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.
SUMMARY
EDITORIAL

- A Divine Plan

HOLY SEE

The Roman Pontiff

- Homily at the Fifth World Family Congress, Valencia (July 9, 2006)
- Homily on the Esplanade of the New Fair Grounds, Munich (September 10, 2006)
- Homily for the Solemnity of Christmas, Vatican Basilica (December 24, 2006)
- Homily at the Shrine of Mary's House, Ephesus (November 29, 2006)
- Address at the Fifth World Family Congress, Valencia (July 8, 2006)

PRELATE

Activities of the Prelate

- Pastoral Trips: Valencia, Kenya and Uganda, the United States and Canada, Lebanon

Pastoral Letters

- Pastoral Letter November, 2006
- Pastoral Letter December, 2006

Homilies

- At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 10, 2006)
- At the diaconal ordination of faithful of the Prelature, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (November 25, 2006)

Addresses

- At the opening of the academic year at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (November 11, 2006)
- On the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate from Strathmore University, Nairobi (August 25, 2006)

Articles and Interviews

- On Prayer, Magnificat, Madrid (October -- December, 2006)
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA

- Congress "Brussels -- Toussaint 2006"
- A chapel dedicated to St. Josemaria Escriva
- Other News

NEWS

- New Centers of the Prelature
- Popular Novena for private devotion to Dr. Cofiño
- Commemorative stamps in honor of Bishop Larrea
- Fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Opus Dei’s work in Switzerland

INITIATIVES

- A study and document

In Brief

- Amsterdam -- (The Netherlands) The Club de Borcht reopens its doors
- London -- (England) Celebrating Life
- Rio de Janeiro -- (Brazil) Panel: What is Opus Dei?
- Lismullin -- (Ireland) Nursing Now: an International Seminar for Nurses
- Dublin -- (Ireland) "Can do, Can U?" A Seminar on Volunteer Work for University Women
- Montevideo -- (Uruguay) The Minister of Labor Visits -- Los Pinos
- Cologne -- (Germany) Work as Spiritual Enrichment
- Sao Paulo -- (Brazil) Project Hypertext: A Grounding in Anthropology
- El Crucero -- (Nicaragua) Eyeglasses for Five Hundred "Indígenas"
- Navunibitu (Fiji) -- Work Camp at the Mission School
- Rio Grande -- (Puerto Rico) Tenth Anniversary of Monteclaro
- Quito -- (Ecuador) Congress on the Advantages of Separate Education
- Nairobi -- (Kenya) European and African Volunteers in Kihumbuini Primary School
- Valencia -- (Spain) The Archbishop in La Alameda Student Residence
• Rome -- (Italy) Ettore Bernabei at the RUI
• Bogota -- (Colombia) "From Vatican II to New Evangelization"
• Manila -- (Philippines) The Mayor Gives a Talk in Sarangani
• Kimlea -- (Kenya) Kimlea Clinic

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 2006

A STUDY

• "Grace in the spirituality of St. Josemaria Escriva," by Cardinal Leo Scheffczyk
EDITORIAL
A Divine Plan

Crowning the work of creation, on the sixth day, “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”[1] While God was pleased with all his works, in the formation of the human race God rejoiced in a special way. He saw that what he had done was “very good,” Scripture tells us,[2] as though the inspired author wanted to stress God’s special action in creating man and woman, made to the image and likeness of the Creator through a spiritual and immortal soul. Moreover, God gratuitously bestowed a participation in his own intimate life, making the first man and woman his children and filling them with preternatural gifts.

Divine providence, in providing for the human being’s free cooperation in the transmission of life, has wanted to protect it from the vagaries of possible caprices through the natural institution of marriage,[3] later elevated by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament.

The family—the great human family, and each of the families that make it up—is one of the natural instruments desired by God so that men and women could cooperate in an orderly way with his creative decree. God’s will in counting on the family in his plan of salvation was confirmed, as time went on, through the various covenants that Yahve established with the ancient patriarchs: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In its set time, the promise of a Redeemer was given to the House of David.

When the fullness of time arrived, an angel of the Lord announced to men the fulfillment of the divine plan: Jesus is born, in Nazareth, of the Virgin Mary, through the action of the Holy Spirit. And God provided a family for his Son, with an adoptive father, Joseph, and Mary, his virginal mother. God deigned, also in this extraordinary event, to provide an example of how he wants men and women, his children, to be born and to grow up: within a stably constituted institution.

“Our thoughts turn to the different events and circumstances surrounding the birth of the Son of God. As we contemplate the stable in Bethlehem or the home of the holy family in Nazareth, Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus occupy a special place in our hearts. What does the simple,
We can respond to St. Josemaría’s question with words from the Compendium of the Catechism: the Christian family, in the image of Jesus’ family, is also a “domestic church” because it manifests the communal and familial nature of the Church as the family of God.[5]

Owing to its natural and supernatural mission, the family has a great dignity. Every family is a sacred entity and merits the veneration and solicitude of its members, of civil society and of the Church. Therefore, it is a tragic corruption of its essence to reduce it to conjugal relations, or to a social unit or a harmonization of special interests. St. Josemaría insisted that “we must strive so that these cells of Christianity may be born and may develop with a desire for holiness.”[6]

The home has to be the first and principal school where children learn to live the human and Christian virtues. The Church has a great interest in the proper development of the “school of virtues” that each family should be. Through the generous cooperation of Christian parents in the divine plan, God himself “will increase and enrich his family.”[7] The Mystical Body of Christ grows in number and virtue on earth, and from Christian homes an especially pleasing oblation is offered to God.[8]

The reality of the family establishes certain rights and duties. All its members should have a clear awareness of the dignity of the family community and of the mission it is called to carry out. Each person should fulfill his or her duties with a true sense of responsibility, despite the sacrifices required. In regard to its rights, the family has a double title to the state’s respect and recognition: the family is the origin of the state and a society is only as good as the families that make it up.[9]

The love that is born in the family—both gentle and demanding—makes family life a foretaste of heaven. “Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.”[10]

At the present moment in the life of society, it is especially urgent to once more instill a Christian meaning into so many homes. To contribute
to this immense work, the key to restoring a Christian tone to society, each of us has to begin by putting order into his own house.

Of special importance here is the education of one’s children. Parents are called to provide this education in a society that to a great extent has become de-Christianized. Pope John Paul II stressed two basic truths in this regard: “first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self.”[^11] “Raising children can be considered a genuine apostolate. It is a living means of communication, which not only creates a profound relationship between the educator and the one being educated, but also makes them both sharers in truth and love, that final goal to which everyone is called by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”[^12]

[^1]: Gen 2:7.
[^3]: Cf. Gen 1:27.
[^4]: St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 22.
[^6]: St. Josemaría, Conversations, no. 91.
[^7]: Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes, no. 50.
[^8]: Cf. Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 188.
[^10]: Benedict XVI, Encyclical Deus Caritas Est, no. 11.
[^12]: Ibid.
HOLY SEE

• The Roman Pontiff
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this Holy Mass which it is my great joy to celebrate, together with many of my Brothers in the Episcopate and a great number of priests, I give thanks to the Lord for all of you, the joyful throng of beloved families gathered in this place, and the many others who in distant lands are following this celebration by radio and television. I greet all of you with an affectionate embrace.

Both Esther and Paul, as we have just heard in today’s readings, testify that the family is called to work for the handing on of the faith. Esther admits: “Ever since I was born, I have heard in the tribe of my family that you, O Lord, took Israel out of all the nations” (14:5). Paul follows the tradition of his Jewish ancestors by worshiping God with a pure conscience. He praises the sincere faith of Timothy and speaks to him about “a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you” (2 Tim 1:15). In these biblical testimonies, the family includes not only parents and children, but also grandparents and ancestors. The family thus appears to us as a community of generations and the guarantee of a patrimony of traditions.

None of us gave ourselves life or single-handedly learned how to live. All of us received from others both life itself and its basic truths, and we have been called to attain perfection in relationship and loving communion with others. The family, founded on indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman, is the expression of this relational, filial and communal aspect of life. It is the setting where men and women are enabled to be born with dignity, and to grow and develop in an integral manner.

Once children are born, through their relationship with their parents they begin to share in a family tradition with even older roots. Together with the gift of life, they receive a whole patrimony of experience. Parents
have the right and the inalienable duty to transmit this heritage to their children: to help them find their own identity, to initiate them to the life of society, to foster the responsible exercise of their moral freedom and their ability to love on the basis of their having been loved and, above all, to enable them to encounter God. Children experience human growth and maturity to the extent that they trustingly accept this heritage and training which they gradually make their own. They are thus enabled to make a personal synthesis between what has been passed on and what is new, a synthesis that every individual and generation is called to make.

At the origin of every man and woman, and thus in all human fatherhood and motherhood, we find God the Creator. For this reason, married couples must accept the child born to them, not simply as theirs alone, but also as a child of God, loved for his or her own sake and called to be a son or daughter of God. What is more: each generation, all parenthood and every family has its origin in God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Esther’s father had passed on to her, along with the memory of her forebears and her people, the memory of a God who is the origin of all and to whom all are called to answer. The memory of God the Father, who chose a people for himself and who acts in history for our salvation. The memory of this Father sheds light on our deepest human identity: where we come from, who we are, and how great is our dignity. Certainly we come from our parents and we are their children, but we also come from God who has created us in his image and called us to be his children. Consequently, at the origin of every human being there is not something haphazard or chance, but a loving plan of God. This was revealed to us by Jesus Christ, the true Son of God and a perfect man. He knew whence he came and whence all of us have come: from the love of his Father and our Father.

Faith, then, is not merely a cultural heritage, but the constant working of the grace of God who calls and our human freedom, which can respond or not to his call. Even if no one can answer for another person, Christian parents are still called to give a credible witness of their Christian faith and hope. The need to ensure that God’s call and the good news of Christ will reach their children with the utmost clarity and authenticity.
As the years pass, this gift of God which the parents have helped set before the eyes of the little ones will also need to be cultivated with wisdom and gentleness, in order to instill in them a capacity for discernment. Thus, with the constant witness of the their parents’ conjugal love, permeated with a living faith, and with the loving accompaniment of the Christian community, children will be helped better to appropriate the gift of their faith, to discover the deepest meaning of their own lives and to respond with joy and gratitude.

The Christian family passes on the faith when parents teach their children to pray and when they pray with them (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 60); when they lead them to the sacraments and gradually introduce them to the life of the Church; when all join in reading the Bible, letting the light of faith shine on their family life and praising God as our Father.

In contemporary culture, we often see an excessive exaltation of the freedom of the individual as an autonomous subject, as if we were self-created and self-sufficient, apart from our relationship with others and our responsibilities in their regard. Attempts are being made to organize the life of society on the basis of subjective and ephemeral desires alone, with no reference to objective, prior truths such as the dignity of each human being and his inalienable rights and duties, which every social group is called to serve.

The Church does not cease to remind us that true human freedom derives from our having been created in God’s image and likeness. Christian education is consequently an education in freedom and for freedom. “We do not do good as slaves, who are not free to act otherwise, but we do it because we are personally responsible for the world; because we love truth and goodness, because we love God himself and therefore his creatures as well. This is the true freedom to which the Holy Spirit wants to lead us (Homily for the Vigil of Pentecost, June 9, 2006).

Jesus Christ is the perfect human being, an example of filial freedom, who teaches us to share with others his own love: “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (*Jn*15:9). And so the Second Vatican Council teaches that “Christian married couples and parents, following their own way, should support one another in grace all through
life with faithful love, and should train their children, lovingly received from God, in Christian doctrine and evangelical virtues. Because in this way they present to all an example of unfailing and generous love, they build up the brotherhood of charity, and they stand as witnesses and cooperators of the fruitfulness of Mother Church, as a sign of and a share in that love with which Christ loved his Bride and gave himself for her” (*Lumen Gentium*, 41).

The joyful love with which our parents welcomed us and accompanied our first steps in this world is like a sacramental sign and prolongation of the benevolent love of God from which we have come. The experience of being welcomed and loved by God and by our parents is always the firm foundation for authentic human growth and authentic development, helping us to mature on the way towards truth and love, and to move beyond ourselves in order to enter into communion with others and with God.

To help us advance along the path of human maturity, the Church teaches us to respect and foster the marvelous reality of the indissoluble marriage between man and woman which is also the origin of the family. To recognize and assist this institution is one of the greatest services which can be rendered nowadays to the common good and to the authentic development of individuals and societies, as well as the best means of ensuring the dignity, equality and true freedom of the human person.

This being the case, I want to stress the importance and the positive role which the Church’s various family associations are playing in support of marriage and the family. Consequently, “I wish to call on all Christians to collaborate cordially and courageously with all people of good will who are serving the family in accordance with their responsibility” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86), so that by joining forces in a legitimate plurality of initiatives they will contribute to the promotion of the authentic good of the family in contemporary society.

Let us return for a moment to the first reading of this Mass, drawn from the Book of Esther. The Church at prayer has seen in this humble queen interceding with all her heart for her suffering people, a prefigurement of Mary, whom her Son has given to us all as our Mother; a
prefigurement of the Mother who protects by her love God’s family on its earthly pilgrimage. Mary is the image and model of all mothers, of their great mission to be guardians of life, of their mission to be teachers of the art of living and of the art of loving.

The Christian family—father, mother and children—is called, then, to do all these things not as a task imposed from without, but rather as a gift of the sacramental grace of marriage poured out upon the spouses. If they remain open to the Spirit and implore his help, he will not fail to bestow on them the love of God the Father made manifest and incarnate in Christ. The presence of the Spirit will help spouses not to lose sight of the source and criterion of their love and self-giving, and to cooperate with him to make it visible and incarnate in every aspect of their lives. The Spirit will also awaken in them a yearning for the definitive encounter with Christ in the house of his Father and our Father. And this is the message of hope that, from Valencia, I wish to share with all the families of the world. Amen.

Homily on the Esplanade of the New Fair Grounds, Munich (September 10, 2006)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

First, I would like once more to offer all of you an affectionate greeting. I am happy, as I told you, to be with you once again and to celebrate Holy Mass with you. I am also happy to revisit familiar places which had a decisive influence on my life, shaping my thoughts and feelings: places where I learned how to believe and how to live. This is a time to say thanks to all those—living and deceased—who guided and accompanied me along the way. I thank God for this beautiful country and for all the persons who have made it truly my homeland.

We have just listened to the three biblical readings which the Church’s liturgy has chosen for this Sunday. All three develop a double theme which is ultimately one, bringing out—as circumstances dictate—one or another
of its aspects. All three readings speak of God as the center of all reality and the center of our personal life. “Here is your God!” exclaims the prophet Isaiah in the first reading (35:4). In their own way, the Letter of James and the Gospel passage say the very same thing. They want to lead us to God, to set us on the right road in life. But to speak of “God” is also to speak of society: of our shared responsibility for the triumph of justice and love in the world. This is powerfully expressed in the second reading, in which James, a close relative of Jesus, speaks to us. He is addressing a community beginning to be marked by pride, since it included affluent and distinguished persons, and consequently the risk of indifference to the rights of the poor. James's words give us a glimpse of Jesus, of that God who became man. Though he was of Davidic, and thus royal, stock, he became a simple man in the midst of simple men and women. He did not sit on a throne, but died in the ultimate poverty of the Cross. Love of neighbor, which is primarily a commitment to justice, is the touchstone for faith and love of God. James calls it “the royal law” (cf. 2:8), echoing the words which Jesus used so often: the reign of God, God's kingship. This does not refer to just any kingdom, coming at any time; it means that God must even now become the force that shapes our lives and actions. This is what we ask for when we pray: “Thy Kingdom come.” We are not asking for something off in the distance, something that, deep down, we may not even want to experience. Rather, we pray that God's will may here and now determine our own will, and that in this way God can reign in the world. We pray that justice and love may become the decisive forces affecting our world. A prayer like this is naturally addressed first to God, but it also proves unsettling for us. Really, is this what we want? Is this the direction in which we want our lives to move? For James, “the royal law,” the law of God's kingship, is also “the law of freedom”: if we follow God in all that we think and do, then we draw closer together, we gain freedom and thus true fraternity is born. When Isaiah, in the first reading, talks about God, saying “Behold your God!” he goes on to talk about salvation for the suffering, and when James speaks of the social order as a necessary expression of our faith, he logically goes on to speak of God, whose children we are.
But now we must turn our attention to the Gospel, which speaks of Jesus' healing of a man born deaf and mute. Here too we encounter the two aspects of this one theme. Jesus is concerned for the suffering, for those pushed to the margins of society. He heals them and, by enabling them to live and work together, he brings them to equality and fraternity. This obviously has something to say to all of us: Jesus points out to all of us the goal of our activity, how we are to act. Yet the whole story has another aspect, one which the Fathers of the Church constantly brought out, one which particularly speaks to us today. The Fathers were speaking to and about the men and women of their time. But their message also has new meaning for us modern men and women. There is not only a physical deafness which largely cuts people off from social life; there is also a “hardness of hearing” where God is concerned, and this is something from which we particularly suffer in our own time. Put simply, we are no longer able to hear God—there are too many different frequencies filling our ears. What is said about God strikes us as pre-scientific, no longer suited to our age. Along with this hardness of hearing or outright deafness where God is concerned, we naturally lose our ability to speak with him and to him. And so we end up losing a decisive capacity for perception. We risk losing our inner senses. This weakening of our capacity for perception drastically and dangerously curtails the range of our relationship with reality in general. The horizon of our life is disturbingly foreshortened.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus put his fingers in the ears of the deaf-mute, touched the sick man’s tongue with spittle and said “Ephphatha”—”Be opened.” The Evangelist has preserved for us the original Aramaic word which Jesus spoke, and thus he brings us back to that very moment. What happened then was unique, but it does not belong to a distant past: Jesus continues to do the same thing anew, even today. At our Baptism he touched each of us and said “Ephphatha”—”Be opened”—thus enabling us to hear God's voice and to be able to talk to him. There is nothing magical about what takes place in the Sacrament of Baptism. Baptism opens up a path before us. It makes us part of the community of those who are able to hear and speak; it brings us into fellowship with Jesus himself, who alone has seen God and is thus able to speak of him (cf. Jn 1:18): through faith, Jesus wants to share with us his
seeing God, his hearing the Father and his converse with him. The path upon which we set out at Baptism is meant to be a process of increasing development, by which we grow in the life of communion with God, and acquire a different way of looking at man and creation.

The Gospel invites us to realize that we have a “deficit” in our capacity for perception—initially, we do not notice this deficiency as such, since everything else seems so urgent and logical; since everything seems to proceed normally, even when we no longer have eyes and ears for God and we live without him. But it is true that everything goes on as usual when God no longer is a part of our lives and our world? Before raising any further questions, I would like to share some of my experience in meeting Bishops from throughout the world. The Catholic Church in Germany is outstanding for its social activities, for its readiness to help wherever help is needed. During their visits ad Limina, the Bishops, most recently those of Africa, have always mentioned with gratitude the generosity of German Catholics and ask me to convey that gratitude, and that is what I wish to do now, publicly. The Bishops of the Baltic Countries, who came before vacations began, also told me about how German Catholics assisted them greatly in rebuilding their churches, which were badly in need of repair after decades of Communist rule. Every now and then, however, some African Bishop will say to me: “If I come to Germany and present social projects, suddenly every door opens. But if I come with a plan for evangelization, I meet with reservations.” Clearly some people have the idea that social projects should be urgently undertaken, while anything dealing with God or even the Catholic faith is of limited and lesser urgency. Yet the experience of those Bishops is that evangelization itself should be foremost, that the God of Jesus Christ must be known, believed in and loved, and that hearts must be converted if progress is to be made on social issues and reconciliation is to begin, and if—for example—AIDS is to be combated by realistically facing its deeper causes and the sick are to be given the loving care they need. Social issues and the Gospel are inseparable. When we bring people only knowledge, ability, technical competence and tools, we bring them too little. All too quickly the mechanisms of violence take over: the capacity to destroy and to kill becomes dominant, becomes the way to gain power—a power which at
some point should bring law, but which will never be able to do so. Reconciliation, and a shared commitment to justice and love, recede into the distance. The criteria by which technology is placed at the service of law and love are then no longer clear: yet it is precisely on these criteria that everything depends: criteria which are not only theories, but which enlighten the heart and thus set reason and action on the right path.

People in Africa and Asia admire, indeed, the scientific and technical prowess of the West, but they are frightened by a form of rationality which totally excludes God from man's vision, as if this were the highest form of reason, and one to be taught to their cultures too. They do not see the real threat to their identity in the Christian faith, but in the contempt for God and the cynicism that considers mockery of the sacred to be an exercise of freedom and that holds up utility as the supreme criterion for the future of scientific research. Dear friends, this cynicism is not the kind of tolerance and cultural openness that the world's peoples are looking for and that all of us want! The tolerance which we urgently need includes the fear of God—respect for what others hold sacred. This respect for what others hold sacred demands that we ourselves learn once more the fear of God. But this sense of respect can be reborn in the Western world only if faith in God is reborn, if God become once more present to us and in us.

We impose our faith on no one. Such proselytism is contrary to Christianity. Faith can develop only in freedom. But we do appeal to the freedom of men and women to open their hearts to God, to seek him, to hear his voice. As we gather here, let us here ask the Lord with all our hearts to speak anew his “Ephphatha,” to heal our hardness of hearing for God's presence, activity and word, and to give us sight and hearing. Let us ask his help in rediscovering prayer, to which he invites us in the liturgy and whose essential formula he has taught us in the Our Father.

The world needs God. We need God. But what God do we need? In the first reading, the prophet tells a people suffering oppression that: “He will come with vengeance” (Is 35:4). We can easily suppose how the people imagined that vengeance. But the prophet himself goes on to reveal what it really is: the healing goodness of God. And the definitive explanation of the prophet's word is to be found in the one who died for us on the Cross: in Jesus, the Son of God incarnate, who here looks at us so closely. His
“vengeance” is the Cross: a “No” to violence and a “love to the end.” This is the God we need. We do not fail to show respect for other religions and cultures, we do not fail to show profound respect for their faith, when we proclaim clearly and uncompromisingly the God who has countered violence with his own suffering; who in the face of the power of evil exalts his mercy, in order that evil may be limited and overcome. To him we now lift up our prayer, that he may remain with us and help us to be.

Homily for the Solemnity of Christmas, Vatican Basilica (December 24, 2006)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have just heard in the Gospel the message given by the angels to the shepherds during that Holy Night, a message which the Church now proclaims to us: "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger" (Lk 2:11-12). Nothing miraculous, nothing extraordinary, nothing magnificent is given to the shepherds as a sign. All they will see is a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, one who, like all children, needs a mother’s care; a child born in a stable, who therefore lies not in a cradle but in a manger. God’s sign is the baby in need of help and in poverty. Only in their hearts will the shepherds be able to see that this baby fulfills the promise of the prophet Isaiah, which we heard in the first reading: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder" (Is 9:5). Exactly the same sign has been given to us. We too are invited by the angel of God, through the message of the Gospel, to set out in our hearts to see the child lying in the manger.

God’s sign is simplicity. God’s sign is the baby. God’s sign is that he makes himself small for us. This is how he reigns. He does not come with power and outward splendor. He comes as a baby — defenseless and in need of our help. He does not want to overwhelm us with his strength. He
takes away our fear of his greatness. He asks for our love: so he makes himself a child. He wants nothing other from us than our love, through which we spontaneously learn to enter into his feelings, his thoughts and his will — we learn to live with him and to practice with him that humility of renunciation that belongs to the very essence of love. God made himself small so that we could understand him, welcome him, and love him. The Fathers of the Church, in their Greek translation of the Old Testament, found a passage from the prophet Isaiah that Paul also quotes in order to show how God’s new ways had already been foretold in the Old Testament. There we read: "God made his Word short, he abbreviated it" (Is 10:23; Rom 9:28). The Fathers interpreted this in two ways. The Son himself is the Word, the Logos; the eternal Word became small — small enough to fit into a manger. He became a child, so that the Word could be grasped by us. In this way God teaches us to love the little ones. In this way he teaches us to love the weak. In this way he teaches us respect for children. The child of Bethlehem directs our gaze towards all children who suffer and are abused in the world, the born and the unborn. Towards children who are placed as soldiers in a violent world; towards children who have to beg; towards children who suffer deprivation and hunger; towards children who are unloved. In all of these it is the Child of Bethlehem who is crying out to us; it is the God who has become small who appeals to us. Let us pray this night that the brightness of God’s love may enfold all these children. Let us ask God to help us do our part so that the dignity of children may be respected. May they all experience the light of love, which mankind needs so much more than the material necessities of life.

And so we come to the second meaning that the Fathers saw in the phrase: "God made his Word short". The Word which God speaks to us in Sacred Scripture had become long in the course of the centuries. It became long and complex, not just for the simple and unlettered, but even more so for those versed in Sacred Scripture, for the experts who evidently became entangled in details and in particular problems, almost to the extent of losing an overall perspective. Jesus "abbreviated" the Word — he showed us once more its deeper simplicity and unity. Everything taught by the Law and the Prophets is summed up — he says — in the command: "You shall
love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-40). This is everything — the whole faith is contained in this one act of love which embraces God and humanity. Yet now further questions arise: how are we to love God with all our mind, when our intellect can barely reach him? How are we to love him with all our heart and soul, when our heart can only catch a glimpse of him from afar, when there are so many contradictions in the world that would hide his face from us? This is where the two ways in which God has "abbreviated" his Word come together. He is no longer distant. He is no longer unknown. He is no longer beyond the reach of our heart. He has become a child for us, and in so doing he has dispelled all doubt. He has become our neighbor, restoring in this way the image of man, whom we often find so hard to love. For us, God has become a gift. He has given himself. He has entered time for us. He who is the Eternal One, above time, he has assumed our time and raised it to himself on high. Christmas has become the Feast of gifts in imitation of God who has given himself to us. Let us allow our heart, our soul and our mind to be touched by this fact!

Among the many gifts that we buy and receive, let us not forget the true gift: to give each other something of ourselves, to give each other something of our time, to open our time to God. In this way anxiety disappears, joy is born, and the feast is created. During the festive meals of these days let us remember the Lord’s words: "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite those who will invite you in return, but invite those whom no one invites and who are not able to invite you" (cf. Lk 14:12-14). This also means: when you give gifts for Christmas, do not give only to those who will give to you in return, but give to those who receive from no one and who cannot give you anything back. This is what God has done: he invites us to his wedding feast, something which we cannot reciprocate, but can only receive with joy. Let us imitate him! Let us love God and, starting from him, let us also love man, so that, starting from man, we can then rediscover God in a new way!

And so, finally, we find yet a third meaning in the saying that the Word became "brief" and "small". The shepherds were told that they would find the child in a manger for animals, who were the rightful occupants of
the stable. Reading Isaiah (1:3), the Fathers concluded that beside the manger of Bethlehem there stood an ox and an ass. At the same time they interpreted the text as symbolizing the Jews and the pagans — and thus all humanity — who each in their own way have need of a Savior: the God who became a child. Man, in order to live, needs bread, the fruit of the earth and of his labor. But he does not live by bread alone. He needs nourishment for his soul: he needs meaning that can fill his life. Thus, for the Fathers, the manger of the animals became the symbol of the altar, on which lies the Bread which is Christ himself: the true food for our hearts. Once again we see how he became small: in the humble appearance of the host, in a small piece of bread, he gives us himself.

All this is conveyed by the sign that was given to the shepherds and is given also to us: the child born for us, the child in whom God became small for us. Let us ask the Lord to grant us the grace of looking upon the crib this night with the simplicity of the shepherds, so as to receive the joy with which they returned home (cf. Lk 2:20). Let us ask him to give us the humility and the faith with which Saint Joseph looked upon the child that Mary had conceived by the Holy Spirit. Let us ask the Lord to let us look upon him with that same love with which Mary saw him. And let us pray that in this way the light that the shepherds saw will shine upon us too, and that what the angels sang that night will be accomplished throughout the world: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased." Amen!

Torna ai contenuti

Homily at the Shrine of Mary's House, Ephesus (November 29, 2006)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this Eucharistic celebration we praise the Lord for Mary’s divine motherhood, a mystery solemnly confessed and proclaimed in Ephesus at the Ecumenical Council of 431. To this place, so dear to the Christian community, my venerable predecessors the Servants of God Paul VI and
John Paul II came as pilgrims; the latter visited this Shrine on 30 November 1979, just over a year after the beginning of his Pontificate. Another of my Predecessors was in this country not as Pope, but as the Papal Representative, from January 1935 to December 1944, Blessed John XXIII, Angelo Roncalli, whose memory still enkindles great devotion and affection. He very much esteemed and admired the Turkish people. Here I would like to quote an entry in his Journal of a Soul: “I love the Turks; I appreciate the natural qualities of these people who have their own place reserved in the march of civilization” (pp. 233-4). He also left to the Church and the world the legacy of his Christian optimism, rooted in deep faith and constant union with God.

In that same spirit, I turn to this nation and, in a special way, to the “little flock” of Christ living in its midst, in order to offer a word of encouragement and to manifest the affection of the whole Church. With great love I greet all of you here present, the faithful of Izmir, Mersin, Iskenderun and Antakia, and others from different parts of the world, as well as those who could not take part in this celebration but are spiritually united with us. I greet in particular Archbishop Ruggero Franceschini of Izmir, Archbishop Giuseppe Bernardini, Archbishop emeritus of Izmir, Bishop Luigi Padovese, the priests and the religious. Thank you for your presence, your witness and your service to the Church in this blessed land where, at its very beginnings, the Christian community experienced great growth, a fact reflected in the numerous pilgrimages made to Turkey to this day.

Mother of God — Mother of the Church

We have listened to a passage from Saint John’s Gospel which invites us to contemplate the moment of the Redemption when Mary, united to her Son in the offering of his sacrifice, extended her motherhood to all men and women, and in particular to the disciples of Jesus. A privileged witness to that event was the author of the Fourth Gospel, John, the only one of the Apostles to remain at Golgotha with the Mother of Jesus and the other women. Mary’s motherhood, which began with her fiat in Nazareth, is fulfilled at the foot of the Cross. Although it is true — as Saint Anselm says — that “from the moment of her fiat Mary began to carry all of us in her womb”, the maternal vocation and mission of the Virgin towards those
who believe in Christ actually began when Jesus said to her: “Woman, behold your son!” (Jn 19:26). Looking down from the Cross at his Mother and the beloved disciple by her side, the dying Christ recognized the firstfruits of the family which he had come to form in the world, the beginning of the Church and the new humanity. For this reason, he addressed Mary as “Woman”, not as “Mother”, the term which he was to use in entrusting her to his disciple: “Behold your Mother!” (Jn19:27). The Son of God thus fulfilled his mission: born of the Virgin in order to share our human condition in everything but sin, at his return to the Father he left behind in the world the sacrament of the unity of the human race (cf. Lumen Gentium, 1): the family “brought into unity from the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Saint Cyprian, De Orat. Dom., 23: PL 4, 536), at whose heart is this new bond between the Mother and the disciple. Mary’s divine motherhood and her ecclesial motherhood are thus inseparably united.

Mother of God — Mother of Unity

The first reading presented what could be called the “Gospel” of the Apostle of the Gentiles: all men and women, including the pagans, are called in Christ to share fully in the mystery of salvation. The text also contains the expression that I have chosen as the motto for my Apostolic Journey: “He, Christ, is our peace” (Eph 2:14). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us that Jesus Christ has not only brought us peace, but that he is our peace. And he justifies this statement by referring to the mystery of the Cross: by shedding “his blood”, by offering in sacrifice “his flesh”, Jesus destroyed hostility “in himself” and created “in himself one new man in place of the two” (Eph 2:14-16). The Apostle explains how, in a truly unforeseen way, messianic peace has now come about in Christ’s own person and his saving mystery. He explains it by writing, during his imprisonment, to the Christian community which lived here, in Ephesus: “to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph1:1), as he says in the salutation of the Letter. The Apostle wishes them “grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:2). Grace is the power that transforms man and the world; peace is the mature fruit of this transformation. Christ is grace; Christ is peace. Paul knows that he has been sent to proclaim a “mystery”, a divine plan
that only in the fullness of time has been carried out and revealed in Christ: namely, that “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel” (Eph 3:6). This mystery is accomplished, in salvation history, in the Church, the new People in which, now that the old dividing wall has been broken down, Jews and pagans find themselves united. Like Christ himself, the Church is not only the instrument of unity, but also its efficacious sign. And the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Christ and of the Church, is the Mother of that mystery of unity which Christ and the Church inseparably signify and build up, in the world and throughout history.

Let us implore peace for Jerusalem and the whole world

The Apostle of the Gentiles says that Christ “has made us both one” (Eph 2:14): these words properly refer to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the mystery of eternal salvation, yet they can also extend, by analogy, to the relationship between the peoples and civilizations present in the world. Christ “came to proclaim peace” (Eph 2:17), not only between Jews and non-Jews, but between all nations, since all have their origin in the same God, the one Creator and Lord of the universe. Strengthened by God’s word, from here in Ephesus, a city blessed by the presence of Mary Most Holy — who we know is loved and venerated also by Muslims — let us lift up to the Lord a special prayer for peace between peoples. From this edge of the Anatolian peninsula, a natural bridge between continents, let us implore peace and reconciliation, above all for those dwelling in the Land called “Holy” and considered as such by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike: it is the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, destined to be the home of a people that would become a blessing for all the nations (cf. Gen12:1-3). Peace for all of humanity! May Isaiah’s prophecy soon be fulfilled: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Is2:4). We all need this universal peace; and the Church is called to be not only the prophetic herald, but even more, the “sign and instrument” of this peace. Against the backdrop of universal peace, the yearning for full communion and concord between all Christians becomes even more profound and intense. Present at today’s celebration are Catholic faithful of various rites, and this is a reason for joyful praise of
God. These rites, when they converge in unity and common witness, are an expression of that marvellous variety which adorns the Bride of Christ. In this regard, the unity of the Ordinaries of the Episcopal Conference in fellowship and the sharing of pastoral efforts must set an example.

*Magnificat*

In today’s liturgy we have repeated, as the refrain of the Responsorial Psalm, the song of praise proclaimed by the Virgin of Nazareth on meeting her elderly kinswoman Elizabeth (cf. Lk 1:39). Our hearts too were consoled by the words of the Psalmist: “steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, righteousness and peace will kiss” (Ps 85:10). Dear brothers and sisters, in this visit I have wanted to convey my personal love and spiritual closeness, together with that of the universal Church, to the Christian community here in Turkey, a small minority which faces many challenges and difficulties daily. With firm trust let us sing, together with Mary, a *magnificat* of praise and thanksgiving to God who has looked with favor upon the lowliness of his servant (cf. Lk 1:48). Let us sing joyfully, even when we are tested by difficulties and dangers, as we have learned from the fine witness given by the Roman priest Don Andrea Santoro, whom I am pleased to recall in this celebration. Mary teaches us that the source of our joy and our one sure support is Christ, and she repeats his words: “Do not be afraid” (Mk 6:50), “I am with you” (Mt 28:20). Mary, Mother of the Church, accompany us always on our way! Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us! *Aziz Meryem Mesih’in Annesi bizim için Dua et*. Amen.

**Address at the Fifth World Family Congress, Valencia (July 8, 2006)**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am most happy to take part in this prayer meeting which is meant to celebrate with great joy God’s gift of the family. I feel very close in prayer to all those who have recently experienced this city’s mourning and in our
hope in the Risen Christ, which provides light and strength even at times of immense human tragedy.

United by the same faith in Christ, we have gathered here from so many parts of the world as a community which with gratitude and joy bears witness that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God for love, and that complete human fulfillment only comes about when we make a sincere gift of ourselves to others. The family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love. That is why the Church constantly wishes to demonstrate her pastoral concern for this reality, so basic for the human person. This is what she teaches in her Magisterium: “God, who is love and who created man and woman for love, has called them to love. By creating man and woman he called them to an intimate communion of life and love in Marriage. ‘So they are no longer two but one flesh’ (Mt19:6)” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Compendium, 337).

This is the truth that the Church tirelessly proclaims to the world. My beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II said that “man has been made in ‘the image and likeness’ of God not only by his being human, but also by the communion of the persons that man and woman have formed since the beginning. They become the image of God, not so much in their aloneness as in their communion” (Catechesis, November 14, 1979). That is why I confirmed the calling of this Fifth World Meeting of Families in Spain, and specifically here in Valencia, a city rich in tradition and proud of the Christian faith lived and nurtured in so many of its families.

The family is an intermediate institution between individuals and society, and nothing can completely take its place. The family is itself based primarily on a deep interpersonal relationship between husband and wife, sustained by affection and mutual understanding. To enable this, it receives abundant help from God in the sacrament of Matrimony, which brings with it a true vocation to holiness. Would that our children might experience more the harmony and affection between their parents, rather than disagreements and discord, since the love between father and mother is a source of great security for children and its teaches them the beauty of a faithful and lasting love.
The family is a necessary good for peoples, an indispensable foundation for society and a great and lifelong treasure for couples. It is a unique good for children, who are meant to be the fruit of the love, of the total and generous self-giving of their parents. To proclaim the whole truth about the family, based on marriage as a domestic Church and a sanctuary of life, is a great responsibility incumbent upon all.

Father and mother have said a complete “yes” in the sight of God, which constitutes the basis of the sacrament which joins them together. Likewise, for the inner relationship of the family to be complete, they also need to say a “yes” of acceptance to the children whom they have given birth to or adopted, and each of which has his or her own personality and character. In this way, children will grow up in a climate of acceptance and love, and upon reaching sufficient maturity, will then want to say “yes” in turn to those who gave them life.

The challenges of present-day society, marked by the centrifugal forces generated especially in urban settings, make it necessary to ensure that families do not feel alone. A small family can encounter difficult obstacles when it is isolated from relatives and friends. The ecclesial community therefore has the responsibility of offering support, encouragement and spiritual nourishment which can strengthen the cohesiveness of the family, especially in times of trial or difficulty. Here parishes have an important role to play, as do the various ecclesial associations, called to cooperate as networks of support and a helping hand for the growth of families in faith.

Christ has shown us what is always to be the supreme source of our life and thus of the lives of families: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one had greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:12-13). The love of God himself has been poured out upon us in Baptism. Consequently, families are called to experience this same kind of love, for the Lord makes it possible for us, through our human love, to be sensitive, loving and merciful like Christ.

Together with passing on the faith and the love of God, one of the greatest responsibilities of families is that of training free and responsible persons. For this reason the parents need gradually to give their children greater freedom, while remaining for some time the guardians of that
freedom. If children see that their parents—and, more generally, all the adults around them—live life with joy and enthusiasm, despite all difficulties, they will themselves develop that profound “joy of life” which can help them to overcome wisely the inevitable obstacles and problems which are part of life. Furthermore, when families are not closed in on themselves, children come to learn that every person is worthy of love, and that there is a basic, universal brotherhood which embraces every human being.

This Fifth World Meeting invites us to reflect on a theme of particular importance, one fraught with great responsibility: the transmission of faith in the family. This theme is nicely expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “As a mother who teacher her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith” (No. 171).

This is symbolically in the liturgy of Baptism: with the handing over of the lighted candle, the parents are made part of the mystery of new life as children of God given to their sons and daughters in the waters of baptism.

To hand down the faith to children, with the help of individuals and institutions like the parish, the school or Catholic associations, is a responsibility which parents cannot overlook, neglect or completely delegate to others. “The Christian family is called the domestic church because the family manifests and lives out the communal and familiar nature of the Church as the family of God. Each family member, in accord with his or her own role, exercises the baptismal priesthood and contributes towards making the family a community of grace and of prayer, a school of human and Christian virtues, and the place where the faith is first proclaimed to children” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, Compendium*, 350). And what is more: “Parents, in virtue of their participation in the fatherhood of God, have the first responsibility for the education of their children and they are the first heralds of the faith for them. They have the duty to love and respect their children as persons and as children of God... in particular, they have the mission of educating their children in the Christian faith” (*Ibid*, 460).
The language of faith is learned in homes where this faith grows and is strengthened through prayer and Christian practice. In the reading from Deuteronomy we have heard the prayer constantly repeated by the Chosen People, the “Shema Israel,” which Jesus himself would have heard and recited in his home in Nazareth. He himself would refer to it during his public life, as we see in the Gospel of Mark (12:29). This is the faith of the Church, which is born of God’s love which comes through your families. To live the fullness of this faith, in all its wondrous newness, is a great gift. All the same, at those times when God’s face seems to be hidden, believing can be difficult and takes great effort.

This meeting provides a new impetus for proclaiming the Gospel of the family, reaffirming the strength and identity of the family founded upon marriage and open to the generous gift of life, where children are accompanied in their bodily and spiritual growth. This is the best way to counter a widespread hedonism which reduces human relations to banality and empties them of their authentic value and beauty. To promote the values of marriage does not stand in the way of fully experiencing the happiness that man and women encounter in their mutual love. Christian faith and ethics are not meant to stifle love, but to make it healthier, stronger and more truly free. Human love needs to be purified and to mature if it is to be fully human and the principle of a true and lasting joy (cf. Address at Saint John Lateran, June 5, 2006).

And so I invite government leaders and legislators to reflect on the evident benefits which homes in peace and harmony assure to individuals and the family, the neuralgic center of society, as the Holy See has stated in the Charter of the Rights of the Family. The purpose of laws is the integral good of man, in response to his needs and aspirations. This good is a significant help to society, of which it cannot be deprived, and for peoples a safeguard and a purification. The family is also a school which enables men and women to grow to the full measure of their humanity. The experience of being loved by their parents helps children to become aware of their dignity as children.

Children need to be brought up in the faith, to be loved and protected. Along with their basic right to be born and to be raised in the faith, children also have the right to a home which takes as its model the home
of Nazareth, and to be shielded from all dangers and threats. I am the grandfather of the world, we have heard.

I would now like to say a word to grandparents, who are so important for every family. They can be—and so often are—the guarantors of the affection and tenderness which every human being needs to give and receive. They offer little ones the perspective of time, they are memory and richness of families. In no way should they ever be excluded from the family circle. They are a treasure which the younger generation should not be denied, especially when they bear witness to their faith at the approach of death.

I now wish to recite a part of the prayer which you have prayed in asking for the success of this World Meeting of Families.

O God, who in the Holy Family
left us a perfect model of family life
lived in faith and obedience to your will.
Help us to be examples of faith and love for your commandments.
Help us in our mission of transmitting the faith that we received from our parents.

Open the hearts of our children
so that the seed of faith, which they received in Baptism, will grow in them.
Strength the faith of our young people,
that they may grow in knowledge of Jesus.
Increase love and faithfulness in all marriages,
especially those going through times of suffering or difficulty.
(...)
United to Joseph and Mary,
we ask this through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Torna ai contenuti
PRELATE

- Activities of the Prelate
- Pastoral Letters
- Homilies
- Addresses
- Articles and Interviews
Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips: Valencia, Kenya and Uganda, the United States and Canada, Lebanon

On July 8 and 9, the Fifth World Congress of Families was celebrated in Valencia, presided over by the Holy Father Benedict XVI. The Prelate of Opus Dei was present at the ceremonies. In addition, he met with faithful of Opus Dei in the Valencia region and visited a number of people suffering from illnesses.

He arrived in Valencia on Friday, July 7. On the morning of the 8th, he went to the Cathedral to participate with many other bishops and priests in the welcoming ceremony for Benedict XVI. In the afternoon, he took part in the vigil for the World Congress of Families. Before the ceremony began, he was interviewed by a television network. On Sunday the 9th, the Prelate of Opus Dei concelebrated at the closing Mass of the Congress presided over by the Pope, together with many cardinals, bishops, and priests from around the world.

On Sunday afternoon, after the Holy Father had begun his return trip to Rome, the Prelate had a meeting with the vicars of all the delegations of Spain, at the seat of the delegation of the Prelature in Valencia. A little later, at Valencia’s Trade Fair Pavilion, he had a get-together with a large group of women of the Prelature. On the next day he had a similar meeting for men in the same place. He also had catechetical meetings with young people on the 10th in the Guadalaviar School in Valencia, and El Vedat School in Torrent, a few miles from Valencia.

On the 10th he went to pray to La Virgen de los Desamparados (Our Lady of the Forsaken) at her basilica, a traditional focus of Marian piety in the Valencian region; he also visited the provisional site of a parish dedicated to St. Josemaría and the construction site of the new church, scheduled to be inaugurated in the coming year.
On Tuesday, July 11, at ten in the morning, he made a brief visit to the church of San Juan del Hospital to view a recently installed image of St. Josemaría. Afterwards he went to the archbishop’s residence where he visited Valencia’s Archbishop Agustín García-Gasco. After this meeting he left for Madrid.

The Prelate of Opus Dei was in Kenya and Uganda at the end of August.

He arrived in Nairobi on August 24. The following day he presided over the graduation ceremony at Strathmore University. He was given an honorary doctorate and presented awards to the students who had finished their studies.

On the 26th, in the esplanade in front of Strathmore University, he took part in a catechetical gathering with some 3,000 people and answered questions from those present. One of the questioners was a Hindu man who had worked in the construction of the oratories of some of the centers of Opus Dei in Nairobi. He said that people had always insisted that the oratories had to be done “with perfection,” with special care. His question was: “Why such insistence?” The Prelate explained that, for Catholics, the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist is very important. Therefore it is a duty to treat him well, even in material things. Churches and oratories, he said, have to reflect that love.

In Nairobi, the Prelate of Opus Dei greeted Archbishop Raphael Ndingi, and the President of the Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop John Njue. In addition, he had get-togethers with members of the Prelature in Strathmore School and blessed an oratory in a retreat center entrusted to the spiritual care of the Prelature.

Bishop Echevarría spent August 27 to 29 in Uganda. About a thousand people attended a get-together with him in the Kampala Serena Hotel in the capital. He also had a meeting with young people in Bugala Study Centre, whose oratory he blessed, and in Teemba Study Centre. During his stay in Kampala he also visited the President of the Ugandan Bishops’ Conference, Bishop Matthias Ssekamanya.
The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in New York on September 11. On the morning of the following day, Tuesday the 12th, he took part in meetings with the men's and women's governing bodies of the Prelature in the United States. At mid-day he greeted Bishop Robert Anthony Brucato, Vicar-General of the Archdiocese of New York, and Bishop William Murphy of Rockville Center. He also had get-togethers with boys and then with girls who take part in the formational work offered by Opus Dei. He encouraged them to give doctrine to their friends, one by one. “It’s a question of loving them, understanding them, and seeking how to help them, without being afraid what others may think.”

On Wednesday the 13th, the Prelate had get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei and in the evening he met with more than two thousand people who filled the Manhattan Center auditorium. He spoke to them about God’s love for and nearness to each person and about forgiving one’s enemies. He also asked people to pray for the Pope.

Early in the morning on Thursday, September 14, Bishop Echevarría left by plane for Montreal.

Shortly after his arrival the Prelate received a number of families. On the following day he went to the Manoir de Beaujeu, a conference center about 30 miles from Montreal, to consecrate an oratory in a new pavilion housing a School of Hospitality. There the Prelate met with a group of married couples, whom he encouraged to form homes filled with affection and peace. On his return to Montreal in the afternoon, Bishop Echevarría met with Bishop Joseph Khoury, the Maronite Eparch of Canada. Afterwards he met with priests from various Canadian dioceses (Montreal, Longueuil, Kingston, St. Jerome, Ottawa, and Quebec), and also from the U.S. states of Vermont and Massachusetts. His main topic of conversation was love for the Holy Mass and the sacrament of reconciliation.

On Saturday, September 16, the Prelate spoke to a group of students about the importance of putting Christ into their studies and getting to know their faith better. In the evening he had a catechetical get-together with some 1,300 people in the Maisonneuve Theater in the Place des Arts. Bishop Echevarría said that he was very happy to be in Montreal and recalled that the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá, had prayed a
lot for this country. At the end he invited those present to pray for the Pope and to read frequently the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

On Sunday the 17th, Bishop Echevarría left for Toronto. There he stayed at Ernescliff College, situated on the university campus. He took advantage of his stay to speak with the students living in the residence, reminding them of their serious obligation to study intensely as a preparation for their future lives. Afterwards, the Prelate met with a number of families from the Toronto area. A little later he had a get-together in the Roy Thomson Hall with some 1,700 people. There he stressed the importance of living a vigorous Christian life in the midst of the world. He also spoke about the need to pray for the dead.

On Monday the 18th, he visited Hawthorn, a school for girls. He was received by about 250 students with their parents and teachers. Later he had a meeting with priests and seminarians. He recalled that St. Josemaría had a great love for the Eucharist and for diocesan priests—among whom are included all the priests of Opus Dei, as secular priests—and he spoke of the importance of wearing clerical attire in order to give public witness of their availability to help and serve everyone. On the next day, after visiting Cardinal Aloysius Ambrosic, Archbishop of Toronto, he met with several groups of young people.

On Friday, September 22, Bishop Echevarría arrived in Vancouver. In Glenwood, the Center of Opus Dei where he stayed, he met with a number of families and small groups of students. On Saturday the 23rd, he met with about 900 people in the Westin Bayshore Hotel. The Prelate spoke about love for the Pope and the need to pray for him. He also asked people to pray for Opus Dei, an institution that exists, he said, to remind everyone that we can be saints in and through our ordinary life. He told them that Opus Dei was preparing to go to Russia, Vietnam, Rumania and Bulgaria. Afterwards, Bishop Echevarría went to see a piece of property at Britannia Beach, north of Vancouver, which hopefully will become the site of a future conference center. He blessed the land and prayed for abundant apostolic fruit. On the return trip, while admiring a view of the city, he said it was one of the most beautiful places he had ever seen.
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Pastoral Trips

On July 8 and 9, the Fifth World Congress of Families was celebrated in Valencia, presided over by the Holy Father Benedict XVI. The Prelate of Opus Dei was present at the ceremonies. In addition, he met with faithful of Opus Dei in the Valencia region and visited a number of people suffering from illnesses.

He arrived in Valencia on Friday, July 7. On the morning of the 8th, he went to the Cathedral to participate with many other bishops and priests in the welcoming ceremony for Benedict XVI. In the afternoon, he took part in the vigil for the World Congress of Families. Before the ceremony began, he was interviewed by a television network. On Sunday the 9th, the Prelate of Opus Dei concelebrated at the closing Mass of the Congress presided over by the Pope, together with many cardinals, bishops, and priests from around the world.

On Sunday afternoon, after the Holy Father had begun his return trip to Rome, the Prelate had a meeting with the vicars of all the delegations of Spain, at the seat of the delegation of the Prelature in Valencia. A little later, at Valencia’s Trade Fair Pavilion, he had a get-together with a large group of women of the Prelature. On the next day he had a similar meeting for men in the same place. He also had catechetical meetings with young people on the 10th in the Guadalaviar School in Valencia, and El Vedat School in Torrent, a few miles from Valencia.

On the 10th he went to pray to La Virgen de los Desamparados (Our Lady of the Forsaken) at her basilica, a traditional focus of Marian piety in the Valencian region; he also visited the provisional site of a parish
dedicated to St. Josemaría and the construction site of the new church, scheduled to be inaugurated in the coming year.

On Tuesday, July 11, at ten in the morning, he made a brief visit to the church of San Juan del Hospital to view a recently installed image of St. Josemaría. Afterwards he went to the archbishop's residence where he visited Valencia's Archbishop Agustín García-Gasco. After this meeting he left for Madrid.

The Prelate of Opus Dei was in Kenya and Uganda at the end of August.

He arrived in Nairobi on August 24. The following day he presided over the graduation ceremony at Strathmore University. He was given an honorary doctorate and presented awards to the students who had finished their studies.

On the 26th, in the esplanade in front of Strathmore University, he took part in a catechetical gathering with some 3,000 people and answered questions from those present. One of the questioners was a Hindu man who had worked in the construction of the oratories of some of the centers of Opus Dei in Nairobi. He said that people had always insisted that the oratories had to be done “with perfection,” with special care. His question was: “Why such insistence?” The Prelate explained that, for Catholics, the presence of our Lord in the Eucharist is very important. Therefore it is a duty to treat him well, even in material things. Churches and oratories, he said, have to reflect that love.

In Nairobi, the Prelate of Opus Dei greeted Archbishop Raphael Ndingi, and the President of the Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop John Njue. In addition, he had get-togethers with members of the Prelature in Strathmore School and blessed an oratory in a retreat center entrusted to the spiritual care of the Prelature.

Bishop Echevarría spent August 27 to 29 in Uganda. About a thousand people attended a get-together with him in the Kampala Serena Hotel in the capital. He also had a meeting with young people in Bugala Study Centre, whose oratory he blessed, and in Teemba Study Centre. During his stay in Kampala he also visited the President of the Ugandan Bishops’ Conference, Bishop Matthias Ssekamanya.
The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in New York on September 11. On the morning of the following day, Tuesday the 12th, he took part in meetings with the men’s and women’s governing bodies of the Prelature in the United States. At mid-day he greeted Bishop Robert Anthony Brucato, Vicar-General of the Archdiocese of New York, and Bishop William Murphy of Rockville Center. He also had get-togethers with boys and then with girls who take part in the formational work offered by Opus Dei. He encouraged them to give doctrine to their friends, one by one. “It’s a question of loving them, understanding them, and seeking how to help them, without being afraid what others may think.”

On Wednesday the 13th, the Prelate had get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei and in the evening he met with more than two thousand people who filled the Manhattan Center auditorium. He spoke to them about God’s love for and nearness to each person and about forgiving one’s enemies. He also asked people to pray for the Pope.

Early in the morning on Thursday, September 14, Bishop Echevarría left by plane for Montreal.

Shortly after his arrival the Prelate received a number of families. On the following day he went to the Manoir de Beaujeu, a conference center about 30 miles from Montreal, to consecrate an oratory in a new pavilion housing a School of Hospitality. There the Prelate met with a group of married couples, whom he encouraged to form homes filled with affection and peace. On his return to Montreal in the afternoon, Bishop Echevarría met with Bishop Joseph Khoury, the Maronite Eparch of Canada. Afterwards he met with priests from various Canadian dioceses (Montreal, Longueuil, Kingston, St. Jerome, Ottawa, and Quebec), and also from the U.S. states of Vermont and Massachusetts. His main topic of conversation was love for the Holy Mass and the sacrament of reconciliation.

On Saturday, September 16, the Prelate spoke to a group of students about the importance of putting Christ into their studies and getting to know their faith better. In the evening he had a catechetical get-together with some 1,300 people in the Maisonneuve Theater in the Place des Arts. Bishop Echevarría said that he was very happy to be in Montreal and recalled that the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá, had prayed a
lot for this country. At the end he invited those present to pray for the Pope and to read frequently the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

On Sunday the 17th, Bishop Echevarría left for Toronto. There he stayed at Ernescliff College, situated on the university campus. He took advantage of his stay to speak with the students living in the residence, reminding them of their serious obligation to study intensely as a preparation for their future lives. Afterwards, the Prelate met with a number of families from the Toronto area. A little later he had a get-together in the Roy Thomson Hall with some 1,700 people. There he stressed the importance of living a vigorous Christian life in the midst of the world. He also spoke about the need to pray for the dead.

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Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter November, 2006

My dear Children: May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

The month of November takes its spiritual tone from the two days with which it begins: the Solemnity of All Saints and the commemoration of the faithful departed. The mystery of the communion of saints illumines this month and the whole of the last part of the liturgical year in particular, directing our meditation to the earthly destiny of man in the light of Christ’s Pasch.\[1\]

The Church is growing not only in this world, but above all in the next. Thus it presents us today’s great feast, when we recall the immense multitude of souls who, after having passed through this world, now enjoy the eternal happiness of contemplating God face to face in heaven. Tomorrow, on the second, we will commemorate the dead who are still being purified in purgatory, preparing themselves for the moment when Jesus will say to them: enter into the joy of your master.\[2\] All of us together form the Mystical Body of Christ, whose Head is the incarnate Word: with him and under him we present to God the Father an unending
song of glory, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The consideration of this mystery of our faith has to move us to thank God for his goodness and for the constant company of the saints, striving to draw greater benefit from this very consoling truth.

Finding strength in this reality, our founder always sought—besides the protection of the saints in heaven and his good friends the souls in purgatory—[3]—the prayer and mortification of those he was in contact with. Especially in the first years of Opus Dei, faced with the immense mission our Lord had entrusted to him, he confidently “begged” for prayers and sacrifices from the poor and sick in Madrid, convinced that after the prayer of priests and of consecrated virgins, the prayer most pleasing to God is that of children and of the sick.[4]

These reflections come to mind because this month we will celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the moment when St. Josemaría began to visit the poor and sick in the company of the first young people who took part in his priestly work. Already a few years earlier, as chaplain of the Foundation for the Sick, he had dedicated himself personally to this activity, by which he was also firmly laying the foundations for the Work. But in October 1931, on ceasing to work for that social service institution in order to dedicate his efforts to the Foundation of St. Elizabeth, he felt the need for the intense work with the needy and sick that he had carried out during the previous years. He tells us so in one of his notes, when mentioning his change of pastoral activity: yesterday I had to definitively leave the Foundation, and therefore the sick. But my Jesus does not want me to leave him and reminded me that he is nailed to a bed in the hospital.

His zeal to serve all souls was shown right from the start. Soon after being ordained he began to organize catechism classes and provide material care for needy families in Saragossa. He visited impoverished areas in the city, asking university students to accompany him; many of them later became part of Opus Dei, moved by the apostolic zeal of that young priest.

As soon as he began to work for the Foundation of St. Elizabeth, he sought a way to continue caring for that apostolate, in which (as he pointed out elsewhere) our Lord wanted me to discover my priestly heart.[5] He knew of the existence of a charitable association, made up of priests and lay
people, which looked after the sick in the General Hospital, near the Church of St. Elizabeth. He contacted that institution and, on November 8, 1931, formalized his way of assisting. On Sunday afternoons he would go to the hospital to provide whatever services the patients needed. There he met some of the first people who later saw that their path as faithful in the Church was to be found in the Work.

I mention these details because nothing that refers to St. Josemaría is without significance for the faithful of the Prelature. We see faithfully reflected in even the smallest circumstances of his life the spirit of the Work, which each of us must take up, conserve, and transmit with veneration to succeeding generations. Are we charitable men and women? How much do we pray for the needy throughout the world? Do we offer mortifications, specific acts of detachment in accord with each one’s real possibilities, in order to help these brothers and sisters of ours?

I want to return now to the theme of this letter: the importance of living the Communion of Saints, not only through prayer, but also through the offering of suffering and sacrifices. Let us be generous, my daughters and sons, in offering our Lord with a smile everything we find annoying; let us ask the sick to joyfully offer to Jesus their sufferings and infirmities, knowing that thus, besides accumulating merit for eternal life, they will collaborate decisively in the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth and assist the apostolate. We have a great treasure in those who are afflicted by some infirmity. Treat each of them as you would our Lord. See in them Jesus himself.

The consideration of this reality will also nourish our hope when the forces of evil present themselves with greater virulence in the world, perhaps opening a door to pessimism. Let us not give way to this temptation, my daughters and sons! Never forget the great reality of the communion of the universal Church, of all peoples, the network of Eucharistic communion, which transcends the frontiers of cultures, of civilizations, of peoples, of times. This communion, these “islands of peace” exist in the Body of Christ. They truly exist. And they are forces for peace in the world. If we look at history, the Pope said recently, we can see that the great saints of charity have created “an oasis” of God’s peace in the world; they have enkindled anew its light and been a force for
reconciliation and peace. There have been martyrs who have suffered with Christ, who have given this witness of peace, of a love that sets a limit to violence.[6]

During my recent trip to Lebanon, I saw once again the strength of this communion in Christ of prayer and sacrifice. People there told me that, during the recent war, they could “feel” that many people were praying for them. Thus was fulfilled, once more, what our Father wrote in The Way: Live a special Communion of Saints: and, in the moments of interior struggle just as in the hours of professional work, each of you will feel the joy and the strength of not being alone.[7]

We also commemorate this month the announcement of Opus Dei’s being erected as a personal Prelature by our beloved John Paul II. I am a witness to how Saint Josemaría prayed for this intention, and how Don Alvaro “took up the baton,” also in this matter. I recall very vividly Don Alvaro’s visit to the Altar of the Miraculous Medal, here in Rome, to give thanks for this step. Now it is our turn to give our lives, for this long-hoped for recognition: unite yourselves, please, to my intention. And also pray for the faithful of the Prelature who will be ordained as deacons on the 25th.

With all affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+Javier

Rome, November 1, 2006


[5] Ibid., no. 731.


Pastoral Letter December, 2006

My dear Children: May Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

In two days Advent begins. During this liturgical time, the Church urges us to consider the end of time, when Christ will come in the splendor of his glory to judge all men, and to prepare ourselves to remember his temporal birth, now twenty centuries ago.

The two comings are intimately related. In the first, divine mercy is especially evident; in the final one, his justice will be clearly seen. But both are a manifestation of God’s love for man, as St. Paul teaches: “For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.”

Let us take advantage of the opportunity which the liturgy now offers us, to meditate personally and to remind others of the splendid truths of our faith regarding the last things. People frequently experience a certain fear when thinking about these realities. We children of God, Christ’s apostles (without being “alarmists,” but also without being naive) have to help others (without considering ourselves superior to them) to face these realities which, in many cases, can be the impetus for a deep conversion or for drawing closer to God.

A few weeks ago, Benedict XVI invited us to consider the Judgment of God, who comes to fulfill the longing for justice that dwells in human hearts. “Does not everyone want to see justice eventually rendered to all those who were unjustly condemned, to all those who suffered in life, who died after lives full of pain? Don’t we, all of us, want the outrageous injustice and suffering which we see in human history to be finally undone,
so that in the end everyone will find happiness, and everything will be shown to have meaning?

“This triumph of justice, this joining together of the many fragments of history which seem meaningless and giving them their place in a bigger picture in which truth and love prevail: this is what is meant by the concept of universal judgment. Faith is not meant to instill fear; rather it is meant to call us to accountability. We are not meant to waste our lives, misuse them, or spend them simply for ourselves. In the face of injustice we must not remain indifferent and thus end up as silent collaborators or outright accomplices. We need to recognize our mission in history and to strive to carry it out. What is needed is not fear, but responsibility—responsibility and concern for our own salvation, and for the salvation of the whole world. Everyone needs to make his or her own contribution to this end.”[2]

Let us ask the Holy Spirit, my daughters and sons, to place on our lips the opportune words to effectively move souls. The holy fear of God, a gift of the Paraclete, means above all that his children do not want to sadden their heavenly Father. But the consideration of death and faith in the particular judgment, in the universal judgment and in the other final realities, can help convince many people to uproot sin from their lives. This is not merely a question of fear, but of the certainty that doing so brings with it all the advantages of a happy life, both in this world and the next. Saint Josemaría Escrivá wrote: “He shall come to judge the living and the dead.’ So we pray in the Creed. God grant that you never lose sight of that judgment and of that justice and... of that Judge.”[3] “Does your soul not burn with the desire to make your Father God happy when he has to judge you?”[4]

Advent is a time of joy and hope. “We might say that Advent is the season in which Christians must rekindle in their hearts the hope that they will be able with God’s help to renew the world.”[5] The Church highlighted this reality in the recent Solemnity of Christ the King, reminding us that we have to play an active role in establishing God’s kingdom on earth. And we need to do so day after day, in the incidents of our daily life, preparing for the constant coming of our Lord to souls. Let us not forget that Jesus did not come only in the first Nativity, nor will he present himself only at the end of time. Our Lord constantly wants to be
present in our souls, and he counts on us to sanctify all noble human realities. He acts through the grace of the sacraments, especially Confession and the Eucharist, and also through the example and word of his disciples, of his friends.

While in the first part of Advent, as we noted at the beginning of this letter, the liturgy points us towards the second coming of Christ, from December 17 on its focus is on the immediate preparation for Christmas. Let us make our way towards Bethlehem, then, closely united to Mary and Joseph. They will teach us to show Jesus affection and refinement, to follow him, to fall in love with him. The fruit of this greater intimacy will be the aspiration Saint Josemaría expressed seventy-five years ago: “I want my mere presence to be enough to set the world on fire, for many miles around, with an inextinguishable flame. I want to know that I am yours. Then, let the Cross come: never will I be afraid of expiation. To suffer and to love. To love and to suffer. What a magnificent path! To suffer, to love and to believe: faith and love. The faith of Peter, the love of John, the zeal of Paul.”[6]

Let us continue to pray for the Holy Father, each day more insistently. I have no doubt that, through your prayer and joyful sacrifice, you have been accompanying him on his recent trip to Turkey. Let us try to get many people to pray for him and for his intentions. And don’t forget my intentions: never let this become a routine request.

With all affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+Javier

Rome, December 1, 2006


[4] Ibid., no. 746.

Homilies

At the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 10, 2006)

At the priestly ordination of faithful of the Prelature, Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain

My dear sons about to receive priestly ordination:

My dear brothers and sisters:

1. The words of Psalm 23 proclaim a truth which fills Christians with consolation: “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.”[1] In whatever place we find ourselves, our Father God is always close by, watching over us and protecting us. He himself promised this through the Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah, confronting the sad spectacle of the bad shepherds who were leading the people of Israel astray, announced on God’s part: “I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.”[2] And Ezekiel, amid the exile in which the people of Israel found themselves, declares that the moment will come to return to their paternal home: “for thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick
darkness...I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God.”[3]

These divine promises are completely fulfilled in Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, who presents himself as the Shepherd announced by the Old Testament. “I am the good shepherd,”[4] he said, sent by God the Father to save all men. As St. Paul reminds us, he has redeemed us at the price of his blood.[5] What sure hope should be ours, having such a Good Shepherd given to us by our Father God! Trusting in his loving assistance, each of us can make our own that verse from the Psalm: “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.”[6]

Let us savor this truth through words of the founder of Opus Dei: “My God, how easy it is to persevere when we know that you are the Good Shepherd, and that we—you and I—are sheep belonging to your flock!”[7]

2. Jesus is also the entrance gate to the sheepfold: only through him do we gain access to the heavenly Father. “No one comes to the Father, but by me,”[8] he told us. And we find Christ in the Church, his Mystical Body.

In his infinite goodness, before ascending to heaven, the Master selected some men, the apostles, so that—as his vicars on earth—they might lead to pasture, in his name and with his authority, the sheep he redeemed with his blood. For this purpose, on the eve of his passion, at the Last Supper, with the words “do this in remembrance of me,”[9] together with the Sacrament of the Eucharist he also instituted Holy Orders. He conferred priestly power on the apostles, so that they in turn could transmit it to others, by means of the laying on of hands, down through the centuries.

This sacred power that the apostles received continues in the bishops and, in a subordinate degree, in the priests, who participate “in the authority by which Christ himself builds up and sanctifies and rules his body.”[10] They carry out Christ’s role as Shepherd in the midst of his people, representing him visibly. Today we have the joy of once again taking part, in the course of the Church’s almost two thousand years of history, in the transmission of these sacred powers.

I direct myself now to those about to be ordained: my sons, may the
light of this new calling always be enkindled in your minds and hearts. You will be visible intermediaries of the Eternal High Priest who guides all of us from heaven. Look to that divine Model. Learn the lessons that he teaches us. In first place, the deep decision—following in Christ’s footsteps—to give your life for the sheep: those who are entrusted to you at each moment of your earthly journey and all humanity, because the ministerial priesthood, although it should be exercised in a special way with the *pusillus grex* entrusted to each one,\(^\text{[11]}\) is not limited to that small flock but always has a universal dimension.

Our Lord tells us that the good shepherd enters “by the door,” while “he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.”\(^\text{[12]}\) A few months ago, in a ceremony similar to this one, Benedicts XVI explained this passage as follows: “This word ‘climbs’ conjures up the image of someone climbing over a fence to get somewhere out of bounds to him. ‘To climb’—here too we can also see the image of careerism, the attempt to ‘get ahead,’ to gain a position through the Church: to exploit and not to serve. It is the image of a man who wants to make himself important, to become a person of note through the priesthood; the image of someone who has as his aim his own exaltation and not the humble service of Jesus Christ.”\(^\text{[13]}\)

St. Josemaría, from the moment he first perceived the divine illuminations that led him to the priesthood, understood that our Lord was putting him on the path of a self-sacrificing and joyful dedication to God and souls. He was never tempted—it caused him outright horror—to view the priesthood as a career, as a way of personal profit. He well knew (as he had learned from Jesus’ example) that it meant a demanding and generous service to others, without ever saying “enough.”

You, my deacon sons, have entered by the door. You have responded to the invitation of your legitimate shepherd, after years of intense formation, and you are being ordained to serve souls through the preaching of the word of God, the administration of the sacraments—especially confession and the Eucharist—and spiritual direction. Your only motive is the desire to dedicate all of your energies to God and to souls. This from now on, so to speak, is your new professional work, which will demand your complete dedication. As St. Josemaría said: “They have constantly to study theology;
they must give spiritual guidance to very many souls, hear many confessions, preach tirelessly and pray a great deal; their heart must always be focused on the tabernacle, where He who has chosen us to be his own is really present. Their life is a wonderful self-surrender, full of joy, though like everyone they will meet up with difficulties.”[14]

3. Benedict XVI, in the homily I referred to above, said that our Lord teaches us three things about the true shepherd: “he gives his own life for his sheep; he knows them and they know him; he is at the service of unity.”[15]

Giving one’s life for one’s sheep is a program for each day, in the thousand and one small details of priestly work, without waiting for the opportunity to carry out heroic, extraordinary actions. And this also holds true for the rest of the faithful, who in virtue of their priestly soul, the common priesthood they received in Baptism, have to do everything possible to serve the others with love. How many occasions we are all presented with every day, in family life, in our professional work, when resting, in our social relations! Let us examine our daily conduct sincerely, asking ourselves whether at every moment we are doing our best to serve those around us—whether we are giving our lives for them.

The good shepherd knows his sheep; he calls them by their own names, and the sheep draw close to him trustingly. We have to be affectionate, putting our heart into our dealings with others, always in the light of faith. St. Josemaría used to say that, in our relations with souls, we have to act “with our heart always, but not only with our heart.” Thus he confronted two possible enemies that can paralyze the apostolic action of the priest and the Christian: the coldness of someone who, since he fails to use his heart, will not attract anyone to our Lord; and the sentimentality of one who lets his heart follow his feelings, without subjecting it to reason illumined by faith.

As the Holy Father said: “The shepherd cannot be satisfied with knowing names and dates. His way of knowing his sheep must always also be knowing with the heart. However, it is only possible to do this properly if the Lord has opened our hearts...It must be knowing with the Heart of
Jesus, oriented to him, a way of knowing that does not bind the person to me but guides him or her to Jesus.”[16]

Finally, the good shepherd is always at the service of unity, as Jesus himself said at the end of this Gospel passage: “I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.”[17] Unity has to be a passionate concern for everyone, lay people and priests, a noble passion that we have to constantly grow in. If we love the unity of the Church we will pray each day for the Holy Father and for the bishops in communion with the Pope. If we want to bring about as soon as possible the union of Christians under a single Supreme Shepherd, we will ask the Holy Spirit insistently to guide the ecumenical activity of the Church. The faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei, if we are truly concerned to foster the unity of this little portion of the Church, will strive to live with “one heart and soul”[18] like the first Christians, realizing that thus we will serve the Church, the Roman Pontiff and all souls in the best possible way.

Let us not forget, however, that “the Cross is the price of unity.”[19] Christ’s open arms on the Cross speak eloquently of the fact that our Lord died “to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”[20] Therefore working for unity includes nailing oneself gladly with Christ to the holy Wood, opening one’s arms and heart to all creatures. Every Christian is called to make present Christ’s redemptive love in his own setting; there he should plant the tree of the Cross with his entire life, giving himself joyfully for the salvation of souls.

I congratulate with all my heart the parents, brother and sisters, relatives and friends of the new priests. I remind all of you that we have the duty of praying for the Pope, for the Bishops, for the Ordinary of this beloved diocese of Barbastro, for priests throughout the whole world, so that we be faithful to the vocation we have received. Let us also ask our Father God to send his Church many vocations of holy, joyful and generous priests, who will give themselves unstintingly to souls.

We do so going to the intercession of our Lady, Mother in a special way of priests, who in this Shrine of Torreciudad and under the advocation
of Our Lady of the Angels, has always shown herself ready to listen to our prayers. Amen.


[6] *Ps* 23[22]:3-4


[8] *Jn* 14:6


At the diaconal ordination of faithful of the Prelature, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (November 25, 2006)

At the diaconal ordination of 
faithful of the Prelature,
St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome

Dear Brothers and Sisters. Most dear children.

1. We are celebrating the diaconate ordination of 38 faithful of the Prelature of Opus Dei on the solemnity of Christ the King. This is a very significant coincidence. As you all know, the word “diaconia” means service. Deacons accede to this first degree of the sacrament of Holy Orders in order to assist the bishop and the priests in the fulfillment of their priestly ministry. Deacons are ordained to this task by the imposition of hands and the bishop's consecratory prayer, which equates them with Christ precisely as the servant of all.

During his life on Earth, Christ’s kingdom was revealed in his serving all men and women, as he himself said: the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20:28). Benedict XVI comments: “The mystery of the cross is at the center of Christ's service as pastor: this is the great service, which he bestows on us. He gives himself, and not only in the distant past. He does this everyday in the Holy Eucharist.”[1]

The nature of Christ’s kingdom appears clearly also in the dialogue with Pilate, which we have just read in the Gospel. To the Roman procurator’s question, “are you the king of the Jews?” the Lord replies: my kingdom is not of this world (Jn 18:36). His dominion is not like the dominion of the Earth’s powerful. The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that have the power over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. (Lk 22:25-26).

Already in these first moments of our reflection we can draw a lesson valid for all of us: if we want to be true disciples of Christ we ought to be,
as he is, servants of all without exceptions, without claiming presumed “rights” due to age, social or economic status, success, etc. Christ’s teaching is very clear: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger: and he that is the leader, as he that serves (Lk 22:26).

What is our attitude—not only in theory but in practice—on this point? Unfortunately, we live in a highly competitive society in which—for many—the only thing that really matters seems to be personal success at any cost, disregarding even their most elementary responsibilities. In their quest for success at any cost, they neglect their spouse, parents and children; they neglect the loyal relationships with friends and colleagues; and they even reach the point of trampling underfoot the most strict duties of justice and charity towards others.

The path to follow in Christ’s footsteps is radically different. Certainly, Christians who try to be holy in the middle of the world must endeavor each day to attain the most prestige they are capable of in their profession; they must make good use of the gifts God has given them, gifts of which one day the Lord will ask for an account. But they ought to do this moved not by an egotistical self-affirmation but rather to serve their brothers and sisters more effectively. Using words borrowed from Opus Dei’s Founder, I say to you that “we need to forget about ourselves and aspire to no other honor than that of serving others, in the same way as Jesus Christ... This requires the integrity of being able to submit our own wills to that of our divine model, working for all men, and fighting for their eternal happiness and well-being. I know of no better way to be just.” concludes St. Josemaría, “than that of a life of self-surrender and service.”[2]

2. Let us look at today’s first reading. A mysterious person described as the ‘son of man’ approaches the throne of the Almighty and receives from him the power, the glory, and the kingdom: and all the peoples, tribes, and tongues shall serve him: his power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:14).

Who is this “son of man” if not Jesus Christ? He himself, during his life, loved to call himself by this title, most likely to avoid facile enthusiasms coming from an erroneous messianic notion so widespread in his time. The Book of Daniel presents him clothed in that majesty that will
be his sign when he comes a second time in the flesh to judge the living and the dead and to take possession of his kingdom. This is the truth that the Church reminds us of during the approaching first weeks of Advent.

And while we await this moment, the life of man continues its course. Let us not forget, however, the relation between the present time and eternity: the kingdom of God is built in history. It is not built in a spectacular way but rather-especially-in the intimacy of the heart. God’s kingdom does not show itself with fireworks but in the humility of fulfilling our daily duties and our everyday service.

When a father and mother care for their home with love and for their children’s education they are indeed building the kingdom of God. When professionals, laborers or students, do their work well, working out of love for God and neighbor, they are building the kingdom of God. When businessmen or politicians use legitimate means to increase their influence in society, trying to contribute to the common good by their personal sacrifice, renouncing the use of means judged illegitimate by a Christian conscience, they are building the kingdom of God. When those who are sick offer to God their pain and their physical limitations, united to Christ on the Cross, they are indeed building—and in most effective way—the kingdom of God.

My dear brothers and sisters, let us keep this reality in mind at all times and in all circumstances, especially when the spreading of evil may produce in us displeasure or discouragement. At times, it is true, doubts regarding the fulfillment of God’s promises may arise in our minds. We may experience the temptation of thinking: Lord, you assure us that you have overcome the world (cf. Jn 16:33), but so many times it seems that sin prevails. You have said through St. Paul the Apostle that you have reconciled everyone with the Father by the shedding of your blood (cf. Eph 2:13-18), and we see that in so many places, unfortunately, there is violence, abuses, war, and injustices of all types How will your promises be fulfilled?

I would like to propose once again Pope Benedict’s answer to these same questions. Observing the apparent opposition between Christ's promises and the reality surrounding us, the Holy Father invites us to look
at history with the eyes of faith. The Lord has conquered on the cross. He has conquered not with a new empire or with a force more powerful than other forces, capable of destroying them. He has not conquered in a human way, as we so imagine, with dominion more powerful than the others. Christ has conquered with a love capable of reaching to the point of death. This is God’s new way of achieving victory: he does not oppose violence with a stronger violence. He opposes violence precisely with the opposite: love to the end, his cross. This is God’s humble way of conquering: with his love—only like this is it possible—he sets a limit to violence. This way of achieving victory seems very slow, but it is the true way of conquering evil, of overcoming violence, and we ought to trust this divine way of conquering.\[3\]

Let us implore God, then, to purify our faith, to strengthen our hope, to increase our love. We must commit ourselves to carry on with Christ’s mission, bringing people to the sacrament of confession and to the Eucharist, being apostles wherever we are. I assure you that in these encounters with Jesus Christ one finds true peace and authentic joy: whenever possible do not fail to speak about these themes. San Josemaría used to explain that this is the way to “make this kingdom of Christ a reality, to eliminate hatred and cruelty, to spread throughout the earth the strong and soothing balm of love. Let us ask our king today to make us collaborate, humbly and fervently, in the divine task of mending what is broken, of saving what is lost, of fixing what man has put out of order, of bringing to his destination whoever has gone off the right road, of reconstructing the harmony of all created things.”\[4\]

3. In one of the opening prayers offered for today’s Mass, the Church addresses herself to God the Father, only King and Pastor of all men and women, with the following words: Enlighten our spirit so that we may understand that to serve is to reign and, giving our lives for our brothers and sisters, we profess our fidelity to Christ, firstborn among the dead and master of all the powerful of the earth.\[5\]

This text offers reflections valid for all Christians, which are especially appropriate for ordained ministers, and thus, for you, my sons, who are about to receive the diaconate. Your Christian vocation of service will be reinforced today with the grace and character specific to this sacrament.
When you carry out your ministry, whether in the liturgy, in the teaching of the faith, or in the works of charity, it will be Christ himself serving through you. Strive to be available, as our beloved Founder taught us. Always remember his words: “When I preach that we have to make ourselves a carpet so that the others may tread softly, I am not simply being poetic: it has to be a reality! It’s hard, as sanctity is hard; but it’s also easy, because, I insist, sanctity is within everyone’s reach.”[6]

The carpet is not a tapestry, which is hung on the wall for decoration. The carpet is made so that people can walk over it. As such, one must not be surprised if at times the carpet is stepped on, or if it must be cleaned often... But what great joy springs from the act of truly serving the others! So let us serve cheerfully, because God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor9:7). *Servite Domino in laetitia* (Ps 99:1). May we always serve the Lord joyfully.

I wish to unite myself and congratulate with all my heart the parents, brothers, and sisters, and friends of these men about to be ordained. To all I say that the Lord is once again passing close to you.

Before concluding, I invite you to pray for the Roman Pontiff, for the bishops, for priests and deacons throughout the world. Let us beseech God, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that he send many vocations to the Church: deacons and priests committed to seeking sanctity in the exercise of their ministry, serving all souls with generosity. Amen.


[5] Roman Missal, Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ the King, Opening Prayer (b).

At the opening of the academic year at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (November 11, 2006)

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

Your Excellencies,

Professors, students and staff of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please allow me a brief initial digression. I would like to ask for your special help in a concern that also includes a material dimension. Only God knows how hard it is for me to begin this academic year without being able to celebrate Holy Mass, in order to invoke the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The reason is that the Basilica of St. Apollinaris, next to the university, is still closed to worship because of restoration work. So I appeal to your generosity to ensure that, with God’s help, the next course is begun with the most solemn act opening the academic year: the Sacrifice of the Altar, with the participation of the academic body, the students and all who work in this alma mater.

Today we can foresee the completion of the restoration of this building and the library, which has involved so many people who share the university ideals we are carrying forward. We should not forget that these reflect the faith in God that St. Josemaría Escrivá transmitted to the Prelature’s faithful—first of all to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, the founder and first Chancellor of our university. As Chancellor I am very thankful to God for this legacy, and for the fruit it has yielded in the Church’s service. I am also grateful to the authorities and teachers and the administrative
personnel of the university, for their patience and diligence in finding solutions to so many little problems arising from the renovations.

In recent years, the office of development has been organizing activities for people who provide assistance to our university. This year too we have been able to share our joy through activities organized here in Rome for a group of benefactors. While they have been able to see with their own eyes the improved material conditions, above all they have seen the interest of the students in their own spiritual and human development. Thus they personally experience the truth of words St. Josemaría directed to the benefactors of initiatives carried out in the service of one’s neighbor: they themselves are the first beneficiaries of this generosity.

In the academic domain, as has already been mentioned, new fronts have been opened for theological research in the study of the liturgy, to be followed this year by a specialization in biblical theology. In addition, the creation of an office of communications last year, and the teaching resources service that will soon be in operation, show the vitality the university requires to also confront the challenges of the new evangelization.

The continual renewal demanded by the work of study and research, which is so evident to us, helps us to reflect on the regenerative capacity of the university institution in its fundamental endeavor, that is to say, its dedication to truth.

In confronting an effort of this kind, one must always take into account capacities and limits, both individual and collective.

One of the obvious limits in this endeavor is the human impossibility of embracing reality in all its aspects. Already in the ancient world it was seen that this limitation was due more to our inadequacy than to any intrinsic deficiency in reality itself. Even so, an intimate union between the true, the beautiful and the good was seen, in such a way that the discovery of the truth (verum), although limited, was considered as an opening also to the good, not as an added dimension, but as a natural consequence of the impossibility to separate these characteristics in reality. A genuinely human development, therefore, entails the harmonious intertwining of capacities directed to the contemplation and enjoyment of the good.
For persons and institutions inspired by the Gospel message, the effort to harmonize all these aspects can be summed up in the search for Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Transcending human wisdom, Christianity offers us in the person of Jesus and in his permanence in the Eucharist an original path, whose principal element is that of self-giving.\[1\]

From this perspective, the search for the truth, as I said above, cannot be separated from its communication to other persons.

The first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI is a call, directed to all of us, to never separate the search for the truth from love for others. There the Holy Father asks us to reflect on the originality of charity, as well as on its various manifestations and on the inseparability between knowledge and action fostering the good of others. “The Christian’s program—the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus—is ‘a heart which sees.’ This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly.”\[2\]

For those involved in the university, fostering charity means exercising it diligently in one’s relations with others, for it is in dialogue and in the interchange of ideas and experiences that one matures as a person and as a searcher for the truth. In university life, harmonizing dedication to the truth and dedication to the good of one’s neighbor is an essential requirement for reaching ever wider and wider circles. Through his word and his example, St. Josemaría encouraged us to strive to ensure that others can begin their work where we have left off. Although this could be viewed as a “strategic duty,” above all it is a manifestation of concern for the good of souls and for the future of society.

I earnestly pray that the events we are witnessing at this moment in the history of the Church and in the development of our university, will be for all of us a spur to joyfully bring forward the mission God has entrusted to us.

We go to Mary, the Mother who “teaches us what love is and where it comes from,”\[3\] through the intercession of St. Josemaría, asking for a fruitful 2006-2007 academic year, which we hereby declare inaugurated...

On the occasion of receiving an honorary doctorate from Strathmore University, Nairobi (August 25, 2006)

Address on receiving an Honorary doctorate from Strathmore University

Your Excellencies,
Honorable Authorities,
Faculty and Students of Strathmore University.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I feel honored and especially happy to be here participating with you in the Graduation Ceremony of Strathmore University. God granted me the grace of witnessing, at a very close range and over so many years, the development of Strathmore since it began.

When St. Josemaría Escrivá accepted, back in 1957, the invitation of Archbishop Gastone Mojaisky Perelli, then Apostolic Delegate resident in Mombasa, to start a university school in Nairobi, he was really responding to the universal scope that God had given Opus Dei from its inception.

The Work that God asked of St. Josemaría, on that 2nd October, 1928, when he founded Opus Dei, had not come to satisfy a particular need of the Church in any specific country or any historical moment. God wanted it to have, from the start, a universal, Catholic heart. He understood from the outset that the task of the faithful who were to come to the Work—the vast majority of them lay people, men and women, of all social strata, and occupations, without any discrimination—was to place
Christ at the summit of all human activities and professions, being themselves present in all the noble human endeavours, each one in his or her profession or place in life, the place where they were when Our Lord called them to His Work.

St. Josemaría was inspired by the spirit that Christ gave his disciples—go out to all nations. The Gospel was a message that affected not only the lives of the first Twelve, but was to be transmitted to the whole world. And he continuously manifested this universal spirit with deeds that were, at the same time, a declaration of his love for the Pope and the Holy Catholic Church.

It is a particularly happy coincidence, in which we see once again God’s providential care for us, that we are holding this Graduation Ceremony precisely on the 48th anniversary of the arrival in Kenya of the first faithful of the Work. It actually happened in a historical period for Africa and for Kenya in particular. Full independence was only five years away and the country had a multi-ethnic transitional government in place. St. Josemaría was open to founding a university provided that the government gave a guarantee concerning its independence and autonomy.

However, it soon became clear that the project of establishing an institution of university level, open to students of all races, had to be modified. It was the founder himself who suggested establishing instead an “institute of higher learning” and a students’ residence. And so, it was that Strathmore College began as an “A” Level College, a new type of special two-year school to serve as a bridge between secondary education and the university. The College would observe the secularity of Opus Dei, and adhere to four general guidelines: It would be interracial; it would be open to non-Catholic and non-Christians; it would not be classified as a mission school; and students had to pay at least a token amount.

The civil authorities were skeptical about the prospects of a college open to students of every race, tribe and religion. It was the first such experiment in East Africa. From the outset, nevertheless, it admitted Africans, Europeans and Indians; adherents of all religions, and members of different tribes. This reflected a guiding principle supplied by the founder of Opus Dei. The College adopted the emblematic motto “Ut
omnes unum sint,” “That all may be one.” The original College, as you all probably know, developed afterwards like any other healthy organism, into The Strathmore University as we see it today, remaining always faithful to its Christian roots and its foundational spirit.

Acting on this newly opened avenue, the women of the Work established Kianda College, which contributed so much to the social advancement of women since its inception. In time it diversified giving rise to what was to become one of the best Secondary Schools in the Country.

It has been a very special grace the one God has granted me all along, in allowing me to witness this unique chain of events, this breaking of new ground, side by side with St. Josemaría and his first Successor, the servant of God, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. With joy, St. Josemaría would explain that Strathmore University arose after many years of prayer and hard work. He certainly did pray constantly for you and for your work. He prayed for all those who would come in the future, because he had his heart in the University. I want to say a special thank-you, asante sana kabisa!!, to all the men, women and institutions that have made possible the success of this enterprise.

Strathmore University not only pursues the highest level of academic excellence, but in keeping with the intention and spirit of its founder, it aims at providing an integral formation, one that focuses also on the human, moral and spiritual facets of every individual person. This all-encompassing approach is put into practice in the lives of all those who are, in one capacity or another, associated with the University. As St. Josemaría used to say, of a hundred souls, we are interested in the hundred.

Quoting the late Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, allow me to recall that “the university is a place of intense work, where scientific developments, technical advances, and new ideas decisively influence the configuration of human society. This effort results in true progress when it respects and loves the nature and dignity of the human person, called to live in unity with all men and women and to journey toward God.”

For this reason St. Josemaría drew attention to the fact that the effectiveness of a university Centre is due to a great extent to the dedication, the noble desires and efforts of all those who collaborate in the
ordinary activities of the academic community: the faculty, the students, and all members of the staff, whether they work in administrative or any other specific job. For him there were no jobs of greater or lesser importance. The importance of a particular line of work depended on the love of God with which it is performed by the person concerned.

Allow me to call to mind some of the recommendations that he gave all those who play a role in the life of this University: Do everything with love of God and neighbour, and you will see that this family of the university will become like a leavening that makes the life of all people more wholesome. We have to act in such way that all may be able to say: this person is a Christian because he does not hate anyone, because he knows how to understand others, because he is not a fanatic, because he is the master of his own natural instincts, because he has feelings of peace, because he loves all without distinction.

With this perspective of human fraternity before our eyes, all those who are part of the academic body are incorporated into a family, a ferment that influences in a powerful and positive manner the whole university environment itself, where personal freedom and responsibility are practiced along with a spirit of coexistence without discrimination of any type.

St. Josemaría used to tell us that there is no University in the strict sense in Schools where, along with the transmission of knowledge, a comprehensive formation of the young personality is lacking. It is not enough to provide the students with the necessary human, scientific and professional formation. This seems more than enough, but it is little when one looks at the university goals from a Christian point of view. It is necessary, therefore, to put into practice the constant teaching of our founder, namely, to renew the soul under the light of the Christian principles, and the need to make one’s behavior consistent with those principles.

Those here present share this appreciation for university work. Precisely because I know your enthusiasm for your work, let me urge you to foster an even greater sense of responsibility in yours tasks. The country and the world are in need of the example of your research and your teaching, which will encourage many others to undertake the effort to
Articles and Interviews

On Prayer, Magnificat, Madrid (October -- December, 2006)

“On Prayer,” in Magnificat

I

St. Josemaría Escrivá holds a special place among teachers of spirituality in the Church’s history for a number of reasons. Above all, because he is a saint of our own times (canonized by John Paul II in 2002), who spread the universal call to holiness, through a specific path, among thousands upon thousands of Catholics. To attain holiness, one has to stay in habitual contact with God, or in other words, to pray. But prayer consists not only in saying vocal prayers. It means talking to God, making use of all one’s human capacities: soul and body, head and heart, intellect and feelings. To be a saint means to become like Jesus. The more we imitate him, the more we try to be like him, developing through grace and our own efforts the sacramental identification we received in baptism, the greater is the holiness and identification with the Master that we will attain. Hence the importance of “habitual conversation” with him. “Sanctity without prayer?” asked St. Josemaría in one of his most widely read books. And he answersconcisely: “I don’t believe in such sanctity” (The Way, no. 107).

God granted the founder of Opus Dei the gift of teaching in a practical way how men and women who are fully involved in earthly activities—in
one’s work and family, in the most varied and upright professional and social environments—can and should aspire to holiness, without neglecting their temporal duties. On the contrary, they have to make use of those very things to seek God, find him and love him. It was for this reason that the Holy See referred to him as “a traveling contemplative” in the decree recognizing that he practiced the Christian virtues to a heroic degree, one of the required stages prior to canonization.

This summary of St. Josemaría’s own life has very important consequences. In first place, it shows that every path in life, if not opposed to God’s law, can be sanctified; that no one is denied the grace to truly become a contemplative; that it is possible to be in God’s presence amid the most absorbing tasks, to stay close to him amid the clamor of the world, without abandoning the place that each one occupies in society. In short, being a man or woman of prayer is not reserved only to those who, following a special call, take up the priestly or religious life. The contemplative life, precisely because it is a requirement of the path to holiness, is presented to us as a path within everyone’s reach. St. Josemaría Escrivá was called by God, not only to proclaim this message, but to teach people how to live it, without lowering any of its demands. His example, the teachings that he transmitted in his writings and, above all, the reality of innumerable persons inspired by his spirit to seek holiness in the midst of earthly concerns, constitute a clear expression of the validity of what was afterwards proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council regarding the universal call to holiness. They also reflect a specific way of putting into practice the call of John Paul II, facing the new millennium, when he exhorted Christians to enter more deeply into the “art of prayer,” to aspire to a “high level” of sanctity in their daily life.

Before looking at some of the fundamental points of his teachings on prayer, I want to cite here the first paragraph of his homily entitled “Life of Prayer.” St. Josemaría wrote: “Whenever we feel in our hearts a desire to improve, a desire to respond more generously to our Lord, and we look for something to guide us, a north star to guide our lives as Christians, the Holy Spirit will remind us of the words of the Gospel that we ‘ought always to pray and not lose heart’ (Lk 18:1). Prayer is the foundation of any
supernatural endeavor. With prayer we are all powerful; without it, if we were to neglect it, we would accomplish nothing” (Friends of God, no. 238).

II

One of the “passions” of St. Josemaría was his love for freedom. He was a staunch defender of personal freedom, with its consequent personal responsibility, in all spheres of life. In the spiritual domain, his constant teaching was that there are many paths to holiness, because “each single soul is a masterpiece of God’s making” (Friends of God, no. 83), with a very personal path to become identified with Christ. Therefore, without belittling the teaching of other saints, he was not a partisan of rigid methods for teaching people how to pray. His own experience and that of the many souls he had assisted in their interior life, reinforced in him the opinion that each person has to make an effort, guided by the Holy Spirit and the advice received in personal spiritual direction, to find his own path. “Let each traveler follow his own path,” he used to say (cada caminante siga su camino), a path that varied according to the needs and circumstances of each soul.

To seek, find, and love Christ

At the same time, within this great variety of personal situations, as far back as the thirties he used to point out several broad stages, valid for everyone, that one has to follow to become a soul of prayer: “May you seek Christ: may you find Christ: may you love Christ. —Three perfectly clear stages. Have you tried, at least, to live the first?” (The Way, no. 382). It is not a question, as the founder of Opus Dei himself pointed out, of clearly marked steps, nor does the fact of having gone through one lead automatically to the beginning of the next. On other occasions, he highlighted four “steps” for reaching identification with Christ: “seeking him, finding him, getting to know him, loving him.” And he added: “It may seem clear to you that you are only at the first stage. Seek him then, hungrily; seek him within yourself, with all your strength. If you act with determination, I am ready to guarantee that you have already found him, and have begun to get to know him and to love him, and to hold your conversation in heaven” (Friends of God, no. 300).
In short, the path of prayer is not something that one acquires once and for all: one is always beginning and beginning again, with a human and supernatural eagerness to deepen one’s conversation with God. In this endeavor, it is important to always consider oneself a student and never a master. This attitude, aside from being a strong counterweight to the possible temptation to spiritual pride, helps us not to become discouraged, to never abandon the practice of prayer because we seem to be making little progress. In the course of mental prayer or meditation, the most important thing is to attain a personal conversation with Jesus. All the rest, such as reading a Gospel passage or some pious book, reflecting on what one has read, seeing one’s own life in its light, etc., even though it may be very useful and even necessary, is directed to moving the will, which should break out into affections: acts of love or sorrow, acts of thanksgiving, petitions, resolutions, which constitute the proper fruit of true prayer. It is a matter of decisions to love God and neighbor more, specified perhaps in very small points, but which leave in the soul an aftertaste, not necessarily a matter of feelings, expressed in interior peace and calm, in order to confront, with new energy and with the joy of the sons and daughters of God, the duties and occupations inherent to one’s particular situation in life. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that the practice of prayer requires a true spiritual “battle” (no. 2725). The founder of Opus Dei used the same words in this context, and he added that this struggle, although it requires effort, is not sad or unpleasant, but has the joy and youthfulness of a sport. It is a “battle” in which we always have in view the “reward,” God himself, who gives himself intimately to anyone who perseveres in seeking him, getting to know him and loving him.

III

“You write: ‘To pray is to talk with God. But about what?’ About what? About him, about yourself: joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions, daily worries, weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petitions: and Love and reparation. —In a word: to get to know him and to get to know yourself: ‘to get acquainted!’” (*The Way*, no. 91).

These words sum up very well the content of the prayer of the sons and daughters of God. A good child, especially if still young, speaks openly with its father or mother on any topic. It has an unwavering trust in them,
for it knows they are deeply interested in all its concerns. And if in human, Christian dealings, it is good to take into account the circumstances of each person, in our dealings with God this criterion has to be applied with absolute confidence. What matters is not so much what we say or how we express ourselves, but above all our desire to speak with the One who loves us immensely and who seeks only our good.

Suggestions regarding how to pray

“You say that you don’t know how to pray? Put yourself in the presence of God, and once you have said, ‘Lord, I don’t know how to pray!’ rest assured that you have begun to do so” (The Way, no. 90). Those who are beginning usually need some special help, some external supports. St. Josemaría called them “crutches,” because they serve as points of reference to begin one’s dialogue with our Lord: the consideration of a Gospel passage, or of other sacred books or a liturgical text; the attentive meditation on the words of a vocal prayer, such as the Our Father or the Hail Mary; the reading of a book that has themes for prayer.... Over time one can leave aside those “crutches,” although it is never good to abandon them entirely. It is not unusual, in fact, that they are needed again after a few years, or from time to time. They can be used as a hand rail to help overcome difficulties that sooner or later may crop up: distractions, interior dryness, worries that try to get the upper hand, physical or intellectual exhaustion.

It is useful to recall that prayer can be seen as a battle in which one must never give up. For among the excuses used to abandon the daily time of prayer, one of the most frequent is discouragement. Upon failing to see clear progress, the temptation can arise to limit oneself to vocal prayers, or even to stop praying altogether. What a great error that would be! This is a “business” that cannot be measured by specific results, which are impossible to calculate in a supernatural activity. The important thing is to continue right to the end of the time dedicated to mental prayer, striving diligently to overcome any difficulties.

Practical advice that St. Josemaría gave in this regard included the time and place chosen for mental prayer: find a place that facilitates interior
recollection (in front of a tabernacle whenever possible), and hold to a schedule, always trying to advance the time for prayer rather than postponing it when one foresees a problem. He also advised people to ask for help from our allies, the guardian angels, and to try to turn even distractions into subject matter for one’s dialogue with God. This is of maximum importance, since praying is holding a conversation with our Lord, not with ourselves. He often advised people to “put themselves” into the Gospel scenes. “My advice,” he said, “is that, in your prayer, you actually take part in the different scenes of the Gospel, as one more among the people present. First of all, imagine the scene or mystery you have chosen to help you recollect your thoughts and meditate. Next apply your mind, concentrating on the particular aspect of the Master’s life you are considering—his merciful Heart, his humility, his purity, the way he fulfills his Father’s Will. Then tell him what happens to you in these matters, how things are with you, what is going on in your soul. Be attentive, because he may want to point something out to you, and you will experience suggestions deep in your soul, realizing certain things and feeling his gentle reprimands” (Friends of God, no. 253). It is also good to have recourse to our Lady, teacher of prayer, and to St. Joseph, when beginning and ending our times of prayer. “Together they will bring our weakness to Jesus, so that he may turn it into strength” (Ibid., no. 255).

IV

If a Christian is faithful and persevering in conversing with God, his prayer will not be confined only to the moments especially dedicated to speaking with him. It will be prolonged throughout one’s whole day, both day and night, so that one’s work and rest, joy and sorrow, serenity and concerns, one’s entire life is turned into prayer. Thus, almost without noticing it, a Christian who is consistent with his vocation as a child of God is becoming “a traveling contemplative,” a soul of prayer.

Life of prayer

“In recommending this unbroken union with God, am I not presenting an ideal so sublime that it is unattainable by the majority of Christians? Certainly the goal is high, but it is not unattainable. The path that leads to holiness is the path of prayer; and prayer ought to take root and grow in
the soul little by little, like the tiny seed which later develops into a tree with many branches” (*Friends of God*, no. 295). In the homily “Towards Sanctity,” St. Josemaría describes in broad outlines the itinerary of his own spiritual path, and offers what might be considered the guidelines for turning one’s whole life into prayer. “We start with vocal prayers which many of us have been saying since we were children. They are made up of simple, ardent phrases addressed to God and to his Mother, who is our Mother as well...Is this not, in some way, a beginning of contemplation, an evident expression of trusting self-abandonment?...First one brief aspiration, then another, and another... till our fervor seems insufficient, because words are too poor...then this gives way to intimacy with God, looking at God without needing rest or feeling tired. We begin to live as captives, as prisoners. And while we carry out as perfectly as we can (with all our mistakes and limitations) the tasks allotted to us by our situation and duties, our soul longs to escape. It is drawn towards God like iron drawn by a magnet. One begins to love Jesus, in a more effective way, with the sweet and gentle surprise of his encounter” (*Friends of God*, no. 296).

An important step along this path is the “discovery” of Christ’s Most Holy Humanity, which is always the only path to reach the Blessed Trinity. “To follow Christ—that is the secret. We must accompany him so closely that we come to live with him, like the first Twelve did; so closely, that we become identified with him. Soon we will be able to say, provided we haven’t put obstacles in the way of grace, that we have put on, have clothed ourselves with our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Friends of God*, no. 299). A distinguishing mark of Christ’s disciple is the encounter with the Cross. One should neither flee from it, nor seek it out recklessly in spectacular ways. The Holy Spirit ordinarily points us towards it in daily happenings, granting us at the same time the grace to love it. Then the Cross is not heavy; Jesus himself, the good Cyrenean, carries it on his own shoulders. One begins to walk along the path of contemplation and discovers our Lord at every step.

Moments of suffering alternate with periods of calm, but interior joy, which is compatible with suffering, is never lacking; here we discover the clearest sign that we are walking alongside the Master. Thus, in corresponding to grace, we learn to find, to get to know and to love the
Blessed Trinity. “We have run ‘like the deer, longing for flowing streams’ (Ps 41:2); thirsting, our lips parched and dry. We want to drink at this source of living water. All day long, without doing anything strange, we move in this abundant, clear spring of fresh waters that leap up to eternal life (cf. Jn 4:14). Words are not needed, because the tongue cannot express itself. The intellect grows calm. One does not reason; one looks! And the soul breaks out once more into song, a new song, because it feels and knows it is under the loving gaze of God, all day long.

“I am not talking about extraordinary situations. These are, they may very well be, ordinary happenings within our soul: a loving craziness which, without any fuss or extravagance, teaches us how to suffer and how to live, because God grants us his wisdom...Either way, it is a gift of God’s mercy. If you try to meditate, our Lord will not deny you his assistance. Faith and deeds of faith are what matter: deeds, because...God demands more from us each day. This is already contemplation and union. This is the way many Christians should live, each one forging ahead along his own spiritual path (there are countless paths) in the midst of the cares of the world, even though he may not even realize what is happening to him” (Friends of God, nos. 307 and 308).
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Congress "Brussels -- Toussaint 2006"

The “2006 Brussels-Toussaint” Congress, organized by the diocese of Malines-Brussels, Belgium, took place from October 28 to November 5, 2006. It included various activities related to St. Josemaría and his message.

Many Catholics from Brussels, among them a number of the Prelature’s faithful, took part in the Congress. Its origin was a concern to help spur evangelization in the large cities. Its central motif was our Lord’s invitation: “Come and see” (Jn 1:39).

On Tuesday, October 31, in the Sacred Heart School near the Basilica of Koekelberg, a workshop was held on “The Greatness of Ordinary Life,” directed by Fr. Stéphane Seminckx.

In addition, in the centers of Opus Dei for young people, three similar sessions were held, with a colloquium and the projection of a film of St. Josemaría.

In Narval Cultural Center two sessions were held, one on October 30 for French speaking people and the other on November 4 for the Flemish speaking public. In the Fontenelle Cultural Center, a session was organized on Friday, November 3, under the direction of Marie-Anne Schnackers, an educator.

Some 150 people attended these activities.

A chapel dedicated to St. Josemaría Escriva

On August 10, 2006, Cardinal Joachim Meisner blessed a new chapel dedicated to St. Josemaría Escrivá in the parish church of St. Pantaleon in Cologne. The altar in the chapel contains a relic of the saint. “It is good that we have blessed an altar in honor of St. Josemaría here in St. Pantaleon. Here we will always be able to return to the charism of the beginnings, to the person who has given us the savor of the Gospel,” the Cardinal said.
In August, 2005, on the occasion of World Youth Day, Pope Benedict XVI was able to see the almost completed chapel during his meeting in St. Pantaleon with seminarians from all over the world. Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, was present at that ceremony.

The apse of the chapel has a relief of St. Josemaría. Some new windows representing the Holy Family have also been installed. In 1963, the Founder of Opus Dei preached a homily entitled *In Joseph’s Workshop*, in which he summed up the spirit of the sanctification of work: “Sanctify your work, sanctify yourself in your work, and sanctify others with your work.”

Other News

The first Swedish edition of *Christ Is Passing By*, entitled *När Kristus gar förbi*, has been published, with a printing of 1,000 copies. The third edition of *The Way* has appeared in Russian, with a printing of 10,000 copies.

In June, 10,000 copies were published of the Spanish translation of the Portuguese book written by Francisco Faus and dedicated to St. Josemaría: *Novena del trabajo* (“Novena of work”).

A film entitled *Questions and Answers*, with scenes from get-togethers with St. Josemaría in various countries, has come out in Lithuanian in DVD format.

For the anniversaries of the foundation of Opus Dei and the canonization of St. Josemaría, a Mass was held on October 1 in the cathedral of New Delhi. The principal celebrant was the Episcopal Vicar for Catholics of the Oriental Rite. Some 500 people took part.
New Centers of the Prelature

The regional vicars have established new centers of the Prelature in the following cities:

Alcorcón (Spain); Helsinki (Finland); Las Rozas (Spain); Malmö (Sweden); Mexicali (Mexico); Pamplona (Spain); Valencia (3 centers, Spain); Vic (Spain).

Popular Novena for private devotion to Dr. Cofiño

In October, distribution was begun of a novena in Spanish entitled Novena popular al Doctor Ernesto Cofiño. Dr. Cofiño was a Guatemalan pediatrician and Supernumerary of Opus Dei. The press run for the novena was 75,000 copies.

Commemorative stamps in honor of Bishop Larrea

The Ecuadorean Post Office has issued two stamps with the picture of Archbishop Juan Larrea Holguin, the first Ecuadorean member of Opus Dei. A well-known jurist and the Archbishop of Guayaquil, he died on August 27, 2006. The stamps went on sale on December 8.

The official presentation of the stamps took place in the auditorium of the Los Cedros Student Residence in Quito. Carmen Elena Salazar, head of the Ecuadorean Postal Authority, said that the publication of the stamps with the picture of Bishop Larrea was in honor of a wise and holy man whose ordinary life was filled with deeds of service to his fellow men and women. Mauricio Troya, president of the Corporación de Estudios y Publicaciones, spoke in similar terms, stressing that the stamps were an act
Archbishop Antonio Arregui of Guayaquil gave a brief history of the ecclesiastical work of his predecessor in that See. He emphasized an event that Archbishop Larrea always saw as decisive in his life: his meeting as a student in Italy with Opus Dei and with its Founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá.

Fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Opus Dei's work in Switzerland

Fifty years ago, on October 31, 1956, Fr. Juan Bautista Torelló arrived in Zürich from Italy accompanied by Pedro Turull, an architect, thus beginning the apostolic work of the Prelature in that city. Fr. Torello now lives in Vienna where he has been Rector of the Peterskirche for many years, while Pedro Turull, who was ordained in 1968, now carries out pastoral work in Rome. In honor of this anniversary, solemn Masses of thanksgiving were celebrated in Zürich and in Geneva.

In the Church of Our Lady (the Liebfrauenkirche) in Zürich, on October 2, the principal celebrant was Bishop Paul Vollmar, auxiliary bishop of Chur and Vicar General of Zürich, who was accompanied by the Regional Vicar of the Prelature, Msgr. Peter Rutz, and six other priests.

On October 6, Bishop Bernard Genoud of the diocese of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, celebrated a solemn Mass in the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Geneve. Concelebrating with him were the Regional Vicar of the Prelature in Switzerland and Fr. Pierre Jaquet, pastor of the Basilica. The Bishop referred to his friendship with the Regional Vicar right from the days when both of them were teaching at St. Michael's high school in Fribourg—a friendship, he said, that extends to all of Opus Dei and in particular to the faithful of the Prelature who work in his diocese. In his homily he also offered a deep reflection on the sanctification of the world and temporal realities, reading citations from St. Josemaría alongside others from Pascal and Cardinal Journet.
Torna ai contenuti
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
A study and document

In January 2007, the first volume of Studia et Documenta, Rivista dell’Istituto Storico San Josemaría Escrivá, will be published. The journal, produced by the St. Josemaría Historical Institute, will appear once a year and will run some 400 to 500 pages. The first issue will contain 14 contributions from eight countries, written in the six languages of the journal: Italian, Spanish, English, Portuguese, French, and German. It will also include a number of reviews and news items, and ample bibliographic information.

After several years of preparation (the St. Josemaría Historical Institute was established by Bishop Javier Echevarría in 2001) and after obtaining the opinions of some fifty academics, especially historians, from various countries, the journal will take its first steps. Through this publication, the Institute hopes to foster historical research on St. Josemaría and Opus Dei. The Institute is also interested in developing theological, canonical, educational and philological studies on the writings and teachings of the founder of Opus Dei, which will appear in the pages of Studia et Documenta.

Publishing the journal is one of the principal activities of the Institute, though not the only one. Among its other concerns are the publication of the complete works of St. Josemaría, the development of bibliographic and archival instruments for purposes of research, as well as providing assistance to researchers interested in the history of St. Josemaría and Opus Dei.

Studia et Documenta arose from a desire to encourage solid research into a chapter of the history of the contemporary Church. Thus it is directed both to people specifically interested in St. Josemaría and his message, and to students of the contemporary world in such fields as history, theology, canon law and sociology. The study of the historical development and spread of Opus Dei in quite diverse countries and cultures, as well as the spiritual message of St. Josemaría, undoubtedly constitutes an important contribution to the history of the contemporary Church.
*Studia et Documenta* will contain four sections: Studies and Notes, Documentation, News, and Bibliography. The articles published in Studies and Notes will focus on specific aspects of St. Josemaría's history; for example: spiritual and pastoral context; his task as founder; his relationship with ecclesiastical and civil personalities, etc. This section will also look at the history of the development of Opus Dei’s apostolic work in various countries, as well as the specific apostolic initiatives that have arisen under the founder’s stimulus.

Part of this section will be monographic in nature. The first issue will focus on the beginning of Opus Dei’s apostolic work in various countries and the attention with which St. Josemaría followed the first expansion of its apostolates. Given the impossibility of referring to all the countries to which the apostolate of Opus Dei spread during St. Josemaría’s lifetime, a representative selection was made. One of the articles looks at the first European nation that St. Josemaría visited with a view to beginning the apostolic work outside Spain (Portugal). Three articles are dedicated to countries in North and South America (Mexico, Ecuador and the U.S.), and a fourth to an Asian nation (Japan). This section also contains a study about February 14, 1930, and a theological reflection on the historical-critical edition of *The Way*.

The documentation section aims at providing documents with particular significance for St. Josemaría’s life and foundational mission. The first issue places two interesting documents at the disposal of the reader. One, of a spiritual nature, is a compilation of texts from Sacred Scripture that had a particular impact on the interior life and teachings of St. Josemaría. The second includes the complete correspondence, made up of thirty-six letters, exchanged between St. Josemaría and the Bishop of Avila, Santos Moro, during the Spanish Civil War.

The news section will provide information on various events related to the historical study of St. Josemaría and Opus Dei sponsored by the Institute and other entities.

The bibliography section is the responsibility of the Center for Documentation and Studies of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer at the University of Navarra, the section of the Historical Institute that is located
in Pamplona. The notes and reviews in the bibliography section will try to provide timely information and evaluation of publications on both St. Josemaría and Opus Dei. The first issue will also include an extensive list of the works published by St. Josemaría, in their various editions and translations, up to the year 2002.

Research on the history of St. Josemaría and Opus Dei is still in its early stages. The appearance of *Studia et Documenta* will undoubtedly serve as a stimulus to this work. In this regard we need only cite a few words from Bishop Javier Echevarría, although spoken in another context: “One learns over time how to make oneself better known and also how to understand oneself better” (Interview with Bishop Javier Echevarría, published in *Figaro-Magazine* on April 21, 2006). The St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, through its journal *Studia et Documenta*, seeks to contribute with rigorous research to this important task.

In Brief

Amsterdam -- (The Netherlands) The Club de Borcht reopens its doors

With more than 40 years of history, the Club de Borcht has reopened its doors. The move from its old location on van Breestraat to a new site on Jacob Obrechtstraat required a year of construction work. Now that the work has been completed, the Club has resumed its activities.

A Mass of thanksgiving was held for the families of members at the nearby church of Our Lady of the Rosary. Afterwards a reception was held. Girls from the Club gave a Power Point presentation of some of the activities there (trips, courses, service projects, etc.). The girls also explained, through quotations from St. Josemaría, how the spirit of Opus Dei animated the formative work carried out in the Club.
London -- (England) Celebrating Life

More than 150 doctors, health assistants and students participated in a special forum on ethics in modern health care organized by the London Diocese of Westminster in conjunction with Netherhall House, whose facilities were made available for this purpose. The forum was held on Saturday, December 2.

The forum was opened by Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, Archbishop of Westminster. He was followed by Philip Howard, adjunct professor at St. George Hospital Medical School and specialist at the St. Helier/Epsom NHS Trust. Prof. Howard presented an analysis of the principles underlying the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* of John Paul II. “Human dignity is the key to understanding our common goal in medical ethics. Being a human person,” Prof. Howard said, “means being the subject of inalienable rights, above all the right to life.”

The forum included a question session moderated by Sarah Johnson, a journalist. Some of the questions raised were: Will doctors be able maintain their right to conscientious objection against certain practices in the light of changes being introduced into the law? What is the difference between contraception and natural family planning? How can one explain to a colleague that a fertilized single cell embryo is a human being when the majority of doctors are materialists? Responding, among others, were a well known doctor from the LIFE organization, Dr. Anne Carus, an expert in NaProtechnology, a system of treatment for infertility by ethical means that has a 50% success rate; Charlie O'Donnel, a specialist in intensive care; and Helen Watt, director of the Linacre Centre for Healthcare Ethics.

Closing the forum, the Director of Pastoral Affairs for the Westminster Diocese, Mr. Edmund Adamus, reminded those present that the “Celebrating Life” forum had made clear the need to spur research in all fields of medical ethics, especially those related to the origin of human life.
Rio de Janeiro -- (Brazil) Panel: What is Opus Dei?

A panel dedicated to some of the principal aspects of the message of Opus Dei was held in the auditorium of the John Paul II building of the Institute for Advanced Religious Studies of the Archdiocese of Rio De Janeiro on August 16, 2006. The panel included the testimony of people connected with the Prelature. The presentation was organized at the request of numerous people who wanted an objective reply to some recent confused information spread by certain communications media.

More than 500 people were in the audience. Auxiliary Bishop Antonio Augusto Dias Duarte of Rio de Janeiro opened the event by explaining in broad outline the history of the foundation of Opus Dei and its spirit and message.

Following this, Valeria Brito, a doctor, explained how she began to participate in the Work’s means of formation. With words of St. Josemaría, she said that “women are called to bring to the family, to society and to the Church, characteristics which are their own and which they alone can give: their gentle warmth and untiring generosity, their love for detail, their quick-wittedness and intuition, their simple and deep piety, their constancy... A woman’s femininity is genuine only if she is aware of the beauty of this contribution for which there is no substitute and if she incorporates it into her own life” (Conversations, no. 87). She also stressed the role of the Numerary Assistants, who by their care for the domestic tasks of the centers and the educational and apostolic works of Opus Dei, contribute to a family atmosphere, turning these places into bright and cheerful homes.

Oscar Rotava, a father of seven children and an engineer for Petrobras, said that coming to know the Work had allowed him to give continuity to the education he had received in childhood and adolescence and to encounter the broad horizons he needed for attaining Christian maturity in his personal, family and social life.
The fourth and last talk was by Henrique Cal, a student of medicine. In a simple and clear way, he recounted how he had first come to a center of Opus Dei and how he had begun to take part in the means of formation. In this context, he explained the different formative activities that are offered in the centers of the Work and the help they provide for people who want to live seriously their baptismal commitments.

Finally, an extensive dialogue was held with those present, which allowed them to clarify not only the subjects discussed in the panel, but also some other questions that in the past few months had been raised in the press.

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**Lismullin -- (Ireland) Nursing Now: an International Seminar for Nurses**

According to recent studies, in 2031 from 18 to 21% of the Irish population will be over 65. Nurses play an important role in caring for the growing number of elderly.

In the seminar “Nursing Now,” which took place in Lismullin on September 23, various projects carried out by nurses who work in care for the elderly were presented. Among the more innovative ones were those involving persons from three generations, with the elderly and children of primary and secondary school age taking part together in a wide gamut of activities: art, music, horseback riding, water polo, story telling,…. 

The seminar also offered group working sessions to study practical cases with particular ethical repercussions, and presentations on technical aspects of attending to patients’ suffering.

Irish nurses from Dublin, Meath, Louth, Kildare and Longford attended the seminar along with others from Switzerland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Many expressed interest in helping to organize similar seminars in the future because they realize the importance of maintaining a high level of quality in their profession.
Dublin -- (Ireland) "Can do, Can U?" A Seminar on Volunteer Work for University Women

The Glenard and Ros Geal university residences in Dublin and Galway organized a seminar under the title, “Can do, Can U?” on the topic of volunteer work. Students from Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, South Korea, the Netherlands and other countries took part in the conference, which focused on Africa, AIDS, and other current topics. Those taking part exchanged experiences regarding projects carried out to foster solidarity.

Angelina Kakooza, a Ugandan doctor, explained how AIDS is being combated in her country. Melanie Verwoerd, former ambassador of South Africa to Ireland, said that volunteer work provides a unique training that opens up unsuspected horizons in life.

For Manon Van Alphen, who headed a group of Dutch university women, one of the most interesting sessions was that given by Gobnait O’Gráidaigh on the qualities needed for volunteer work. “It is important to know one’s own talents and limitations before working with a team,” said Manon. “Otherwise it is easy to become discouraged by the gap between theory and practice in volunteer work.”

Montevideo -- (Uruguay) The Minister of Labor Visits -- Los Pinos

Uruguay’s Minister of Labor, Eduardo Bonomi, came to Los Pinos Educational Center on the occasion of the granting of certificates for Industrial Employment, a program for young people in the Casavalle neighborhood provided by Los Pinos in conjunction with the National
Employment Committee. The students are young people from the ages of 18 to 24 who have returned to the classroom after a number of years out of school and without jobs. This represents perhaps their last opportunity to get the training they need to obtain formal employment.

After visiting the instructional facilities, the minister spoke to the new graduates, giving them three pieces of advice: “never be late for work, be the best worker in your company, and be respectful to women.” He congratulated them on the fact that 27 of the 37 young men who finished the course had already found jobs.

At the graduation ceremony, the National Employment Conference also gave certificates of recognition to the 26 companies in the area that had accepted young people as interns during the course and later gave them positions in their companies. These industries, which make up the “Industry for Casavalle” alliance, also advise Los Pinos on the skills needed by the future workers.

Cologne -- (Germany) Work as Spiritual Enrichment

From the 15th to the 17th of December, fifteen professional men from various enterprises assembled at Haus Hardtberg Conference Center near Cologne to discuss practical cases regarding the Church’s social doctrine. They also received classes on the transcendent dimension of the human person, on the social nature of the human being, and on justice and solidarity. The Kompendium der Soziallehre der Kirche (“Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church”), which was published in German this year, was the basic text.

The participants, young men in the first years of their professional life, were eager to learn about a non-materialist vision of the human person. They came to see their work as more than a mere profession, and as contributing to the moral improvement of their fellow men and women.

The practical talks, given by experienced professionals, touched on
three topics: “The temptation of corruption,” “Love for the truth in business counseling,” and “The relationship of justice to the stabilization of a company in bankruptcy.” A lively debate followed each of the talks with quite practical and personal questions.

For those attending, the greatest surprise was to discover many others who shared their desire to contribute to the common good through their work, and to fight against what John Paul II called “structures of sin.”

Sao Paulo -- (Brazil) Project Hypertext: A Grounding in Anthropology

Hypertext is a cultural program that offers a basic philosophical formation to students at Pacaembu University Center in São Paulo. During the semester, those involved in the program study important facets of the human person through philosophy, history and art. The name Hypertext suggests a multidisciplinary approach that enables one to understand more effectively the great philosophical questions.

The program is divided into five modules: anthropology, history of ideas, history of art, movies, and literature. In the anthropology module, basic concepts regarding the metaphysics of the person are studied: knowledge, imagination and intellect, the will and instincts, the passions and feelings, language and symbols. The history of ideas module includes the theory of the state in the classical world and in modernity, the relation between the state and individual rights, ethics and politics in modern times, etc. Themes in the history of art directly related to philosophy and anthropology are also studied, and debates are held about works of film and literature.

The incentive to undertake quality reading forms part of the Hypertext program. All of the participants are asked to read two books indicated by the coordinators, which are discussed later in the semester.

At the end of the first module, an informal meeting was held at a ranch near São Paulo, to develop more fully some themes of Christian
anthropology in light of the rich teachings in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The three-day-long meeting resulted in some of the participants returning to the practice of the faith, while others saw a strengthening of their Christian convictions. For everyone it was an occasion to broaden their personal horizons and to strengthen their determination to bring Christian ideals to their own environment.

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**El Crucero -- (Nicaragua) Eyeglasses for Five Hundred "Indigenas"**

Since the year 2000, the Almudi Association in Valencia, Spain, has organized trips to Nicaragua to carry out various social service activities. University students and teachers and priests from Valencia take part in these activities. This summer a group of 25 students came to the Central American country with the intention of testing the eyes of impoverished natives (*indigenas*) in various villages of the interior such as El Crucero, Dulce Nombre and Desnredo. In addition, they gave catechism classes and classes on recycling for teachers; they also manned a medical dispensary.

Some natives with acute vision problems have grown accustomed to their situation over the years. “Some of them told us that they only became aware of their problem when they realized their neighbors in the fields were able to gather beans faster than they could,” explained Fr. Fernando Cuevas, a member of the Valencian expedition.

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**Navunibitu (Fiji) -- Work Camp at the Mission School**

During the month of July 2006, volunteers from Warrane College in Sydney, Australia, and Glenrowan Study Center in Auckland, New Zealand, joined forces for a work camp in Fiji.
Navunibitu Catholic Mission is situated in the province of Ra, to the north of Viti Levu. For two and a half weeks the volunteers from Warrane and Glenrowan repaired and painted the mission school.

The building has eight classrooms, bathrooms and a teacher’s room. Before beginning to paint they had to make many repairs. These included the emplacement of new windows, the installation of sanitary facilities and the replacement of some parts of the roof and gutters. They also installed screens in the windows and dug a large trench for sewage pipes. At the same time they prepared a place for garbage disposal. An old metal shanty also had to be demolished. Finally, they repainted the goals for the sports field and the flag staff.

Those at Navunibitu were very happy with the work that was done. They are good friends of the students by now, since this was their fourth visit there.

Tornai contenuti

Rio Grande -- (Puerto Rico) Tenth Anniversary of Monteclaro

On October 1, Monteclaro, a school of hospitality and culinary arts situated in Rio Grande, celebrated its tenth anniversary at the Fine Arts Theater in Guaynabo. Over a thousand people took part in the ceremony, including students, alumnae, teachers, friends and benefactors. A special invitee was Cardinal Luis Aponte Martínez, Archbishop Emeritus of San Juan. Also present was Msgr. Vicente Ariza Soler, Regional Vicar of the Opus Dei Prelature in Puerto Rico.

The purpose of Monteclaro “is to prepare women for employment in the hospitality industry, based on work well done, with a sense of responsibility, with an eagerness to excel and to serve others, and to contribute to the building up of a more human, more just, and more dignified world,” said Georgina Piñero Prieta, an educator and the first president of the board of directors of the institution.

The event ended with the projection of a documentary that included
testimonies of people from the island who explained how the teachings of St. Josemaría had led them to seek sanctity through their ordinary work.

**Quito -- (Ecuador) Congress on the Advantages of Separate Education**

An International Congress on Separate Education was held in Quito on October 24 and 25 sponsored by Intisana High School, which simultaneously celebrated its fortieth anniversary. Talks were given by speakers from Spain, Uruguay and Ecuador. Those attending, besides teachers and parents from the school, included many directors of schools from Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador.

Maria José Soler, from the Psychiatric and Psychological Institute of Montevideo, described the structural, functional and hormonal differences between the brains of men and women. She stressed “how important it is that teachers be aware of the differences between the sexes and that they cannot demand the same things from boys and girls. Single-sex educational centers offer the possibility of an education adapted to the psychology proper to each sex, accommodating pedagogical techniques to the specific needs of each person.”

Josep Maria Barnils, from the European Association for Single-Sex Education (EASSE), summed up advances in the movement for separate education, emphasizing that in Europe and North America interest in this cause embraces very diverse political currents.

Fernando Chapresto, from Torremar High School in Guayaquil, offered his experiences as a teacher. In his opinion, separate-sex schools have fewer disciplinary and academic problems than co-ed schools.
Nairobi -- (Kenya) European and African Volunteers in Kihumbuini Primary School

In August 2005, fifty Kenyan and Ugandan girls traveled to Germany to take part in the World Youth Day with the Holy Father Benedict XVI. The girls stayed at the Mädchengymnasium Jülich, a high school in Cologne. After the trip, they decided to organize a social work project in Kenya in conjunction with students and teachers from this school.

The German group (eleven students and four teachers) landed at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi on July 31, 2006. They undertook an intense program of cleaning, construction and painting to help improve school life for the more than 1,000 pupils at Kihumbuini Primary School, a public school in Nairobi. Most of the students there come from Kangemi, a very poor district nearby.

Kihumbuini receives a supply of food every three months, mostly vegetables, which has to last for 14 weeks. Since the school doesn't have a storeroom, they have been using the library as a storage place. Their quarterly food ration is more important to them than the use of the library. Seeing this situation, the group of volunteers decided to construct a storeroom and restore the library to its original use. Many pupils cannot study in their homes owing to a lack of light and adequate space. Funding and plenty of material for construction were obtained. The enthusiastic but unskilled team had the help of a professional mason.

On the last day, before handing over the building, the young German girls, representing their country as the host of the 2006 World Cup, gave soccer balls and uniforms of the German team to Kihumbuini’s soccer team. The pupils, for their part, sang and recited poems to show their gratitude for the work carried out in their school.

Torna ai contenuti

Valencia -- (Spain) The Archbishop in La Alameda Student Residence
On Friday, October 20, Archbishop Agustin Garcia-Gasco, Archbishop of Valencia, came to lunch at La Alameda Student Residence. Afterward he had a get-together with more than sixty volunteers for the World Congress of Families. The meeting had a very pleasant atmosphere. The students of the residence thanked Archbishop Garcia-Gasco for the diocese to host such an important event. The Archbishop, in turn, praised the students for their efforts as volunteers and encouraged them to give courageous and timely testimony to their Christian faith.

A greeting signed by all of the students was given to the Archbishop as a memento.

Rome -- (Italy) Ettore Bernabei at the RUI

Ettore Bernabei, one of the best-known Italian television personalities, gave a talk to students at the RUI university residence (Residenza Universitaria Internazionale) on October 23.

“It is possible to make good television programs.” That, in synthesis, was the message of the former general director of RAI (Radiotelevisione Italiana) and president of the LuxVide production company in his talk. Bernabei explained that television companies arose as public entities in Europe and as commercial companies in America; he said that the gradual predominance of the commercial model throughout the world, with the resulting imposition, on the part of the producers, of programs without any ethical values in order to avoid distracting attention from the commercials, has led to a relativistic television, incapable of presenting reality as the work of a Creator.

Despite the difficulties involved, however, it is still possible to offer quality products, Bernabei insisted. By way of example, he pointed to two cases in which Italian television had managed to unite high cultural and ethical content with unquestionable popular success: a lecture on the last canto of Dante’s Paradiso by the actor Roberto Benigni and a dramatic program on Pope John XXIII produced by Lux Vide itself, which a few
years after its showing continues to hold the record for audience size in Italy in its genre.

The future is promising, he said, because the public has matured and no longer lets itself be seduced by “tele-garbage.” Thanks to new technology, it is the spectator himself who can now choose the programs he wants. More than being concerned about the creation of “aqueducts” (television companies), one should be concerned about the production of “good water” (good programs): water that will later flow through television, the internet, mobile telephones, etc.

Bernabei encouraged the students at RUI to confront seriously the cultural and religious problems of today’s society, and he emphasized in particular the need for a solid professional preparation in order to be able to produce worthwhile and attractive programs.

Bogota -- (Colombia) "From Vatican II to New Evangelization"

The Department of Doctrine and Ecumenism of the Colombia Bishops’ Conference, in collaboration with the Theology Department of La Sabana University, organized the 18th edition of its Course of Theological Renewal.

The meeting took place at the seat of the Bishops’ Conference from July 10 to 13. More than a hundred priests, deacons and seminarians took part from various dioceses throughout the country: Bogotá, Medellín, Manizales, Ibagué, Cali, Villavicenio, Baledupar, Santa Marta, and Yopal.

Professors Juan Luis Lorda and Juan Alonso, from the University of Navarra, noted that 2005 had been “a crucial year and a point of departure” in the Church’s life. The Catholic Church not only celebrated the 40th anniversary of the closing of the last Council, but also saw the end of the Pontificate of John Paul II and the beginning of that of Benedict XVI. They stressed that both pontificates have been marked by the intention of the Council to bring about a new evangelization in the modern world,
beginning with a renewal of the Church in its fundamental aspects. In this context they also spoke about the importance of the personal path of conversion for each Catholic, as a specific way of personalizing the teachings of the Council that the new Pontiff, like his predecessor, wants to emphasize.

Manila -- (Philippines) The Mayor Gives a Talk in Sarangani

The mayor of Manila, Lito Atienza, gave a talk to some seventy college students at Sarangani Study Center on November 11. Atienza, an architect, is well known for his urban renewal projects and his efforts to restore and preserve the historic sites in the capital.

The talk was followed by a lively discussion, with many questions being raised by the students. Mayor Atienza made clear his opposition to certain anti-life legislative proposals being discussed in Congress and encouraged his audience to take an active role in the public debate.

Kimlea -- (Kenya) Kimlea Clinic

In 2002, the services of Kimlea Clinic—an activity organized by Fanusi Study Centre, in collaboration with the Medical School of the University of Nairobi—were extended to various villages close to Kimlea Training Centre. In addition, the Kianda Foundation undertook a project aimed at establishing a permanent clinic on the property of Kimlea itself. They wanted thus to honor the memory of St. Josemaría on the occasion of his canonization. The clinic was completed in May 2006 and shortly thereafter was asked by the Ministry of Health to assist in a campaign of vaccination against polio and measles, due to an outbreak of these two diseases in the country. In three days, more than 500 children under the age of five were
vaccinated. The clinic now attends to an average of 60 patients a day coming from a radius of about fifteen miles.

Torna ai contenuti
Faithful of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who died in the second half of the year 2006

In the second half of 2006, 303 faithful of the Prelature and 15 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
"Grace in the spirituality of St. Josemaría Escriva," by Cardinal Leo Scheffczyk

Among the rich legacy of works of spirituality that the holy founder of Opus Dei left us, we do not find any theological treatise or essay on grace. Thus a theological investigation of the concept of grace in St. Josemaría might seem ill-advised. This could easily become a formal exercise, betraying the lively experience of the reality of grace so evident in all of Escrivá’s works. Therefore I will make no attempt here to present a systematic synthesis that seeks to attribute to Escriva a conceptual system he himself had no interest in constructing. Nor is the topic focused from the point of view of abstract theological doctrine, which could obscure the organic intertwining of Escrivá’s conception of grace with the living experience of the spiritual life. Rather than a dogmatic “De gratia” treatise, this investigation closely adheres to the spirituality of St. Josemaría as reflected in spiritual conversations, homilies and meaning-filled aphorisms. Only thus can we draw out what is truly distinctive in Escrivá’s conception of grace.

In this effort, the concepts employed correspond to a terminology that is not strictly speaking dogmatic. Although we may take it for granted that St. Josemaría, as a theologian, held to the doctrine of grace as expressed in the Church’s dogma (and this will become evident, even in small points, throughout this study), he rarely made use of a strictly dogmatic terminology. In his writings such traditional expressions as “external grace” and “internal grace,” “actual grace” and “habitual grace,” “created grace” and “uncreated grace” very seldom appear, although the reality expressed by them is always present. Something similar occurs regarding such theological doctrines as the relationship between “nature and grace,” “grace and freedom,” and “grace and works.” Here too we find no thematic discussion of these questions, even though these realities often underlie, in a living and dynamic way, what he is considering.

In Escrivá’s attractive approach to grace, the theoretical and theological aspects are found in the context of a lived religious experience and expressed in a personal language. At the same time, they result from the interaction of the spoken word and the interior response of the believer.
Therefore this study will try to respect Escrivá's lively, existential expression of the mystery of grace, avoiding abstract theological discussions that would rob it of its originality.

1. *Nature and grace in Opus Dei’s spirituality.*

The founder of Opus Dei—like the apostle Paul—became an eminent herald of the mystery of grace, due in good part to the experience of his own path in life. One of his biographers gives us this summary of the great importance Escrivá attributes to grace: “The most important work, of course, is all done by God’s grace.”[1] The same author cites an expression of the founder regarding the first years of the Work: “I had nothing but my youth, God’s grace, and a good sense of humor.”[2]

Referring to the lasting impression of his parents’ example, St. Josemaría said in a letter written in 1971: ‘This is how our Lord prepared my soul, through their example imbued with Christian dignity and hidden heroism...so that later, with God’s grace, I could serve him as a poor instrument.”[3]

Even without the word “grace” being used explicitly, its omnipresence in St. Josemaría’s thought is seen in his frequent reference to supernatural realities. In present-day theology, the term “supernatural” is not always viewed in a positive light, since it is seen as fostering a simplistic “two-level” conception of the relationship between nature and grace. Such an approach, some theologians claim, could encourage an “extrinsic” conception of grace, opposed to the organic unity between nature and grace.[4] But the use of the term “supernatural” does not necessarily entail any form of “extrinsicism,” since it is meant simply to stress the sublimity and superiority of God’s grace over everything created.

This reproach regarding unsuitable language is completely inappropriate in Escrivá’s case. As we will see below, he has a deep awareness of the unity between nature and grace, and he gives us a solid theological description of this relationship. He contrasts supernatural realities with a two-dimensional surface, seeing them as a “third dimension” in human existence. “People see only the flat surface. Their vision is two-dimensional and fixed to the ground. When you live a supernatural life, God will give you the third dimension: height, and with
it, perspective, weight and volume.”[5] The theologically relevant point is that this new dimension is not seen as a structure superimposed on existing reality, but rather as something pertaining to the whole of reality. But while intimately linked with it, it far surpasses it in meaning and value.

While maintaining the essential differences between nature and grace, between creation and redemption, we can attain a correct evaluation of Escrivá’s view of the supernatural order from the way he understands the natural world. As already noted, he does not give any theological explanation in his spiritual writings regarding this relationship which traditionally was explained (not altogether satisfactorily) with the help of the concept of “potentia oboedientialis” (obediential potency) and which modern theology expresses using the term “supernatural existential” (an expression not exempt from its own problems).[6] But there are a number of texts that show how Escrivá saw this relationship as something interior and dynamic. The person who exists and loves is oriented to the gratuitous gift of grace, which is not an exterior addition to the person, but rather one’s intimate completion and fulfillment. Especially significant is Escrivá’s use of a particular term: “the way,” or “man’s way to holiness.” This mode of speaking makes clear the human being’s orientation towards grace.[7]

A solid foundation, although not strictly speaking a theological argument, for this relationship can be seen in Escrivá’s view of the close connection between the natural and supernatural virtues. Some words of St. Josemaría make this organic unity very clear: “By living charity—Love—you live all the human and supernatural virtues demanded of a Christian. These virtues form a unity.”[8] Therefore Christian piety “also calls for the exercise of human virtues.”[9] In some words of spiritual advice addressed to married couples we read: “Husband and wife must grow in interior life and learn from the Holy Family to live with refinement, for supernatural and at the same time human reasons, the virtues of a Christian home. I repeat again that the grace of God will not be lacking.”[10] Such certainty can only be explained if it is rooted in the conviction that everything natural is under the directing influence of grace.

The same is true for the relationship between reason and faith: “If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness and given him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to
uncover the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be attained only by dint of hard work. And with the light of faith, we also can perceive their supernatural purpose, resulting from the elevation of the natural order to the higher order of grace.”[11] This unity between the human and created world and the order of grace is reflected in human love: “We must be very human, for otherwise we cannot be divine. Human love, the love we experience on earth when it is really genuine, helps us to savor divine love. That is how we grasp the love by which we rejoice in God and which we will share in heaven when the Lord is everything to everyone.”[12]

As a final consideration regarding the unified view of nature and grace found in the spiritual writings of the founder of Opus Dei, we can cite an absolutely original insight, specific to his spirituality: the theological meaning of work and its relationship to holiness. Finding in human work a means and a mediating instance of grace stems, according to Escrivá, from the story of creation, where work is seen as a facet of the human being’s likeness to God. “Professional work...is a witness to the worth of the human creature. It provides a chance to develop one’s own personality; it creates a bond of union with others; it constitutes a fund of resources; it is a way of helping in the improvement of the society we live in, and of promoting the progress of the whole human race...For a Christian, these grand views become even deeper and wider. For work, which Christ took up as something both redeemed and redeeming, becomes a means, a way of holiness, a specific task which sanctifies and can be sanctified.”[13]

Certainly work serves as a means of sanctification only for the believer in the state of grace who sanctifies his work: from his work there comes, as a reflection so to speak, a renewed sanctification. Escriva insisted that “every activity” can “become for you a means to serve our Lord and your fellow men.”[14] For “it is in the simplicity of your ordinary work, in the monotonous details of each day, that you have to find the secret, which is hidden from so many, of something great and new: Love.”[15] Work, with its objective relationship to man as well as to God, “gains the value of the Love with which it is done.”[16]

In the love with which it is carried out, human work is already oriented towards the supreme supernatural love of God who, through the action of
the Redeemer, definitively raised the natural order to the level of sanctity and salvation. But this bond is not something purely external to a human reality that is not in any way oriented towards this elevation. The love entailed by work is rather the interior feature that, so to speak, goes out to meet the supernatural love of God. From human work and its impulse towards the higher love of God there arises (and this is a significant element in Escrivá’s spiritual thought) the passage from natural work to supernatural action and apostolate. This too finds its basis in natural work, in the same way that the human virtues required by one’s work are indispensable for apostolic activity.[17]

However, with Escrivá’s inclusion of work in the sphere of grace, a problem seems to arise that, if not confronted directly, could be seen as an objection against this theological approach. Human work, that is, a natural activity directed towards a particular goal, seems to contradict the gratuitousness of grace and nullify its character as an unmerited gift. This objection is directed not only to the first ascending step from nature to grace, which could be seen as something attained “from below.” It also affects apostolic activity, always demanded in the state of grace: the apostolic work that ought to bear fruit and contribute to the sanctification of the world. The founder of Opus Dei asked those entrusted to him to launch out in an untiring apostolate and a determined effort to bring about the kingdom of God. At the same time he warned energetically against laziness and mediocrity. For example: “We should never have time on our hands, not even a second—and I am not exaggerating. There is work to be done. The world is a big place and there are millions of souls who have not yet heard the doctrine of Christ in all its clarity. I am addressing each one of you individually. If you have time on your hands, think again a little. It’s quite likely that you have become lukewarm; that, supernaturally speaking, you have become a cripple. You are not moving, you are at a standstill. You are barren, you are not doing all the good you should be doing to the people around you, in your environment, in your work and in your family.”[18] In these demands one finds a noble zeal for apostolic work and ardent dedication. However, the energetic vocabulary could feed a suspicion of activism, an excessive insistence on accomplishment and confidence in one’s own powers, devaluing the role of grace.
But in reality these demanding calls are theologically well-grounded. In the first instance, in the ascent—through the mediation of love—from the natural order to the level of grace and apostolate, love by its very nature refuses to demand or seek anything for itself; rather it recognizes the freedom of God, the giver of grace. In the second instance (that of the apostolic activity of a Christian in the state of grace) we find the clear conviction, constantly present, that every acting in grace stems from grace and is never carried out by itself. That is to say, every human operation is a cooperation with grace.

The character of this human activity in the apostolate, based on the foundation of divine grace, is clearly expressed in the need for prayer in all apostolic action and in the intertwining of all one’s activities with contemplation. For to the extent that prayer imbues and vivifies one’s work, it cannot be separated in any way from divine grace. “I really do believe that a serious danger of losing the way threatens those who launch out into action—activism!—while neglecting prayer, self-denial and those means without which it is impossible to achieve a solid piety: receiving the Sacraments frequently, meditation, examination of conscience, spiritual reading and constant recourse to our Lady and the Guardian Angels... Besides, all these means contribute, in a way that nothing else can, to making the Christian’s daily life a joyful one, for, from their hidden riches, flow out the sweetness and joy of God, like honey from the comb.”[19]

Therefore, in Escrivá’s energetic way of stressing the role of human activity in the spiritual life, one can see a totally sound view of the relationship between nature and grace. He emphasizes the dominant and effective role of grace, while avoiding the Protestant error of attributing to it universal efficacy.

But grasping Escrivá’s spiritual teaching on grace requires more than just seeing its fundamental dogmatic integrity. One needs to go deeper and contemplate the concrete action of grace in the Christian.

2. **Grace as strength for the way: conversion and vocation**

Traditional Catholic teaching, in approaching grace as an integral part of Christian life, draws a distinction between assisting actual grace and sanctifying habitual grace. But first, in proper scholastic fashion, we need
to give a conceptual definition of the essence of divine grace. Obviously this does not entail a complete unveiling of the mystery of the essence of grace. Even though in some editions of the founder of Opus Dei's works one can find in the index such topics as “essence and effects of grace,” no real definition is given. The references do not go beyond the analogies of “light,” “strength,” “power of God,” “love, mercy, and affection.” Specific theological terms such as the distinction between gratia actualis and gratia habitualis (sanctificans) play no substantial role. But this does not mean that these realities are not present. Otherwise one's theology of grace would be, as in Protestantism, greatly restricted.

The distinction between actual and sanctifying grace appears in the context of Escrivá's spiritual theology, making use of terminology that is a function of the dynamic and personal mode of his thought (God and man face-to-face). This terminology is associated with what Escrivá sees (significantly, as early as his first book) as “the way” of man towards God and towards holiness: a continuous movement, also present in work, to which God corresponds with an equally dynamic and permanent action, which turns man's path in life into a salvific path. Dogmatic theology would here use the concept of “cooperating grace.” Escrivá also sometimes speaks of the “help” God provides, but then relates this generic term with man's life as a way or path; and he understands God's help, above all, in the sense of a decisive point of departure, as the grace of conversion.

Therefore, what traditional theology calls actual grace appears in the first place under the name of conversion, which unites divine action and human effort. “Conversion is a matter of a moment. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime.” Conversion brings “new lights” and joy, as our Lord “makes you discover” once again so many realities. One is led by God to “react,” to feel “sorry for your venial sins. For, until you are, you cannot begin to have true interior life.” It is a moment like Lazarus’ awakening from the rigidity of death: “If you hear God's inspiration and follow it—'Lazarus, come forth!'—you will return to Life.”

In accord with the image of human life as a way or path, conversion means a “change of direction,” opening oneself to a commitment of love: “Loving you—this is what my life is going to be all about.” It is the moment when the soul who has found God exclaims: “Nunc coepi!” —Now I
One hears the call: “Change now, when you still feel young. How difficult it is to put things right when the soul has aged.”[32] “You told me, Father, that after my past life it is still possible to become ‘another’ Saint Augustine.” And Escrivá, the experienced director of souls, replied: “But you have to cut out sin courageously from the root, as the holy Bishop of Hippo did.”[33] The disposition of soul that makes this change possible is rooted in humility: “To be converted you must climb via humility, along the path of self-abasement.”[34] Escrivá finds in the parable of the prodigal son the best image for the conversion worked by God’s grace, in cooperation with man: “Our Father God, when we come to him repentant, draws, from our wretchedness, treasure; from our weakness, strength...The return of a son who had betrayed him is enough for him to prepare a banquet.”[35]

Conversion brings with it the interior riches of a life of faith: “There are some who pass through life as through a tunnel, without ever understanding the splendor, the security and the warmth of the sun of faith.”[36] Escrivá sees this faith, in accord with his personalistic dynamics, not only as faith in the sense of doctrinal content (though this aspect is never absent), but above all as life with God in Christ: “Live your faith cheerfully, keeping very close to Jesus Christ.”[37]

The conversion worked by grace acquires in Escrivá’s spirituality a very specific meaning, one that is often found in doctors of spirituality but that in Escrivá takes on a distinct character. Conversion is seen as a continual renewal and a constant beginning again on one’s spiritual path, which requires the assistance of actual grace, even when there is a vital and loving union with Christ, but especially when one has lost the grace of union with our Lord. In the first situation: “For a son of God each day should be an opportunity for renewal, knowing for sure that with the help of grace he will reach the end of the road, which is Love.”[38] The second situation involves the reality of cooperating grace: “And if at a certain moment you should fall or suffer some setback (not that it has to happen), all you have to do is to apply the remedy, just as, in the normal course of events, you would do for the sake of your bodily health. And then: off to a fresh start!”[39] The spiritual life is seen here as a determined struggle,[40] one that presupposes the constant action of actual grace.
In one’s daily life, “suns of heaven are needed and personal efforts, small and constant, to shake off those inclinations, those vain fancies, that depression: that mud clinging to your wings.”[41] It’s a question of beginning again and again: “To rectify. A little each day. This must be your constant concern if you really want to become a saint.”[42] “Your life cannot be the repetition of actions which are monotonously all the same, because the next one should be more upright, more effective, more full of love than the last. Each day should mean new light, new enthusiasm—for Him!”[43] “Every single day, do what you can to know God better, to get acquainted with him, to fall more in love with him each moment, and to think of nothing but of his Love and his glory.”[44]

Escrivá’s spiritual teaching thus follows the main lines of the Catholic doctrine on grace, which interweaves the power of grace (a gift man is incapable of meriting) with human cooperation. He was well aware of the danger of a Pelagianism that puts the accent on justification through works. But he also warned: “People have often drawn attention to the danger of deeds performed without any interior life to inspire them; but we should also stress the danger of an interior life—if such a thing is possible—without deeds to show for it.”[45] Thus he took a clear stand against a “sola gratia” position that might try to present itself as apparently Catholic, which would see all salvific action as rooted in grace and thus seek to renounce all human “co-causality.” Escrivá presents us here with a clear and correct application of the Augustinian principle: “Qui te creavit sine te, non te iustificat sine te.”[46] Escrivá warns against a tepid love that leads to a false tranquility and comfort-loving passivity, which he sometimes referred to as “laziness.” “You must fight against the tendency to be too lenient with yourselves. Everyone has this difficulty. Be demanding with yourselves! Sometimes...relying on flimsy excuses, we become too easygoing and forget about the marvelous responsibility that rests upon our shoulders. We are content with doing just enough to get by. We let ourselves get carried away by false rationalizations and waste our time, whereas Satan and his allies never take a holiday.”[47]

These demands imbue Escrivá’s spirituality with features that are decidedly active, with a zeal to do and to act (without being waylaid by an external “activism,” since the power of interior grace is always present).
These demands become even more pressing when seen in relation to the reality of the great adversary and enemy of all that is good, namely, the Malignant One, whose reality Escrivá never denied. Here the Christian life takes on the clear character of a battle, with the action of grace spurring the Christian to a renewed resistance and confrontation with the enemy. “Don’t be troubled if, as you consider the wonders of the supernatural world, you hear that other voice, the intimate, insinuating voice of your ‘old self.’” “The world, the flesh and the devil are a band of adventurers who take advantage of the weakness of that savage you bear within you.”[48] The reality of this continual struggle leads him to show understanding for those he is guiding, while encouraging them to mobilize their strength: “It’s hard! Yes, I know. But, forward! No one will be rewarded—and what a reward!—except those who fight bravely.”[49]

Escrivá also frequently alludes in his spiritual writings to the reality of vocation in Christian life. In one’s vocation there shines forth clearly the feature of God’s sovereignty in granting his grace, while human cooperation is limited to a certain suitability of the person which is never the cause of the vocation. He tells one of his early followers that his vocation “is the greatest grace God could have given you.”[50] But the term here does not refer to a “religious” vocation. “Your perfection consists in living perfectly in the place, occupation and position that God, through those in authority, has assigned to you.”[51] A call from God is already contained in one’s profession in the world as the place for seeking holiness, in the triple aspect of sanctifying oneself, sanctifying one’s work and sanctifying the world. The first vocation is undoubtedly the choice of a person by God to be a Christian. Here one finds included the call to carry out apostolate and to heal and sanctify the world. Escrivá, whose words are filled with echoes of Sacred Scripture and the Fathers, cites in this context a text from Clement of Alexandria regarding the life of Christians in the world: “Since we are convinced that God is to be found everywhere, we plough our fields praising the Lord, we sail the seas and ply all our other trades singing his mercies.”[52]

Since sanctifying oneself and sanctifying the world are closely united in Escrivá’s spirituality, the lay person’s vocation to sanctity, the call to follow Christ and serve God that imparts to all the baptized a common priestly
character, necessarily gives rise to apostolate. The call “to a Christian life, to a life of holiness, to a chosen life, to life eternal” directed to everyone, already entails an apostolic dimension: “Children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls. The Lord uses us as torches, to make that light shine out.” “Our task as children of God is to get all men to enter, freely, into the divine net; to get them to love each other. If we are Christians, we must seek to become fishermen like those described by the prophet Jeremiah with a metaphor which Jesus also often used: ‘Follow me and I will make you fishers of men,’ he says to Peter and Andrew.” This is especially true for the priesthood: “it is an apostolate!” In the ministerial priesthood Christ’s being and acting are clearly expressed, insofar as the priest “is always another Christ.” Here the vocation to the apostolate is seen as a gift of grace. Certainly this also entails a special feature that marked the life of Christ: it is carried out under the sign of the cross. “To be a Christian, and in particular to be a priest—bearing in mind, too, that all of us who are baptized share in Christ’s priesthood—is to be at all times on the Cross.”

Let us turn now to the relationship, always stressed by Escrivá, between nature and grace, between the natural human virtues apostolate requires and the supernatural gifts. As he always insisted: “We must be very human, for otherwise we cannot be divine.” Here we find a clear statement of the organic unity between nature and grace, a bulwark as it were against any “extrinsicism” in his teaching on grace. But this organic unity between the natural and supernatural orders can never lead us to forget that our nature is a wounded nature. Therefore the elevation and perfecting of nature by grace and its orientation, continually renewed, to the supernatural order cannot be accomplished in any other way than under the sign of the cross. Thus Christ’s “disciples, if they really want to imitate him, have to convert their existence into a co-redemption of Love, with their own active and passive self-denial.”

3. Holiness, the goal of the path of grace

In Escrivá’s spiritual theology, both “conversion” and “vocation,” which correspond to the concept of actual grace, are oriented towards the goal of sanctification, in which grace—corresponding to the technical expression “sanctifying grace”—has become a permanent reality of divine life in man.
The Founder of Opus Dei’s dynamic and personal conception of grace explains why for him it is not characterized by the concept of created grace, understood as an accident inherent in the soul, but by the state that results from acts of sanctification: holiness. This state can only be thought of as united to a person, to the person whom that state turns into a saint.

There is no need to stress that the acts required by conversion and by one’s vocation, which lead a person towards sanctity, can never be separated from sanctity. Since the state of grace never acquires an unbreakable firmness in this world, the person in the state of grace, the justified person, always needs the help of actual graces. Such a need arises not only for ontological reasons (as in the scholastic tradition, which taught that a supernatural habit can become a being in act only through an actual divine impulse[^61]), but also because of the weaknesses and temptations a justified person is subject to, which require a continual struggle to remain in grace and holiness. This reality reinforces the character of struggle in the Christian life (a point Escrivá frequently insisted on), through a continual conversion and a renewed “yes” to one’s vocation, for which the justified person needs actual grace.[^62]

This struggle also involves the duty of permanent prayer, above all to keep alive a fervent apostolic zeal.[^63] To keep up one’s battle for holiness and preserve the vigor of one’s first love, one needs to pray for perseverance: “Constancy, that nothing can shake. That is what you need. Ask it of God and do what you can to obtain it: for it is a great safeguard against your ever turning from the fruitful way you have chosen.”[^64] The “way” that Escrivá traced through the milestones of conversion and vocation reaches its earthly goal in holiness. But this goal is not the definitive eschatological goal. Therefore the “way” continues forward even after one’s justification, although on a more elevated plane.

The inseparable coupling of the efficacy of actual grace and the life of holiness is also reflected in the constant human effort and self-sacrificing dedication that must always be present in the apostolic life Escrivá characterizes as marked by the Cross. A Christian in the state of holiness, then, continues to need to cooperate agilely and to fight. This could lead one to view Escrivá’s conception of grace as weighing one down with constant demands, and thus as failing to reveal the beauty and happiness of

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a life lived in sanctifying grace. In reality however, his constant concern to attain a life of holiness shows us the splendor of a life in grace, and the deepest motive for optimism when reflecting on supernatural realities.

Here we should note an important characteristic of Escrivá’s conception of grace (clearly based on his own personal experience) that gives it its intimate dynamism and vitality. Without employing the terminology of “created grace” (which the author leaves to the side, while recognizing its necessity), this approach soon attains what traditional theology (perhaps without giving sufficient weight to the theological data) calls “the retinue accompanying sanctifying grace,” seen as including not only the theological virtues, the infused moral virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but also the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the entire Trinity in the soul of the just person. Thus, without trying to resolve the problems regarding “created grace” and “uncreated grace,” he gives priority to uncreated grace over created grace. Uncreated grace (which is God himself in his free self-gift to man) can be seen as the essence of the state of grace, for whose actualization created grace provides the foundation. This way of viewing grace leads to the reality that grace, at its highest level, is not a gift distinct and separable from God, but is identical with the Trinitarian Giver, who here gives himself to the creature in a mysterious personal union.

Thus Escrivá expresses the life of holiness as the union of the person in grace with the divine life of the three divine Persons. The conceptual richness we find here is quite remarkable. Although the diverse concepts are related among themselves, each one has a distinctive connotation. This enables us to begin to grasp the rich variety and living plenitude of personal grace.

Included among these expressions we find: “friendship with Christ,” “presence of God,” “divine filiation,” “union with the Holy Spirit,” “divinization,” “love,” “spiritual childhood,” “the coming of the Holy Spirit,” “participation in divine Life,” “identification with Christ.” All express the reality of grace and holiness through a personal relationship. Human relationships, however close, always maintain a certain distance. But in the relationship we are considering, the intimacy attained has no human analogy. It leads one to see the grace of sanctification as a union
with the divine persons, as a penetration of the divine Spirit in the human mind, as a harmony between the Word of God and the creature’s voice.

This intimate union sheds new light on the meaning of the three theological virtues. Faith “disposes our intelligence to give assent to the truths of revelation, to say Yes to Christ;”[65] it gives us “our supernatural outlook,”[66] but it is also an entrusting and abandoning of ourselves to our Lord. Faith leads us to “sense in our hearts the love, the compassion, the tenderness of Christ’s gaze upon us, for he never abandons us...If we have faith in our Lord, in spite of our failings or, rather, with our failings—we shall be faithful to our Father, God; his divine power will shine forth in us, sustaining us in our weakness.”[67]

The supernatural virtue of hope has a similar effect, “because hope encourages us to grasp hold of the strong hand which God never ceases to reach out to us, to keep us from losing our supernatural point of view...I am convinced that unless I look upward, unless I have Jesus, I will never accomplish anything.”[68] In contemplating “the divine interlacing of the three theological virtues which form the backing upon which the true life of every Christian man or woman has to be woven,” it is hope in God which sets us “marvelously ablaze with love, with a fire that makes the heart beat strong and keeps it safe from discouragement and dejection, even though along the way one may suffer and at times suffer greatly.”[69]

The life springing from union with God in Christ Jesus experiences a new impulse through the Holy Spirit and his gifts. “Don’t forget that you are God’s temple. The Advocate is in the center of your soul: listen to him and be docile to his inspirations.”[70] The Holy Spirit’s gifts are dispositions that foster his direct action in the person in grace, especially when facing extraordinary demands and tasks. For “even without talents, fame or fortune, we can be effective instruments if we go to the Holy Spirit so that he may grant us his gifts.”[71]

The conviction, based on faith, of a personal unity of life and action with the divine Persons opens up a spiritual plenitude and supernatural richness that transforms a Christian’s life in the world into a lofty adventure, despite the experience, always present, of human weakness and sorrow. But the immense gift of grace towers over the smallness and
weakness of all that is earthly and fosters an attitude towards life marked by confidence, joy and optimism.

The first expression of this supernatural joy, seldom mentioned when referring to the topic of grace although closely connected to it, is gratitude. Escrivá frequently stresses this deep attitude of a person marked by grace, well aware of the etymological connection in Spanish between grace (“gracia”) and giving thanks for a gift received (“gracias”). In doing so, he also stresses the personal character of the relationship grace entails. The awareness of having received the gift of grace should lead a person to a deep feeling of gratitude.

Escrivá's numerous appeals to be grateful are valid for all Christians: “Look: you are bound to show yourself very grateful to the Lord, precisely because you have received it all in one go. Just as it would strike a blind man if he suddenly recovered his sight, while it does not even occur to others to give thanks because they see.”[72] Hence, for the founder of Opus Dei, thanksgiving is an indispensable element in one's personal relationship with God: “Make sure that your thanksgiving comes pouring out from your heart every day.”[73]

But giving thanks is only a first expression of the joy that, through divine grace, imbues Christian life with vitality. For if our Lord is truly nearby—Dominus prope est—then the person in grace is called to “serve God with joy!”[74] And then it is also true that: “Now that you have given yourself to God your happiness cannot be taken away.”[75] From the depths of one's soul there blossoms forth, as an expression of one's self-giving to God, the joy and peace that St. Paul links together (Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22).

In highlighting the rich spiritual legacy that union with the God of grace brings, Escrivá not only breathed new life into the doctrine of grace but also displays the Gospel and the Christian faith as a message of joy and as the religion of true spiritual happiness. When today religion is often reduced to human goals and Christianity to its social utility, Escrivá stresses a redemptive communion with God that transcends all human dimensions, proclaiming the splendor of Christianity as the religion of grace.
Nevertheless, the founder of Opus Dei well knows that the excellence of grace in this world should only be seen as a partial beginning and a pledge. It is meant to grow, with the limited and finite reaching towards what is unlimited and infinite. It yearns to reach its plenitude in heaven. Therefore grace here on earth is already a beginning of glory, an “incipient glory,” just as the plenitude of heaven is “a consummated grace.” Here too Escrivá’s view of grace shows its harmonious wholeness as he directs our eyes, with an eschatological perspective, towards the fullness of grace in heaven. To speak of grace and not consider heaven would be a deep contradiction.

This eschatological perspective has great importance for Christian life. To know where one is traveling one needs to know what the goal is. The path of grace would be a path without meaning if faith and hope in reaching heaven were lacking. That many Christians view the life of grace as lacking in savor and dynamism stems, in part, from not seeing heaven as a real goal. Therefore Escrivá encourages his hearers in a homily: “let us...go right to the core, to what is really important. Look: what we have to try to do is to get to heaven. If we don’t, nothing is worthwhile.”[76] And he advised “keep on lifting your eyes up to heaven as you go about your work, because hope encourages us to grasp hold of the strong hand which God never ceases to reach out to us.”[77] Here he is alluding not simply to a longing glance but to a determined effort to reach the goal, compatible with the reality of the trials and apostolic hardships from which it blossoms. For those who are following the path of salvation “at the end of the road a garden of paradise awaits them, eternal happiness, heaven.”[78]

This realism in regard to salvation is firmly grounded in the Gospels, including the very human concern for the reward. Seeing life as a struggle entails the thought of the prize of victory: “It’s hard! Yes, I know. But, forward! No one will be rewarded—and what a reward!—except those who fight bravely.”[79] Escrivá recalls St. Paul’s promise that “each will duly be paid according to his share in the work?”[80] What one reaps will be a function of what one sows.[81]

Escrivá, in giving us his fullest view of heaven, asks: “what will it be like when all the infinite beauty and greatness, and happiness and Love of God will be poured into the poor clay vessel that the human being is, to
satisfy it eternally with the freshness of an ever-new joy?”[82] Heaven is the definitive fullness of grace, union with the divine Persons in love, joy, holiness and glory. Here we see the dynamic and personal character of Escrivá’s thought, which permits one to grasp the heights and depths of the Catholic faith.


[21] As in *Christ Is Passing By*, no. 114


[29] *The Forge*, no. 32.


[34] *Ibid.*, no. 278.


[37] *The Forge*, no. 448.

[38] *Ibid.*, no. 344


[40] Regarding Christian life as struggle cf., for example: *The Way*, nos. 707-733; *Christ Is Passing By*, nos. 73-201.


Ibid., n. 734.


*Friends of God*, no. 62.


Ibid., no. 720.

Ibid., no. 913.

Ibid., no. 926


*The Forge*, no. 13.

Ibid., no. 1.

*Friends of God*, no. 259.

*The Forge*, no. 582.

*The Way*, no. 66.

*The Forge*, no. 882.

*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 166.

*Furrow*, no. 255.


*The Way*, no. 990.

*Friends of God*, no. 191.

Ibid., 194.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 213.

Ibid., p. 205.

*The Way*, no. 57.
[71] *Furrow*, no. 283.


[73] *The Forge*, no. 866

[74] *Furrow*, no. 53.


[76] *Christ Is Passing By*, 76.

[77] *Friends of God*, no. 213.


[82] *Furrow*, no. 891.

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