—is to sanctify the world “from within,” as a leaven, it is evident that its efficacy depends on fidelity to its own way of being: to its secularity. This implies, essentially and inseparably, that the lay faithful live fully involved in the temporal realities with which their life is intertwined: and that that life is fully Christian. To the first of these is opposed the idea, or the temptation, that the full assumption of the Christian vocation on the part of the laity consists in an increase in their work within the Church structure. To the second, the temptation of secularism, of a worldly spirit.
An adequate response to these two temptations requires that we explain, at least in its most essential lines, the ecclesial meaning of the mission of the laity in the world and of unity of life; two questions that in reality could be reduced to the latter, but which it is useful to treat separately for greater clarity.

1. Ecclesial meaning of the secular mission of the laity

The Synod of Bishops on the laity used the term *clericalization* to refer to the error of considering the promotion of the vocation and mission of the laity to consist basically of opening up to them access to functions and offices previously reserved exclusively for the clergy, or to consider it as consisting in making greater use of their collaboration in those functions. This first temptation pointed out by Pope John Paul II supposes a reductive conception of Christian life as an “intraecclesial” life: and in that case the co-responsibility of all of the faithful would be reduced to their sharing without discrimination in ecclesiastical tasks. The common participation in the mission of the Church would be identified, in practice, with liturgical activity, or with collaboration in organized initiatives and activities. But in that case the leaven would not really be mixed with the dough and the proper vocation of the laity would not produce the fruit that God wants: the renewing force of the Christian life would be, in practice, impoverished.

On the contrary, if one does not lose sight of the fact that—in conformity with the Conciliar teaching that we are analyzing—the *quid* [essential nature] of the special vocation of the laity in the Church is their Christian life in the world, one also clearly understands that dedication to their mission in secular life constitutes the most substantial and effective aspect of their mission in the Church (precisely through that fidelity to one’s proper vocation that it supposes).

It is necessary, once more, to affirm that there is no dilemma here, no alternative: either a mission in the Church or a mission in the world; but that both dimensions converge in a true *unity of life*, which is a manifestation of the unity and totality of one’s personal vocation. To understand this is decisive, because it explains that the quality of Christian life and the intensity of the commitment and participation in the mission
of the Church is not counted by the greater or lesser dedication—or availability to dedicate oneself—to intra-ecclesial tasks. The Christian commitment and the dedication to the mission of the Church are always full, in each of the faithful in accord with their own vocation. This fullness of dedication which is presupposed by the secular character of their Christian vocation is an essential key to understanding the mission of the laity.[62]

Thus, when a lay person lives with fidelity to the demands of his vocation any facet of his life or activity, his Christian life and his dedication to the mission of the Church are full. For this very reason, one cannot say that one participates more in the mission of the Church if one takes up more intra-ecclesial commitments or services, or that the laity have a participation in the mission of the Church which is limited by their dedication to secular tasks, because their full dedication as Christians to secular tasks is dedication to the mission of the Church, in the part that is most proper to them by their divine vocation: “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities.”[63]

The lay faithful, living members of the Body of Christ, by reason of their being part of the communion which is the Church—communion with God and with all of their brethren—are themselves the Church,[64] in such a way that through their life and activity, which constitutes one of the modalities of that diversity united in communion,[65] they also carry out the mission of the Church in the world.[66] The whole life of the laity, even in its most earthly and ordinary manifestations, possesses then an ecclesial dimension,[67] and consciousness of this reality is, in whoever cultivates it, a joyful invitation to hope and fidelity. Anyone who considers that his life is strongly rooted in the communion of the Church cannot have a feeling of distance, of coolness, with respect to ecclesial life, but instead will feel the power and responsibility of knowing that in taking care of the realities that by his human and Christian vocation he is involved with, he is also—through his communion with God and all his brothers and sisters—the Church who is acting, making Jesus Christ present among mankind. 2. UNITY OF LIFE
That ecclesial dimension of the whole life of the Christian in virtue of communion is one of the numerous consequences of the unity of life that radically characterizes it. And unity of life is also affected by the second temptation described by Pope John Paul II: that of “legitimating the undue separation between faith and life, between acceptance of the Gospel and concrete action in the most diverse temporal and earthly realities,” a rupture of such gravity for Christian life and for the efficacy of the mission of co-redeeming that it was considered by the Second Vatican Council as “one of the gravest errors of our time.”

Unity of life signifies that one must not separate, oppose or compartmentalize the different aspects and realities which make up the life of the Christian, according to whether they are considered proper to one’s baptismal condition as a child of God, or one’s condition as a man or woman and a member of the society of mankind. Undoubtedly the life of each person is complex, and presents a multiplicity of facets, but this is not a simple accumulation or amalgam of unconnected circumstances. They are distinct, but really interrelated, above all because they make up a single life, with a single protagonist, a person, who is not divisible and, in addition, because they each have a relationship, each according to its nature, with the same ultimate end to which the life of that person is ordered. In a Christian, unity of life should be precisely the Christian life, because the person who is the protagonist of this concrete life is, in the deepest and most definitive sense, Christian, not simply someone who, among other circumstantial bonds, has a commitment which connects him with the Church. Therefore one should not raise dikes between one’s human life and divine vocation; between living in the Church and living in the world; between one’s effort to be a Christian and obligation to attend to other tasks; between realities with a spiritual content and everyday realities; between supernatural and earthly logic; between faith and life... The Founder of Opus Dei expressed this with unusual power in a homily, preached in 1967, which condensed his constant preaching since 1928: “No, my children. We cannot lead a double life. We cannot have a split personality, if we want to be Christians. There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and
soul, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.”

This does not mean, however, that all of those aspects present themselves or should present themselves mixed up haphazardly, because they are really distinct. Nor is their “unity” brought about because some of them absorb and annul the others. That unity of the distinct, which is not confusion, has to be understood according to a theological model analogous to that which describes the special co-penetration—not absorption, annulling or confusion—between grace and nature, the supernatural and the natural. Grace does not destroy nor annul nature, rather it assumes it, heals it, and elevates it, leading it to transcend the purely human dimension.

a) UNITY OF LIFE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION This is so because unity of life refers also—as does every authentic dimension of secularity—to the mystery of the incarnation of the Word. It’s understanding is based, concretely, on consideration of the basic truths rooted in that mystery: that the Word of God, upon becoming man, has taken up all that is human; and that the Christian vocation, a vocation in Christ, encompasses the whole person. Let us look briefly at the implications of this foundation of unity of life.

That the Son of God, upon becoming true man, took up all that is human, has as its consequence that there are no human realities that lie outside of the redemption. Everything has been made by Christ into a path and occasion for the fulfillment of the will of the Father. The new Adam, Head of creation which is recapitulated in Him, is the only one who can say in a full sense, those words of the Roman poet Terence: “I am a man, and I do not consider anything human foreign to me.”

There is then nothing human and noble which does not have a relationship with the Christian life: “Nothing can be foreign to Christ’s care. If we enter into the theology of it instead of limiting ourselves to functional categories, we cannot say that there are things — good, noble or indifferent — which are exclusively worldly. This cannot be after the Word of God has lived among the children of men, felt hunger and thirst, worked with his hands, experienced friendship and obedience and suffering and
death.”[72] And this dimension of the Incarnation, which illuminates the deepest truth of things, affects the most important human realities as well as the most humble and ordinary, without distinction: “Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.”[73]

The affirmation that vocation involves the whole person is equivalent to saying—as we saw when we dealt with the vocational meaning of the secular condition of the laity—that it is not a partial aspect of life, but rather, being in the order of being, of identity,[74] it extends of all facets of one’s personality and aspires to cover all of one’s work. The Christians, incorporated into Christ, made another Christ by baptismal grace, has to take up as He did all of reality with a sense of redemption, because nothing human is foreign to one’s life in Christ and living in Christ embraces all dimensions of his personal existence. And so, unity of life is not an artificial and forced unification, a volunteristic program, but rather has a real human basis, supernaturally perfected: it constitutes the harmonious development of the economy of the Incarnation which is both natural and supernatural at the same time. It is this to such an extent that, in my belief, the sense of unity of life can be explained analogically by the formula with which the Council of Chalcedon confessed the unity of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ: “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence”[75]

b) UNITY OF LIFE AND CHRISTIAN CONSISTENCY

Unity of life is, therefore, a realizable aspiration, because it has a real foundation: there is no obstacle on the part of the realities of the world, because, without losing their own natural values, their autonomy,[76] all of them possess a profound and definite Christian meaning. And there is also no obstacle on the part of the Christian, who without ceasing to be a person like any other, is called to live and act among those realities not like those “who have no hope,”[77] but in such a way that they are, for him and for others, fully human and at the same time, and for this very reason, fully transcendent: the occasion and the place of a meeting with God, the matter
of sanctification.\textsuperscript{[78]} This last should lead the lay faithful to value the vocational dimension of their responsibility in respect to the faithful fulfillment of their duties of state.\textsuperscript{[79]}

In spite of everything that I have said, it is quite certain that the daily life of each person appears to be fragmented and divided in many senses (faith and reason; mind and heart; duty and tastes; immediate present and the future; hopes and reality; differences of surroundings, activities, loyalties, anxieties and interests...). Therefore, unity of life is not something that is accomplished automatically; it has to be achieved, in the light of the personal discovery that everything can and should tend to the same ultimate end, God, even though the immediate end might be very diverse. This evidently is the characteristic perspective of hope: “with the intensely human impetus of Christian hope,”\textsuperscript{[80]} every circumstance can be converted into the path of faithfulness to vocation, according to the admonition of St. Paul: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”\textsuperscript{[81]}

The attainment of unity of life consists, then, in taking up more and more fully the vocational meaning of one’s own life. This has such importance that one can well say that the effort to discern in each circumstance what is demanded by consistency with one’s own vocation, in the various aspects of life, is the path of Christian maturity. A Christian is mature to the extent to which whatever happens spontaneously—what one’s freedom asks is to consider things and make decisions with a supernatural sense, with a profound sense of one’s vocation and mission.

To act with naturalness, for a Christian, is precisely to live that consistency. It would be deeply erroneous to understand naturalness as if what was normal was to act in such a way that faith and hope are not noticed: that the action of a Christian cannot be distinguished from that of those who are moved by purely worldly interests and criteria.\textsuperscript{[82]} That false naturalness would, in reality mean that one has given in to the temptation to shatter one’s unity of life: in this way, the light would cease to illuminate, the slat would lose its savor; instead of sanctifying the world, the disciple of Christ would become worldly.\textsuperscript{[83]}
In summary, the efficacy of the vocation and mission of the laity necessarily requires an understanding of the secular character of their life and their proper path of fidelity to Christ and the true naturalness of their conduct consists in being faithful in the world.

c) UNITY OF LIFE AND APOSTOLIC MISSION OF THE LAITY.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, dealing with the apostolic mission of the laity, recalls the conciliar doctrine, according to which “Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth”[84]. It goes on to present in summary fashion the conciliar doctrine on the participation of the laity in the triple function—priestly, prophetic and royal—of Christ, indicating various manifestations of that apostolic mission. I will limit myself to pointing out now, in the light of that doctrine, that unity of life, with Christian consistency and naturalness as its operative manifestations, explains also that the apostolic mission of the lay faithful is expressed and realized in a way that is inseparable from its secularity[85].

The first consequence of this reality is that—for the same reason that the call to holiness and life in the world cannot be separated—the apostolic mission is indissolubly united to ordinary life, and it cannot be reduced to certain activities formally qualified as “apostolate” which also form part of the lay mission. The second is that, therefore, the apostolic mission is not an occasional or intermittent occupation, on the contrary, as an essential element of the Christian vocation,[86] it should be present in all manifestations of the life, “just as there is no way to separate Christ, the God-man, from his role as redeemer”[87].

It is impossible, therefore, to give an exhaustive list of the manifestations of the lay apostolate, which are as diverse and constant as the situations and variations of life in the world. But it is unquestionable that their mission to “to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase
according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer,”[88] must be carried out, in the first place, in the characteristic places of ordinary life: family, work, friendship, social life. Considered from this perspective, everything has an apostolic facet: optimism in family matters, cooperation in household tasks, punctuality and good example at work, sobriety in one’s lifestyle, conversations with neighbors, proper choice of clothing or the place for vacations.

In addition to pointing out this apostolic dimension of daily life, the Council forcefully calls on the laity to accept their responsibility for the apostolic mission especially in those places, circumstances and activities in which the Church can be the salt of the earth only through them[89]. This is a proper and specific demand of the secular nature of their vocation: “The priority of the task of the New Evangelization, which involves all the People of God, requires, today in particular... a full recovery of the awareness of the secular nature of the mission of the laity. This enterprise opens vast horizons, some of which have yet to be explored, for the lay faithful. The faithful can be active in this particular moment of history in areas of culture, in the arts and theatre, scientific research, labor, means of communication, politics, and the economy, etc. They are also called to a greater creativity in seeking out ever more effective means whereby these environments can find the fullness of their meaning in Christ.[90]

We are dealing with areas in which there is no such thing as the Catholic “solution” or “position.” In all these fields, the initiative and responsibility belong properly and exclusively to each of the lay faithful. We are not dealing here with cooperation in the apostolates of the hierarchy to which the lay faithful may be called from time to time.[91] These, of course, must be carried out in accord with the directions and indications of the legitimate Church authorities. The freedom that each of the faithful enjoys in temporal matters,[92] demands the talent and inventiveness to seek in each case the most appropriate means to illuminate and consider issues in a Christian way, or to cooperate in solving them, in a way consistent with the faith. We are not dealing, then, with a freedom that “liberates” one from consistency with the faith, but of a joyful freedom to be faithful.

This was expressed with great clarity by the Founder of Opus Dei in the homily, already cited, of 1967: “A man who knows that the world, and
not just the Church, is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world. He endeavors to become properly trained, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind with complete freedom about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and he takes his own decisions in consequence. As the decisions of a Christian, they derive from personal reflection, which endeavors in all humility to grasp the will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life. But it would never occur to such a Christian to think or say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are ‘the catholic solutions’ to the problems. That would be clericalism, ‘official Catholicism’, or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things.... It is obvious that, in this field as in all others, you would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom that proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God, and that the Church freely recognizes. Personal freedom is essential to the Christian life. But do not forget, my children, that I always speak of a responsible freedom. Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in times of emergency. A call to fulfill honorably your commitments as citizens in all fields—in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in your job—accepting with courage all the consequences of your free decisions and the personal independence that is yours.”

VI. FORMATION AND INTERIOR LIFE, PILLARS OF CHRISTIAN SECULARITY.

To be able to attain a settled unity of life, and to have our works show the consistency that is a sign of maturity in the Christian vocation, there are two indispensable resources, “which are like living supports of Christian conduct: interior life and doctrinal formation, the deep knowledge of our faith”.

We saw previously that the Christian statement that the world is good does not respond to a naive attitude, nor does it gloss over the manifestations of evil present in the world. It does not mean, as we know, that all realities, just as they appear today in fact—stained by the disorder, consequence of sin—are perfectly good; but that they possess in themselves
a meaning, a truth that ordains them to the glory of God, and we have to discover and recover this.

It would, then, show a “false naturalness” to see secularity as simply living in the world and accepting the logic of worldly realities as they exist in fact.[95] This would mean forgetting that strong statement of St. Paul: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now.”[96] Even the tone of this Pauline text shows us that hope is the right antidote for that false naturalness.

In fact, naturalness—as has been said—is not the predominance of worldly logic in one’s life, but Christian consistency, living worldly realities in the light of their relationship to God’s plan. In this way, as we have seen, two things opposed to secularity are the abandonment of the Christian mission in the world by lay people and contagion with the worldly spirit: adopting a bourgeois life-style. And to avoid this danger, a Christian formation is essential to provide the faithful with the capacity to discern good and evil, to judge first what pleases God,[97] without allowing oneself to be carried along by the criteria of fashionable behavior, by what everybody is doing or by what is in fact happening.[98]

“A Christian has to be ready, at all times, to sanctify society from within. He is fully present in the world, but without belonging to the world, when it denies God and opposes his lovable will of salvation, not because of its nature, but because of sin.”[99] To live in the world while being faithful to that mission to purify all human realities and to ordain them according to God, one needs an intense Christian formation, which—for that very reason—the Code of Canon Law has proclaimed as a fundamental right of the faithful, and specifically, of the laity.[100]

The faithful, together with their human and professional formation, should strive to acquire, first, a clear doctrinal formation: a deep and exact knowledge of the truths of faith—in conformity to each person’s capacity; a correct Christian anthropology; the essentials of moral science, especially in
what relate to their profession and circumstances; and a solid knowledge of the Church’s social teachings. But all these elements must be oriented, not simply to erudition, but to a true formation of the person’s conscience. This is a task that requires special effort and dedication—from the lay persons themselves and from their pastors, given that Christian consistency must be shown precisely in a secular life characterized by a broad freedom of decision and action. Christians must be able to explain their hope to whomever asks it, but first of all, to themselves, facing all the vicissitudes of their earthly life with the transcendent vision of a hope properly based and knowledgeable, capable of accepting and seeing in perspective, the totality—human and supernatural—of the changing situations and realities of life in the world.

To this end, it is interesting to keep in mind that in Christian life, formation cannot be reduced to more or less detailed “information.” Christian life is not a philosophy or a series of opinions, but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not enough, then, to know a doctrine, a group of propositions, more or less profoundly in theory—the formation must become life, unity of life: “Every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”

The knowledge of the faith would be of limited use, then, if there were not a sincere life of personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The cultivation of the spiritual life is an indispensable condition for unity of life. One cannot persevere in consistency of faith without an intense living of a personal and transforming relationship with God, and this is what our vocation consists of.

The fount and summit of this spiritual life is the Eucharist, its “center and source.” Christians, participants in the priesthood of Christ by baptism—the “common priesthood of the faithful”—are called and empowered to join their whole life to the Sacrifice of Christ, the great redeeming act in which the whole of creation, taken up by its Head, becomes a pleasing offering to the Father and the Holy Spirit: “For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried
out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become ‘spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ Together with the offering of the Lord’s body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. And so, worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God."[108]

The Eucharist becomes, in this way, a magnificent focus of attraction of unity of life, first of all by sacramentally actualizing the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ: “In the paschal event and the Eucharist which makes it present throughout the centuries, there is a truly enormous ‘capacity,’ which embraces all of history as the recipient of the grace of the redemption”[109]; a “universal and, so to speak, cosmic character. Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth. It embraces and permeates all creation. The Son of God became man in order to restore all creation, in one supreme act of praise, to the One who made it from nothing. He, the Eternal High Priest who by the blood of his Cross entered the eternal sanctuary, thus gives back to the Creator and Father all creation redeemed. He does so through the priestly ministry of the Church, to the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. Truly this is the mysterium fidei, which is accomplished in the Eucharist: the world which came forth from the hands of God the Creator now returns to him redeemed by Christ”[110].

Together with that essential and objective redeeming dimension, and precisely because of it, the Eucharist brings about a progressive Christianization of the subjective dispositions of the faithful: “It is because of this that we can consider the Mass as the center and the source of a Christian’s spiritual life. It is the aim of all the sacraments. The life of grace, into which we are brought by baptism, and which is increased and strengthened by confirmation, grows to its fullness in the Mass. ‘When we participate in the Eucharist,’ writes St. Cyril of Jerusalem, ‘we are made spiritual by the divinizing action of the Holy Spirit, who not only makes us share in Christ’s life, as in baptism, but makes us entirely Christ-like, incorporating us into the fullness of Christ Jesus.’... We may have asked ourselves, at one time or another, how we can correspond to the greatness
of God’s love. We may have wanted to see a program for Christian living clearly explained. The answer is easy, and it is within reach of all the faithful: to participate lovingly in the holy Mass, to learn to deepen our personal relationship with God in the sacrifice that summarizes all that Christ asks of us.”[111]

This learning to make contact with God is decisive, because for the Christian soul to become sensitive to that vehement attraction that moves one to offer one’s life with Christ for the salvation of the world, a personal life of prayer—together with the Eucharist and the other sacraments, especially frequent recourse to penance—is indispensable. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, very significantly, captions its first chapter devoted to prayer: “The universal call to prayer.” Thus implying that it is not possible to be faithful to the Christian vocation to holiness and apostolate without being faithful to the calling, no less personal, to prayer.[112] A prayer that has numerous forms and manifestations, but which has to conduct each faithful to personal friendship, to a vital union with Jesus. “This is how the early Christians lived, and this is how we too should live: meditating the doctrine of our faith until it becomes a part of us; receiving our Lord in the Eucharist; meeting him in the personal dialogue of our prayer, without trying to hide behind impersonal conduct, but face to face with him. These means should become the very substance of our attitude. If they are lacking we will have, perhaps, the ability to think in an erudite manner, an activity that is more or less intense, some practices and devotions. But we will not have and authentically Christian way of life, because we will lack that personal relationship with Christ, which is a real and living participation in the divine work of salvation.”[113]

Christian formation attains its fullest sense when spiritual life and doctrinal instruction interpenetrate in a deep unity, because, in the end, formation consists in identification with Christ, permitting the action of the Holy Spirit to form Christ in each of the faithful, according to that exclamation of St. Paul: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!”[114] Spiritual life and formation coincide in their most profound sense under the action of the Sanctifying Spirit, facilitated by the docility of the Christian who generously cultivates the life of grace: “The Holy Spirit
forms the human spirit from within according to the divine model which is Christ.

Thus, through the Spirit, that Christ whom we know through the pages of the Gospel becomes the ‘life of the soul’, and man, when he thinks, when he loves, when he judges, when he acts, even when he feels, is conformed to Christ; he become ‘Christ-like’[115]

This living according to the Spirit brings it about that the realities of daily life, themselves, turned into the place and matter of the life of prayer, are rediscovered through the eyes of Christ. We thus recognize our own existence as an offering that can attain co-redemptive value, united to Christ’s Sacrifice of in the Eucharist, in which the perfect unity of ordinary life, holiness and apostolate is found and the true reason for hope becomes present. John Paul II expressed this in his last Encyclical, with a reflection on the Church that is also applicable to every Christian: “The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith. but recapitulates the heart of the mystery of the Church. In a variety of ways she joyfully experiences the constant fulfillment of the promise: ‘Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age’ (Mt 28:20), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope”.[116]


[2] “How can one not notice the ever-growing existence of religious indifference and atheism in its more varied forms particularly in its perhaps most widespread form of secularism? Adversely affected by the impressive triumphs of continuing scientific and technological development and above all, fascinated by a very old and yet new temptation, namely, that of wishing to become like God (cf. Gen 3:5) through the use of a liberty without bounds, individuals cut the religious roots that are in their hearts; they forget God or simply retain him without meaning in their lives, or
outrightly reject him and begin to adore various “idols” of the contemporary world. The present-day phenomenon of secularism is truly serious not simply as regards the individual, but in some ways as regards whole communities, as the Council has already indicated: ‘Growing numbers of people are abandoning religion in practice.’ At other times I myself have recalled the phenomenon of de-Christianization which strikes long-standing Christian people and which continually calls for a re-evangelization.” (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, [CL] December 30, 1988, no. 4).

[3] Illustrative of nihilism as despair is this other passage of the pontifical magisterium: “As a result of the crisis of rationalism, what has appeared finally is nihilism.... Its adherents claim that the search is an end in itself, without any hope or possibility of ever attaining the goal of truth. In the nihilist interpretation, life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place. Nihilism is at the root of the widespread mentality which claims that a definitive commitment should no longer be made, because everything is fleeting and provisional.” (John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, no. 46).


[6] Ibid.

[7] In the homily of the Mass of inauguration of his Pontificate (April 24, 2005), Benedict XVI made use of that same comparison: “The pastor must be inspired by Christ’s holy zeal: for him it is not a matter of indifference that so many people are living in the desert. And there are so many kinds of desert. There is the desert of poverty, the desert of hunger and thirst, the desert of abandonment, of loneliness, of destroyed love. There is the desert of God’s darkness, the emptiness of souls no longer aware of their dignity or the goal of human life. The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.” This image is not that distant from the divine lament expressed by Jeremiah (2:13): “They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”
Because of the informative and pastoral orientation that I have tried to give these pages, I ask the reader’s indulgence of the numerous bibliographic citations which are de rigueur in an academic study of the subject of secularity in general. To develop the ideas that follow, aside from invoking the opportune teaching orientation, I base myself in a special way, explicitly and implicitly on the teachings of St. Josemaría. The interior lights and motions that he received from God and that he faithfully spread through his pastoral activity since 1928, cast a specially strong light on the universal call to sanctity, the vocation of ordinary Christians, the value of secular realities, ordinary life as a path and place of meeting God and the apostolic mission of the lay faithful. All of this in a pastoral and theological context in which those concepts, or better, the understanding of their radical connection with the history of salvation, were not common teaching. Undoubtedly the teaching and pastoral practice of the Founder of Opus Dei, “not only in the fruitful example of his own life, but also—prophetically anticipating the Second Vatican Council—in the extraordinary vigor with which he sought from the very start of his ministry to address to all Christians the Gospel’s call (Pontifical Decree on the Heroic Virtues of the Servant of God J. Escrivá de Balaguer, April 9, 1990), is counted among the relevant contributions with which the Holy Spirit prepared the times and consciences for the providential renovation that the Second Vatican Council provided in this area. For this reason, they constitute a privileged guide for their theoretical and living comprehension: cf., Alvaro del Portillo, As a Conclusion to the Symposium, in M. Belda et al. (eds.), Santidad y Mundo: Proceedings of the Theological Symposium for the Study of the Teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá (Rome, October 12-14, 1993), Eunsa, Pamplona 1996, pp. 277-294.

St. Thomas explains that “when our mind is occupied with temporal things as though trying to find its end there, it is lowered to them; in contrast, when these things are ordered to blessedness, one is not brought down by them, but, rather, one raises them to a higher level” (S.Th., II-II, q.83, a. 6 ad 3).

Friends of God, no. 208.
“It is a time of hope, and I live off this treasure. It is not just a phrase, Father,’ you tell me, ‘it is a reality.’—Well then..., bring the whole world, all the human values which attract you so very strongly -- friendship, the arts, science, philosophy, theology, sport, nature, culture, souls -- bring all of this within that hope: the hope of Christ.” St. Josemaría Escrivá, Furrow, no. 293.

Cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes [GS], no. 19.

St. Josemaría illustrates an aspect of that ambiguity in the sphere of the spiritual life, in Furrow, no. 294, which refers to “that pleasant but insubstantial enchantment of the world... there all the time.” Cf. the enlightening balance with which the Council expresses the general statement of this theme in GS, 36 ff.

Cf. GS, 36

1 Pet 3:15.

Friends of God, no. 208.

“The virtue of hope responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man; it takes up the hopes that inspire men's activities and purifies them so as to order them to the Kingdom of heaven; it keeps man from discouragement; it sustains him during times of abandonment; it opens up his heart in expectation of eternal beatitude.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1818).

Friends of God, no. 206.

Cf. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution, Lumen Gentium [LG], no. 48.

LG, 11; 39—41.

Pope Paul VI, Motu proprio Sanctitas Clarior, March 19, 1969), p. 159. For his part, Pope John Paul II evaluated that teaching as follows: “The Second Vatican Council has significantly spoken on the universal call to holiness. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church by a
Council which intended to bring a renewal of Christian life based on the Gospel. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church” (CL, 16).


[25] This is the way that the Synod of Bishops of 1987, dedicated to the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world, understood it, as they took up the challenge “of specifying the concrete ways of seeing to it that the splendid “theory” of the laity expressed by the Council might find an authentic ecclesial “praxis.” (CL, 2).

[26] GS, 43.

[27] CL, 7.

[28] EiE, 41.

[29] “... [begging] Our Lord to grant us an ever increasing hope, we will possess the infectious joy of those who know they are children of God.... Let us be optimists. Moved by the power of hope, we will fight to wipe away the trail of filth and slime left by the sowers of hatred [cf. The Way, no. 1]. We will find a new joyful perspective to the world, seeing that it has sprung forth beautiful and fair from the hands of God. We will give it back to him with that same beauty. (Friends of God, no. 219).

[30] As indicated by the title, I am going to refer directly only to the lay faithful, without dealing with other aspects or types of secularity. The purpose of the reflections that I propose here is to illustrate some of the principle dimensions of the secular character of the lay vocation, leaving aside any kind of comparison or theoretical discernment of the different vocations and conditions or positions that exist in the Church. Within these coordinates, given that, in the case of the laity, secularity is translated as the secular character to which the Council refers, I will use both expressions as synonyms, without any further shades of meaning, to simplify terms.


*LG*, 31.

*LG*, 31.

These were originally spelled out in my book *Fieles en el mundo: La secularidad de los laicos cristianos*, Pamplona 2000, ch. 2.

In the decades following the Council, the expression “universal call to holiness” has become a part of the common vocabulary of Christians. But, perhaps for that very reason, it is very necessary to accentuate certain aspects of its meaning, to avoid it being vitiated. Among these, it would be good to call attention precisely to its character of being a call, that is to say, a vocation: that universal or general call is, for each Christian, a very personal vocation. The expression “universal call” is an attempt to place the accent on what is “new” in the Conciliar teaching with respect to the preceding doctrinal situation: that this call extends to all of the faithful by the fact of being such, that it does not exclude anyone. But this does not mean that it is a matter of a generic, impersonal call, without any specific addressee. On the contrary, every call from God, even when it seems to be directed equally at many people, or at a collectivity, is always translated into a personal for each one: into a divine vocation to which each has to respond personally. And it is also worth pointing out that this is a matter of vocation in the strict sense, because the concept of vocation has also with the passage of time suffered an analogous, and parallel, process to that obscuring of the call of all Christians to holiness: “Before the Second Vatican Council, the concept of ‘vocation’ was applied first of all to the priesthood and religious life, as if Christ had to the young person his evangelical ‘follow me’ only for these cases. The Council has broadened this way of looking at things” (John Paul II, *Letter to Young People*, March 31, 1985, no. 9).

*CL*, 15.

*CL*, 15.


See below, note 74.
“Creation,” says the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “is the foundation of ‘all God’s saving plans,’ the ‘beginning of the history of salvation’... that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which ‘in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’ (Gen 1:1): from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ (cf. Rom 8:18-23)” (CCC, 280).

Col 1:15ff.
2 Cor 5:19.
2 Cor 5:18.
Eph 1:3ff.
Christ Is Passing By, no. 112.
LG, 31.

St. Josemaria explains that vocation with formulations similar to the following: “What illuminates our conscience is faith in Christ, who has died and risen and is present in every moment of life. Faith moves us to play our full part in the changing situations and in the problems of human history. In this history, which began with the creation of the world and will reach its fulfillment at the end of time, the Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God’s love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 99).

Very timely, in this sense, is the description of the circumstances of the pagan world that is shown in the first chapter of the Letter to the Romans.
"The world... `That is our field!' you said, after directing your eyes and thoughts to heaven, with all the assurance of the farmer who walks through his own ripe corn. Regnare Christum volumus! -- we want Him to reign over this earth of his!" (Furrow, no. 292).

Christ Is Passing By, no. 183.


“We must therefore see ourselves as a tiny measure of yeast, prepared and ready to do good to the whole of mankind, remembering the words of the Apostle: 'a little leaven is enough to leaven all the dough', transforming it completely. We have to learn to become that yeast, that leaven, and so modify and transform the multitude. Is yeast, by its nature, better than dough? No. But it is what makes the dough rise and become good and nourishing food.... This result would never have been possible had it not been for the small amount of leaven, which dissolved and disappeared among the other ingredients, working effectively and passing unnoticed.... If leaven is not used for fermenting, it rots. There are two ways leaven can disappear, either by giving life to dough, or by being wasted, a perfect tribute to selfishness and barrenness” (Friends of God, nos. 257—258).

CL, 2.

Note that not only the second of these, as we have seen, but also the first could imply a deterioration or curtailment of Christian hope, to the extent that it implies a flight, a contempt, or a devaluation of human realities (cf. GS, 1; 34). Indeed “the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one” (GS, 39).The Church well knows that no temporal achievement is to be identified with the Kingdom of God, but that all such achievements simply reflect and in a sense anticipate the glory of the Kingdom, the Kingdom which we await at the end of history, when the Lord will come again. But that expectation can never be an excuse for lack of concern for people in their concrete personal situations and in their social, national and international life, since the former is conditioned by the latter, especially today. However imperfect and temporary are all the things that can and ought to be done through the combined efforts of everyone and through
divine grace, at a given moment of history, in order to make people's lives "more human," nothing will be lost or will have been in vain (John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, December 30, 1987, no. 48).


[62] This is not to say that there are not also intra-ecclesial tasks and offices that are ordinarily proper to the lay faithful, and others that these could exercise, and at times even to supply for the absence or scarcity of sacred ministers (cf. Interdicasterial Instruction *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, August 15, 1997, Theological Principles, 4). The Church has an internal life with needs, initiatives and activities in which all of the faithful collaborate in accordance with their situation, preparation and possibility: in respect to those specific offices, services and ecclesial functions one can of course say that there is a diversity of kinds of dedication and availability, in accord with the situation and vocation of each. It could even happen that the Church might have a need for some lay people to center their principal activity, even professionally, in tasks of that time. The carrying out of functions and jobs, the providing of services and participation in internal activities of the Church (liturgy, catechesis, charity, administration, counseling, apostolic groups, prayer groups, etc.), especially in parishes (cf. *CL*, 26), are not only something strange for the laity, but constitute a normal and joyful facet of their full condition as members of the Church.

[63] *CL*, 17.

[64] “Only from inside the Church's mystery of communion, explains Pope John Paul II, "is the ‘identity’ of the lay faithful made known and their fundamental dignity revealed. Only within the context of this dignity can their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world be defined” (*CL*, 8).

[65] Among other aspects and consequences of the consideration of the Church as communion, one point that stands out and permits one to understand the full ecclesial nature of the secular life of the lay faithful is the following: “Ecclesial communion is more precisely likened to an “organic” communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body. In fact, at one and the same time it is characterized by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life, of ministries, of charisms
and responsibilities. Because of this diversity and complementarity every member of the lay faithful is seen in relation to the whole body and offers a totally unique contribution on behalf of the whole body” (CL, 20).

[66] This supernatural reality does not imply, of course, that their activity in the area of public life, implies any sort of official or semi-official representation of the Church as an institution: “It is very important, especially where a pluralistic society prevails, that there be a correct notion of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and a clear distinction between the tasks which Christians undertake, individually or as a group, on their own responsibility as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and the activities which, in union with their pastors, they carry out in the name of the Church” (GS, 76). Later in this study, I will refer to the activity of the laity in public life.

[67] “The eyes of faith behold a wonderful scene: that of a countless number of lay people, both women and men, busy at work in their daily life and activity, oftentimes far from view and quite unacclaimed by the world, unknown to the world's great personages but nonetheless looked upon work in the Lord's vineyard. Confident and steadfast through the power of God's grace, these are the humble yet great builders of the Kingdom of God in history” (CL, 17).

[68] The concept of unity of life constitutes "a theological category very common to" the spiritual teaching of the Founder of Opus Dei, "this is one of the basic dimensions of the image of the Christian which he proposes in his preaching" (cf. Pedro Rodríguez, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, "Camino". Edición crítico-histórica, Madrid 1999; introduction to chapter 15: "Study" and commentary on point 411). The apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici (nos. 17 and 59) emphasize the great importance of the unity of life of the lay faithful: cf. R. Lanzetti, L’unità di vita e la missione dei fedeli laici nell’Esortazione Apostolica "Christifideles laici", in "Romana" 9 (1989/2), pp. 300-312. Cf. also, among other studies, E. Reinhardt, La legítima autonomía de las realidades temporales (3: "Santificación del mundo y unidad de vida en el Beato Josemaría"), in "Romana" 15 (1992/2), pp. 331 ff.; Ignacio de Celaya, Unidad de vida y plenitud cristiana, in Fernando Ocáriz-Ignacio de Celaya, Vivir como hijos de Dios. Estudios sobre el Beato Josemaría Escrivá, Pamplona 1993, pp. 93 ff.;

[69] GS, 43.


[71] “Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto” (*Heautontimorumenos*, I, 1).

[72] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 112.

[73] *Conversations*, no. 114. The Pontifical Decree on the Heroic Virtues of the Servant of God J. Escrivá de Balaguer, points out that thanks to “his vivid perception of the mystery of the Incarnation,” the Founder of Opus Dei understood “how supernatural life penetrates all human realities in the heart of a person reborn in Christ. These realities thus become the setting for holiness and the means to that goal.”

[74] Vocation, strictly speaking, is not a simple circumstance added to or suddenly coming upon one’s personal existence. On the contrary, it constitutes the most definitive basis of a person’s life and identity and, in consequence, it affects the whole person, his very being, his definition. As Pope John Paul II explained on one occasion: “The vocation of each person is fused, to a certain degree, with his own being: one can say that the vocation and the person become a single thing” (Meeting with seminarians in Porto Alegre, June 5, 1980. This implies that the vocation of every Christian to sanctity, the Christian vocation, does not constitute a partial aspect of his or her existence, but rather, by being in the order of being, it extends to all of the epochs of one’s life and to all the facets of one’s personality and aspires to encompass the whole work. In effect, if the life of each person is radically explained by the love emanating from God who called that person into existence (cf. *Eph 1:4*) and to the fullness of love, it is evident that responding to that vocation is not just one among the tasks that call for one’s attention and energy. Nor is it even the most important task, in competition with all the others. It is rather one’s raison d’être and one’s only goal, to such an extent that all of the tasks and aspects of one’s existence are, or should be, aspects and moments of that unique task. One can understand, then, that totality is the only magnitude adequate to vocation: “Christian faith and calling affect our whole existence, not just a
part of it. Our relations with God necessarily demand giving ourselves, giving ourselves completely. The man of faith sees life, in all its dimensions, from a new perspective: that which is given us by God” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 46).


[76] Cf. Second Vatican Council, GS, 36ff; Decree Apostolicam Actuositatem [AA], no. 7.

[77] 1 Thess 4:13.

[78] The Second Vatican Council teaches, in this respect, that “All those things which make up the temporal order, namely, the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community... not only aid in the attainment of man's ultimate goal but also possess their own intrinsic value. This value has been established in them by God, whether they are considered in themselves or as parts of the whole temporal order” (AA, 7). From this, C. Soler concludes: “... the ordination of earthly realities to the ultimate end cannot be done independently of their proper meaning; that is to say, it is not right to take them as just an opportunity to direct oneself to the ultimate end, it is not right to order them to this end from outside of themselves, extrinsically, as if their own content were a matter of indifference in itself. To say this with examples: it is not valid to take them as a mere occasion to exercise virtue, or to order them by means of offering them with a right intention, or to give testimony of Christ, independently of the proper reality or temporal activity with which we are dealing. It is its proper content, its material significance, its proper dynamic, in short its proper value which has to be ordained intrinsically to the final end. That is to say, it is a matter of finding in each reality its proper meaning and to discover the immanent ordination of that meaning itself to the final end” (Iglesia y Estado. La incidencia del Concilio Vatican o II sobre el derecho publico externo, Pamplona 1993, p. 151). This is the reason that is hidden, for example, in these words of the Founder of Opus Dei in regard to work: “It is no good offering to God something that is less perfect than our poor human limitations permit. The work that we offer must be without blemish.
and it must be done as carefully as possible, even in its smallest details, for God will not accept shoddy workmanship” (*Friends of God*, no. 55).

On this point of special importance is the personal discovery of the value of one’s own work as a daily reality which is sanctifiable and sanctifying: “Your ordinary professional work will provide the true, solid, noble material out of which you will build a truly Christian life. You will use your work to make fruitful the grace which comes to us from Christ. Faith, hope and charity will come into play in your professional work done for God. The incidents, the problems, the friendships which your work brings with it, will give you food for prayer. The effort to improve your own daily occupation will give you the chance to experience the cross which is essential for a Christian. When you feel your weakness, the failures which arise even in human undertakings, you will gain in objectivity, in humility and in understanding for others. Successes and joys will prompt you to thanksgiving and to realize that you do not live for yourself, but for the service of others and of God” (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 49).

P. O’Callaghan, La virtud de la esperanza y la ascetica cristiana en algunos escritos del Beato, Fundador del Opus Dei, in *Romana* 23 (1996/2), PP. 262-279, (the expression cited is on page 268).

1 Cor 10:31.

Cf. *EiE*, no. 7 (cited supra, note 1).

“‘And in a pagan or in a worldly atmosphere, when my life clashes with its surroundings, won’t my naturalness seem artificial?’ you ask me. —And I reply: Undoubtedly your life will clash with theirs; and that contrast—faith confirmed by works!— is exactly the naturalness I ask of you” (*St. Josemaría Escrivá, The Way*, no. 380).

*CCC*, 900

Each one of us has to be *ipse Christus*: Christ himself. He is the one mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim 2:5). And we make ourselves one with him in order to offer all things, with him, to the Father. Our calling to be children of God, in the midst of the world, requires us not only to seek our own personal holiness, but also to go out onto all the ways of the earth, to convert them into roads that will carry souls over all
obstacles and lead them to the Lord. As we take part in all temporal activities, as ordinary citizens, we are to become leaven (cf. Mt 13: 33) acting on the mass (cf. 1 Cor 5:6) (Christ Is Passing By, no. 120)

[86] “The Christian vocation by its very nature is also a vocation to the apostolate” (AA, no. 2)

[87] Christ Is Passing By. no 122.

[88] Lumen Gentium, no. 31

[89] Cf. Lumen Gentium, no. 33

[90] Instruction Ecclesiae de Mysterio, cit. Premise; cf. also CL, 36 ff.


[92] Cf. Gaudium et Spes, 43; Code of Canon Law, canons 227, 272.

[93] Conversations, nos. 116-117.

[94] Christ Is Passing By, no. 8.

[95] “Our Lord... has given us the world for our inheritance. It is up to us to keep our souls and our minds wide awake. We have to be realistic, without being defeatist. Only a person with a callous conscience, made insensitive by routine or dulled by a frivolous attitude, can allow himself to think that evil—offense to God and harm, at times irreparable harm, to souls—does not exist in the world he sees. We have to be optimistic, but our optimism should come from our faith in the power of God who does not lose battles, and not from any human sense of satisfaction, from a stupid and presumptuous complacency.” (Christ Is Passing By, no 123).

[96] Rom 8:19-22

[97] Cf. Eph 5:10; Rom 12:2

[98] In the encyclical Veritatis Splendor, of August 6, 1993, John Paul II made this reflection: “In a widely de-Christianized culture, the criteria employed by believers themselves in making judgments and decisions often appear extraneous or even contrary to those of the Gospel. It is urgent then that Christians should rediscover the newness of the faith and its power to judge a prevalent and all-intrusive culture. As the Apostle Paul admonishes us “Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as
children of the light (for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead, expose them. Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time because the days are evil" (*Eph* 5:8-11, 15-16; cf. 1 *Thess* 5:4-8) (no. 88)

[99] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 125.


[101] Cf. on the characteristics of this formation, R. Lanzetti, *L'unità di vita e la missione del fedeli laici...*, cit. (Section B: “La formazione dei laici all'unità di vita,” pp. 304 and ff.)

[102] Cf. For one of the relevant aspects of the activity of the laity in temporal affairs, Congregation for the doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, Nov. 24, 2002; and among other studies, A. Rodríguez Luño, La formación de la conciencia en materia social y política según las enseñanzas del Beato Josemaría Escrivá, in *Romana* (1997/1) pp. 162-181.

[103] Cf. 1 *Pet.* 3:15

[104] *Mt* 7: 26-27


[106] *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 87

[107] Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10


[110] Ibid., no. 8.

[111] *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 87-88.

[112] In the Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, of January 6, 2001, John Paul II expressed it thus: “But it would be wrong to think that
ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today’s world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but ‘Christians at risk.’ They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of ‘substitutes’. (no. 34)


[114] *Gal 4:19*
