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

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature.

This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

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

*Spe salvi facti sumus*, in hope we were saved. Benedict XVI begins his encyclical on Christian hope with this phrase from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans (8:24). It is God and God alone who grounds our hope: “[To come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope.”[1] God makes himself present in a Christian’s life, and although we see him now in an obscure manner (cf. 1 Cor 13:12), he is present in a very real way. “The things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence.”[2] Therefore, “the fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.”[3] As St. Josemaría put it “the light of holy hope gives us a foretaste of never-ending love in our true homeland in heaven.”[4]

Christian hope is a theological virtue. It rests entirely on the goodness of God, who through his only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, saves us in hope. We should humbly ask God, with words of St. Thomas Aquinas: “Make me always have greater hope in you!”[5] Christ lived among men, died, rose, ascended into heaven, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. In Christ, we discover God’s fatherly strength: he is almighty, good, merciful, and faithful. We can make this strength our own through the action of the Holy Spirit and bring it to all men and women.

The object of our hope is God, who gives himself to us and whom we can possess forever. Living this hope means employing all the faculties God has given us, in particular our reason and our free will. Our reason opens itself to God, who has revealed himself as the highest Reason in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ; while our freedom unfolds in love for God, and through him and in him, for all mankind.

Human work, which St. Josemaría saw as the hinge supporting the sanctification of ordinary life in the middle of the world, possesses certain characteristics that accord very well with hope. And this is not only because work entails persevering effort, which in the believer receives encouragement from hope, but because all work, small or great, intellectual or manual, is presented as a plan, as an idea that moves a person towards its realization, until it is finally attained. Work always refers, like hope, to a
bonum futurum arduum possibile,⁶ to a good that is absent, difficult to attain, yet at the same time possible.

Before beginning any work, whether a large or small project (the construction of a building or the arrangement of a floral piece), a plan is drawn up, using one’s imagination and with the collaboration of other persons. This plan first takes shape in the human mind, and later it is confronted with reality to determine the means needed to overcome any obstacles.

Little by little, the initial plan begins to become reality. In this process many virtues come into play, but it is hope that guides everything, since it permits one to overcome all the difficulties, both the objective ones (for example, a lack of material means) and the subjective ones (discouragement, etc.). Without hope, this process would not take place; when there is no hope of attaining the end, a person ceases to put effort into his work.

Anyone who possesses Christian hope “works in this world of ours, which he loves passionately; he is involved in all its challenges, but all the while his eyes are fixed on heaven.”⁷ Such a person works for the glory of God and in the service of mankind, so that Christ might “draw all men to himself” (Jn 12:32), and God might be “everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28). By means of work carried out with hope, our reason and freedom open fully to God, and human work is divinized.

Our Lady guides us through the darkness and trials of our earthly path. If we go to her with trust and humility she will fill our hearts with hope. “When you hastened with holy joy across the mountains of Judea to see your cousin Elizabeth, you became the image of the Church to come, which carries the hope of the world in her womb across the mountains of history.”⁸

“Let us ask Holy Mary, Spes Nostra, our hope, to kindle in us a holy desire that we may all come together to dwell in the house of the Father. Nothing need disturb us if we make up our minds to anchor our hearts in a real longing for our true fatherland. Our Lord will lead us there with his grace, and he will send a good wind to carry our ship to the bright shores of our destination.”⁹

[2] Ibid., no. 8.

[3] Ibid., no. 7.


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The Encyclical Spe Salvi (November 30, 2007)

Introduction

1. “SPE SALVI facti sumus”—in hope we were saved, says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (Rom 8:24). According to the Christian faith, “redemption”—salvation—is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. Now the question immediately arises: what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that, on the basis of that hope and simply because it exists, we are redeemed? And what sort of certainty is involved here?

Faith is Hope

2. Before turning our attention to these timely questions, we must listen a little more closely to the Bible's testimony on hope. “Hope”, in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words “faith” and “hope” seem interchangeable. Thus the Letter to the Hebrews closely links the “fullness of faith” (10:22) to “the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23). Likewise, when the First Letter of Peter exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the logos—the meaning and the reason—of their hope (cf. 3:15), “hope” is equivalent to “faith”. We see how decisively the self-understanding of the early Christians was shaped by their having received the gift of a trustworthy hope, when we compare the Christian life with life prior to faith, or with the situation of the followers of other religions. Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Of course he knew they had had gods, he knew they had had a religion, but their gods had proved questionable, and no hope emerged from their contradictory myths. Notwithstanding their gods, they were “without God” and consequently
found themselves in a dark world, facing a dark future. *In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus* (How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing);[1] so says an epitaph of that period. In this phrase we see in no uncertain terms the point Paul was making. In the same vein he says to the Thessalonians: you must not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (*1 Thess* 4:13). Here too we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well. So now we can say: Christianity was not only “good news”—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative”. That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.

3. Yet at this point a question arises: in what does this hope consist which, as hope, is “redemption”? The essence of the answer is given in the phrase from the *Letter to the Ephesians* quoted above: the Ephesians, before their encounter with Christ, were without hope because they were “without God in the world”. To come to know God—the true God—means to receive hope. We who have always lived with the Christian concept of God, and have grown accustomed to it, have almost ceased to notice that we possess the hope that ensues from a real encounter with this God. The example of a saint of our time can to some degree help us understand what it means to have a real encounter with this God for the first time. I am thinking of the African Josephine Bakhita, canonized by Pope John Paul II. She was born around 1869—she herself did not know the precise date—in Darfur in Sudan. At the age of nine, she was kidnapped by slave-traders, beaten till she bled, and sold five times in the slave-markets of Sudan. Eventually she found herself working as a slave for the mother and the wife of a general, and there she was flogged every day till she bled; as a result of this she bore 144 scars throughout her life. Finally, in 1882, she was bought by an Italian merchant for the Italian consul Callisto Legnani, who returned to Italy as the Mahdists advanced. Here, after the terrifying
“masters” who had owned her up to that point, Bakhita came to know a
totally different kind of “master”—in Venetian dialect, which she was now
learning, she used the name “paron” for the living God, the God of Jesus
Christ. Up to that time she had known only masters who despised and
maltreated her, or at best considered her a useful slave. Now, however, she
heard that there is a “paron” above all masters, the Lord of all lords, and
that this Lord is good, goodness in person. She came to know that this
Lord even knew her, that he had created her—that he actually loved her.
She too was loved, and by none other than the supreme “Paron”, before
whom all other masters are themselves no more than lowly servants. She
was known and loved and she was awaited. What is more, this master had
himself accepted the destiny of being flogged and now he was waiting for
her “at the Father’s right hand”. Now she had “hope”—no longer simply
the modest hope of finding masters who would be less cruel, but the great
hope: “I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me—I am awaited
by this Love. And so my life is good.” Through the knowledge of this hope
she was “redeemed”, no longer a slave, but a free child of God. She
understood what Paul meant when he reminded the Ephesians that
previously they were without hope and without God in the
world—without hope because without God. Hence, when she was about to
be taken back to Sudan, Bakhita refused; she did not wish to be separated
again from her “Paron”. On 9 January 1890, she was baptized and
confirmed and received her first Holy Communion from the hands of the
Patriarch of Venice. On 8 December 1896, in Verona, she took her vows in
the Congregation of the Canossian Sisters and from that time onwards,
besides her work in the sacristy and in the porter’s lodge at the convent, she
made several journeys round Italy in order to promote the missions: the
liberation that she had received through her encounter with the God of
Jesus Christ, she felt she had to extend, it had to be handed on to others, to
the greatest possible number of people. The hope born in her which had
“redeemed” her she could not keep to herself; this hope had to reach many,
to reach everybody.

The concept of faith-based hope in the New Testament and the early
Church
4. We have raised the question: can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us his face and opened his heart be for us too not just “informative” but “performative”—that is to say, can it change our lives, so that we know we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses? Before attempting to answer the question, let us return once more to the early Church. It is not difficult to realize that the experience of the African slave-girl Bakhita was also the experience of many in the period of nascent Christianity who were beaten and condemned to slavery. Christianity did not bring a message of social revolution like that of the ill-fated Spartacus, whose struggle led to so much bloodshed. Jesus was not Spartacus, he was not engaged in a fight for political liberation like Barabbas or Bar- Kochba. Jesus, who himself died on the Cross, brought something totally different: an encounter with the Lord of all lords, an encounter with the living God and thus an encounter with a hope stronger than the sufferings of slavery, a hope which therefore transformed life and the world from within. What was new here can be seen with the utmost clarity in Saint Paul's Letter to Philemon. This is a very personal letter, which Paul wrote from prison and entrusted to the runaway slave Onesimus for his master, Philemon. Yes, Paul is sending the slave back to the master from whom he had fled, not ordering but asking: “I appeal to you for my child... whose father I have become in my imprisonment... I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart... perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother...” (Philem 10-16). Those who, as far as their civil status is concerned, stand in relation to one another as masters and slaves, inasmuch as they are members of the one Church have become brothers and sisters—this is how Christians addressed one another. By virtue of their Baptism they had been reborn, they had been given to drink of the same Spirit and they received the Body of the Lord together, alongside one another. Even if external structures remained unaltered, this changed society from within. When the Letter to the Hebrews says that Christians here on earth do not have a permanent homeland, but seek one which lies in the future (cf. Heb 11:13-16; Phil 3:20), this does not mean for one moment that they live only for the future: present society is recognized by Christians as an exile; they belong to a new society which is the goal of their common pilgrimage and which is anticipated in the course
of that pilgrimage.

5. We must add a further point of view. The *First Letter to the Corinthians* (1:18-31) tells us that many of the early Christians belonged to the lower social strata, and precisely for this reason were open to the experience of new hope, as we saw in the example of Bakhita. Yet from the beginning there were also conversions in the aristocratic and cultured circles, since they too were living “without hope and without God in the world”. Myth had lost its credibility; the Roman State religion had become fossilized into simple ceremony which was scrupulously carried out, but by then it was merely “political religion”. Philosophical rationalism had confined the gods within the realm of unreality. The Divine was seen in various ways in cosmic forces, but a God to whom one could pray did not exist. Paul illustrates the essential problem of the religion of that time quite accurately when he contrasts life “according to Christ” with life under the dominion of the “elemental spirits of the universe” (*Col* 2:8). In this regard a text by Saint Gregory Nazianzen is enlightening. He says that at the very moment when the Magi, guided by the star, adored Christ the new king, astrology came to an end, because the stars were now moving in the orbit determined by Christ\(^2\). This scene, in fact, overturns the world-view of that time, which in a different way has become fashionable once again today. It is not the elemental spirits of the universe, the laws of matter, which ultimately govern the world and mankind, but a personal God governs the stars, that is, the universe; it is not the laws of matter and of evolution that have the final say, but reason, will, love—a Person. And if we know this Person and he knows us, then truly the inexorable power of material elements no longer has the last word; we are not slaves of the universe and of its laws, we are free. In ancient times, honest enquiring minds were aware of this. Heaven is not empty. Life is not a simple product of laws and the randomness of matter, but within everything and at the same time above everything, there is a personal will, there is a Spirit who in Jesus has revealed himself as Love\(^3\).

6. The sarcophagi of the early Christian era illustrate this concept visually—in the context of death, in the face of which the question concerning life’s meaning becomes unavoidable. The figure of Christ is interpreted on ancient sarcophagi principally by two images: the
philosopher and the shepherd. Philosophy at that time was not generally seen as a difficult academic discipline, as it is today. Rather, the philosopher was someone who knew how to teach the essential art: the art of being authentically human—the art of living and dying. To be sure, it had long since been realized that many of the people who went around pretending to be philosophers, teachers of life, were just charlatans who made money through their words, while having nothing to say about real life. All the more, then, the true philosopher who really did know how to point out the path of life was highly sought after. Towards the end of the third century, on the sarcophagus of a child in Rome, we find for the first time, in the context of the resurrection of Lazarus, the figure of Christ as the true philosopher, holding the Gospel in one hand and the philosopher’s traveling staff in the other. With his staff, he conquers death; the Gospel brings the truth that itinerant philosophers had searched for in vain. In this image, which then became a common feature of sarcophagus art for a long time, we see clearly what both educated and simple people found in Christ: he tells us who man truly is and what a man must do in order to be truly human. He shows us the way, and this way is the truth. He himself is both the way and the truth, and therefore he is also the life which all of us are seeking. He also shows us the way beyond death; only someone able to do this is a true teacher of life. The same thing becomes visible in the image of the shepherd. As in the representation of the philosopher, so too through the figure of the shepherd the early Church could identify with existing models of Roman art. There the shepherd was generally an expression of the dream of a tranquil and simple life, for which the people, amid the confusion of the big cities, felt a certain longing. Now the image was read as part of a new scenario which gave it a deeper content: “The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, because you are with me...” (Ps 23 [22]:1, 4). The true shepherd is one who knows even the path that passes through the valley of death; one who walks with me even on the path of final solitude, where no one can accompany me, guiding me through: he himself has walked this path, he has descended into the kingdom of death, he has conquered death, and he has returned to accompany us now and to give us the certainty that, together with him, we can find a way through. The realization that there is One who even in death accompanies me, and with
his “rod and his staff comforts me”, so that “I fear no evil” (cf. Ps 23 [22]:4)—this was the new “hope” that arose over the life of believers.

7. We must return once more to the New Testament. In the eleventh chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews (v. 1) we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope. Ever since the Reformation there has been a dispute among exegetes over the central word of this phrase, but today a way towards a common interpretation seems to be opening up once more. For the time being I shall leave this central word untranslated. The sentence therefore reads as follows: “Faith is the hypostasis of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen”. For the Fathers and for the theologians of the Middle Ages, it was clear that the Greek word hypostasis was to be rendered in Latin with the term substantia. The Latin translation of the text produced at the time of the early Church therefore reads: Est autem fides sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium—faith is the “substance” of things hoped for; the proof of things not seen. Saint Thomas Aquinas [4], using the terminology of the philosophical tradition to which he belonged, explains it as follows: faith is a habitus, that is, a stable disposition of the spirit, through which eternal life takes root in us and reason is led to consent to what it does not see. The concept of “substance” is therefore modified in the sense that through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say “in embryo”—and thus according to the “substance”—there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: the whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, this presence of what is to come also creates certainty: this “thing” which must come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not “appear”), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence. To Luther, who was not particularly fond of the Letter to the Hebrews, the concept of “substance”, in the context of his view of faith, meant nothing. For this reason he understood the term hypostasis/substance not in the objective sense (of a reality present within us), but in the subjective sense, as an expression of an interior attitude, and so, naturally, he also had to understand the term argumentum as a disposition of the subject. In the twentieth century this interpretation became prevalent—at least in Germany—in Catholic exegesis too, so that the ecumenical translation into German of the New Testament, approved
by the Bishops, reads as follows: Glaube aber ist: Feststehen in dem, was man erhofft, Überzeugtsein von dem, was man nicht sieht (faith is: standing firm in what one hopes, being convinced of what one does not see). This in itself is not incorrect, but it is not the meaning of the text, because the Greek term used (elenchos) does not have the subjective sense of “conviction” but the objective sense of “proof”. Rightly, therefore, recent Protestant exegesis has arrived at a different interpretation: “Yet there can be no question but that this classical Protestant understanding is untenable”[5]. Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a “proof” of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet”. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future.

8. This explanation is further strengthened and related to daily life if we consider verse 34 of the tenth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, which is linked by vocabulary and content to this definition of hope-filled faith and prepares the way for it. Here the author speaks to believers who have undergone the experience of persecution and he says to them: “you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property (hyparchonta—Vg. bonorum), since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession (hyparxin—Vg. substantiam) and an abiding one.” Hyparchonta refers to property, to what in earthly life constitutes the means of support, indeed the basis, the “substance” for life, what we depend upon. This “substance”, life’s normal source of security, has been taken away from Christians in the course of persecution. They have stood firm, though, because they considered this material substance to be of little account. They could abandon it because they had found a better “basis” for their existence—a basis that abides, that no one can take away. We must not overlook the link between these two types of “substance”, between means of support or material basis and the word of faith as the “basis”, the “substance” that endures. Faith gives life a new basis, a new foundation on which we can stand, one which relativizes the habitual
foundation, the reliability of material income. A new freedom is created with regard to this habitual foundation of life, which only appears to be capable of providing support, although this is obviously not to deny its normal meaning. This new freedom, the awareness of the new “substance” which we have been given, is revealed not only in martyrdom, in which people resist the overbearing power of ideology and its political organs and, by their death, renew the world. Above all, it is seen in the great acts of renunciation, from the monks of ancient times to Saint Francis of Assisi and those of our contemporaries who enter modern religious Institutes and movements and leave everything for love of Christ, so as to bring to men and women the faith and love of Christ, and to help those who are suffering in body and spirit. In their case, the new “substance” has proved to be a genuine “substance”; from the hope of these people who have been touched by Christ, hope has arisen for others who were living in darkness and without hope. In their case, it has been demonstrated that this new life truly possesses and is “substance” that calls forth life for others. For us who contemplate these figures, their way of acting and living is de facto a “proof” that the things to come, the promise of Christ, are not only a reality that we await, but a real presence: he is truly the “philosopher” and the “shepherd” who shows us what life is and where it is to be found.

9. In order to understand more deeply this reflection on the two types of substance—hypostasis and hyparchonta—and on the two approaches to life expressed by these terms, we must continue with a brief consideration of two words pertinent to the discussion which can be found in the tenth chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. I refer to the words hypomone (10:36) and hypostole (10:39). Hypomone is normally translated as “patience”—perseverance, constancy. Knowing how to wait, while patiently enduring trials, is necessary for the believer to be able to “receive what is promised” (10:36). In the religious context of ancient Judaism, this word was used expressly for the expectation of God which was characteristic of Israel, for their persevering faithfulness to God on the basis of the certainty of the Covenant in a world which contradicts God. Thus the word indicates a lived hope, a life based on the certainty of hope. In the New Testament this expectation of God, this standing with God, takes on a new significance: in Christ, God has revealed himself. He has already communicated to us the “substance” of things to come, and thus the
expectation of God acquires a new certainty.

It is the expectation of things to come from the perspective of a present that is already given. It is a looking-forward in Christ’s presence, with Christ who is present, to the perfecting of his Body, to his definitive coming. The word *hypostole*, on the other hand, means shrinking back through lack of courage to speak openly and frankly a truth that may be dangerous. Hiding through a spirit of fear leads to “destruction” (*Heb* 10:39). “God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control”—that, by contrast, is the beautiful way in which the *Second Letter to Timothy* (1:7) describes the fundamental attitude of the Christian.

**Eternal life — what is it?**

10. We have spoken thus far of faith and hope in the New Testament and in early Christianity; yet it has always been clear that we are referring not only to the past: the entire reflection concerns living and dying in general, and therefore it also concerns us here and now. So now we must ask explicitly: is the Christian faith also for us today a life-changing and life-sustaining hope?

Is it “performative” for us—is it a message which shapes our life in a new way, or is it just “information” which, in the meantime, we have set aside and which now seems to us to have been superseded by more recent information? In the search for an answer, I would like to begin with the classical form of the dialogue with which the rite of Baptism expressed the reception of an infant into the community of believers and the infant’s rebirth in Christ. First of all the priest asked what name the parents had chosen for the child, and then he continued with the question: “What do you ask of the Church?” Answer: “Faith”. “And what does faith give you?” “Eternal life”. According to this dialogue, the parents were seeking access to the faith for their child, communion with believers, because they saw in faith the key to “eternal life”. Today as in the past, this is what being baptized, becoming Christians, is all about: it is not just an act of socialization within the community, not simply a welcome into the Church. The parents expect more for the one to be baptized: they expect that faith, which includes the corporeal nature of the Church and her
sacraments, will give life to their child—eternal life. Faith is the substance of hope. But then the question arises: do we really want this—to live eternally? Perhaps many people reject the faith today simply because they do not find the prospect of eternal life attractive. What they desire is not eternal life at all, but this present life, for which faith in eternal life seems something of an impediment. To continue living for ever—endlessly—appears more like a curse than a gift. Death, admittedly, one would wish to postpone for as long as possible. But to live always, without end—this, all things considered, can only be monotonous and ultimately unbearable. This is precisely the point made, for example, by Saint Ambrose, one of the Church Fathers, in the funeral discourse for his deceased brother Satyrus: “Death was not part of nature; it became part of nature. God did not decree death from the beginning; he prescribed it as a remedy. Human life, because of sin... began to experience the burden of wretchedness in unremitting labor and unbearable sorrow. There had to be a limit to its evils; death had to restore what life had forfeited. Without the assistance of grace, immortality is more of a burden than a blessing”[6]. A little earlier, Ambrose had said: “Death is, then, no cause for mourning, for it is the cause of mankind’s salvation”[7].

11. Whatever precisely Saint Ambrose may have meant by these words, it is true that to eliminate death or to postpone it more or less indefinitely would place the earth and humanity in an impossible situation, and even for the individual would bring no benefit. Obviously there is a contradiction in our attitude, which points to an inner contradiction in our very existence. On the one hand, we do not want to die; above all, those who love us do not want us to die. Yet on the other hand, neither do we want to continue living indefinitely, nor was the earth created with that in view. So what do we really want? Our paradoxical attitude gives rise to a deeper question: what in fact is “life”? And what does “eternity” really mean? There are moments when it suddenly seems clear to us: yes, this is what true “life” is—this is what it should be like. Besides, what we call “life” in our everyday language is not real “life” at all. Saint Augustine, in the extended letter on prayer which he addressed to Proba, a wealthy Roman widow and mother of three consuls, once wrote this: ultimately we want only one thing—”the blessed life”, the life which is simply life, simply “happiness”. In the final analysis, there is nothing else that we ask for in
prayer. Our journey has no other goal—it is about this alone. But then Augustine also says: looking more closely, we have no idea what we ultimately desire, what we would really like. We do not know this reality at all; even in those moments when we think we can reach out and touch it, it eludes us. “We do not know what we should pray for as we ought,” he says, quoting Saint Paul (Rom 8:26). All we know is that it is not this. Yet in not knowing, we know that this reality must exist. “There is therefore in us a certain learned ignorance (docta ignorantia), so to speak”, he writes. We do not know what we would really like; we do not know this “true life”; and yet we know that there must be something we do not know towards which we feel driven[8].

12. I think that in this very precise and permanently valid way, Augustine is describing man's essential situation, the situation that gives rise to all his contradictions and hopes. In some way we want life itself, true life, untouched even by death; yet at the same time we do not know the thing towards which we feel driven. We cannot stop reaching out for it, and yet we know that all we can experience or accomplish is not what we yearn for. This unknown “thing” is the true “hope” which drives us, and at the same time the fact that it is unknown is the cause of all forms of despair and also of all efforts, whether positive or destructive, directed towards worldly authenticity and human authenticity. The term “eternal life” is intended to give a name to this known “unknown”. Inevitably it is an inadequate term that creates confusion. “Eternal”, in fact, suggests to us the idea of something interminable, and this frightens us; “life” makes us think of the life that we know and love and do not want to lose, even though very often it brings more toil than satisfaction, so that while on the one hand we desire it, on the other hand we do not want it. To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality—this we can only attempt. It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy.
This is how Jesus expresses it in Saint John's Gospel: “I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (16:22). We must think along these lines if we want to understand the object of Christian hope, to understand what it is that our faith, our being with Christ, leads us to expect.

Is Christian hope individualistic?

13. In the course of their history, Christians have tried to express this “knowing without knowing” by means of figures that can be represented, and they have developed images of “Heaven” which remain far removed from what, after all, can only be known negatively, via unknowing. All these attempts at the representation of hope have given to many people, down the centuries, the incentive to live by faith and hence also to abandon their hyparchonta, the material substance for their lives. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews, in the eleventh chapter, outlined a kind of history of those who live in hope and of their journeying, a history which stretches from the time of Abel into the author's own day. This type of hope has been subjected to an increasingly harsh critique in modern times: it is dismissed as pure individualism, a way of abandoning the world to its misery and taking refuge in a private form of eternal salvation. Henri de Lubac, in the introduction to his seminal book Catholicisme. Aspects sociaux du dogme, assembled some characteristic articulations of this viewpoint, one of which is worth quoting: “Should I have found joy? No... only my joy, and that is something wildly different... The joy of Jesus can be personal. It can belong to a single man and he is saved. He is at peace... now and always, but he is alone. The isolation of this joy does not trouble him. On the contrary: he is the chosen one! In his blessedness he passes through the battlefields with a rose in his hand”[10].

14. Against this, drawing upon the vast range of patristic theology, de Lubac was able to demonstrate that salvation has always been considered a “social” reality. Indeed, the Letter to the Hebrews speaks of a “city” (cf. 11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14) and therefore of communal salvation. Consistently with this view, sin is understood by the Fathers as the destruction of the unity of the human race, as fragmentation and division. Babel, the place where languages were confused, the place of separation, is seen to be an expression of what sin fundamentally is. Hence “redemption” appears as the
reestablishment of unity, in which we come together once more in a union that begins to take shape in the world community of believers. We need not concern ourselves here with all the texts in which the social character of hope appears. Let us concentrate on the Letter to Proba in which Augustine tries to illustrate to some degree this “known unknown” that we seek. His point of departure is simply the expression “blessed life”. Then he quotes Psalm 144 [143]:15: “Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord.” And he continues: “In order to be numbered among this people and attain to... everlasting life with God, ‘the end of the commandment is charity that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith' (1 Tim 1:5)”[11]. This real life, towards which we try to reach out again and again, is linked to a lived union with a “people”, and for each individual it can only be attained within this “we”. It presupposes that we escape from the prison of our “I”, because only in the openness of this universal subject does our gaze open out to the source of joy, to love itself—to God.

15. While this community-oriented vision of the “blessed life” is certainly directed beyond the present world, as such it also has to do with the building up of this world—in very different ways, according to the historical context and the possibilities offered or excluded thereby. At the time of Augustine, the incursions of new peoples were threatening the cohesion of the world, where hitherto there had been a certain guarantee of law and of living in a juridically ordered society; at that time, then, it was a matter of strengthening the basic foundations of this peaceful societal existence, in order to survive in a changed world. Let us now consider a more or less randomly chosen episode from the Middle Ages, that serves in many respects to illustrate what we have been saying. It was commonly thought that monasteries were places of flight from the world (contemptus mundi) and of withdrawal from responsibility for the world, in search of private salvation. Bernard of Clairvaux, who inspired a multitude of young people to enter the monasteries of his reformed Order, had quite a different perspective on this. In his view, monks perform a task for the whole Church and hence also for the world. He uses many images to illustrate the responsibility that monks have towards the entire body of the Church, and indeed towards humanity; he applies to them the words of pseudo-Rufinus: “The human race lives thanks to a few; were it not for them, the world would perish...”[12]. Contemplatives—contemplantes—must become
agricultural laborers—laborantes—he says. The nobility of work, which Christianity inherited from Judaism, had already been expressed in the monastic rules of Augustine and Benedict. Bernard takes up this idea again. The young noblemen who flocked to his monasteries had to engage in manual labor. In fact Bernard explicitly states that not even the monastery can restore Paradise, but he maintains that, as a place of practical and spiritual “tilling the soil”, it must prepare the new Paradise. A wild plot of forest land is rendered fertile—and in the process, the trees of pride are felled, whatever weeds may be growing inside souls are pulled up, and the ground is thereby prepared so that bread for body and soul can flourish[13]. Are we not perhaps seeing once again, in the light of current history, that no positive world order can prosper where souls are overgrown?

The transformation of Christian faith–hope in the modern age

16. How could the idea have developed that Jesus’ message is narrowly individualistic and aimed only at each person singly? How did we arrive at this interpretation of the “salvation of the soul” as a flight from responsibility for the whole, and how did we come to conceive the Christian project as a selfish search for salvation which rejects the idea of serving others? In order to find an answer to this we must take a look at the foundations of the modern age. These appear with particular clarity in the thought of Francis Bacon. That a new era emerged—through the discovery of America and the new technical achievements that had made this development possible—is undeniable. But what is the basis of this new era? It is the new correlation of experiment and method that enables man to arrive at an interpretation of nature in conformity with its laws and thus finally to achieve “the triumph of art over nature” (victoria cursus artis super naturam)[14]. The novelty—according to Bacon’s vision—lies in a new correlation between science and praxis. This is also given a theological application: the new correlation between science and praxis would mean that the dominion over creation—given to man by God and lost through original sin—would be reestablished[15].

17. Anyone who reads and reflects on these statements attentively will recognize that a disturbing step has been taken: up to that time, the recovery of what man had lost through the expulsion from Paradise was
expected from faith in Jesus Christ: herein lay “redemption”. Now, this “redemption”, the restoration of the lost “Paradise” is no longer expected from faith, but from the newly discovered link between science and praxis. It is not that faith is simply denied; rather it is displaced onto another level—that of purely private and other-worldly affairs—and at the same time it becomes somehow irrelevant for the world. This programmatic vision has determined the trajectory of modern times and it also shapes the present-day crisis of faith which is essentially a crisis of Christian hope. Thus hope too, in Bacon, acquires a new form. Now it is called: faith in progress. For Bacon, it is clear that the recent spate of discoveries and inventions is just the beginning; through the interplay of science and praxis, totally new discoveries will follow, a totally new world will emerge, the kingdom of man. He even put forward a vision of foreseeable inventions—including the airplane and the submarine. As the ideology of progress developed further, joy at visible advances in human potential remained a continuing confirmation of faith in progress as such.

18. At the same time, two categories become increasingly central to the idea of progress: reason and freedom. Progress is primarily associated with the growing dominion of reason, and this reason is obviously considered to be a force of good and a force for good. Progress is the overcoming of all forms of dependency—it is progress towards perfect freedom. Likewise freedom is seen purely as a promise, in which man becomes more and more fully himself. In both concepts—freedom and reason—there is a political aspect. The kingdom of reason, in fact, is expected as the new condition of the human race once it has attained total freedom. The political conditions of such a kingdom of reason and freedom, however, appear at first sight somewhat ill defined. Reason and freedom seem to guarantee by themselves, by virtue of their intrinsic goodness, a new and perfect human community. The two key concepts of “reason” and “freedom”, however, were tacitly interpreted as being in conflict with the shackles of faith and of the Church as well as those of the political structures of the period. Both concepts therefore contain a revolutionary potential of enormous explosive force.

19. We must look briefly at the two essential stages in the political realization of this hope, because they are of great importance for the
development of Christian hope, for a proper understanding of it and of the reasons for its persistence. First there is the French Revolution—an attempt to establish the rule of reason and freedom as a political reality. To begin with, the Europe of the Enlightenment looked on with fascination at these events, but then, as they developed, had cause to reflect anew on reason and freedom. A good illustration of these two phases in the reception of events in France is found in two essays by Immanuel Kant in which he reflects on what had taken place. In 1792 he wrote Der Sieg des guten Prinzipus über das böse und die Gründung eines Reiches Gottes auf Erden (“The Victory of the Good over the Evil Principle and the Founding of a Kingdom of God on Earth”). In this text he says the following: “The gradual transition of ecclesiastical faith to the exclusive sovereignty of pure religious faith is the coming of the Kingdom of God”[17]. He also tells us that revolutions can accelerate this transition from ecclesiastical faith to rational faith. The “Kingdom of God” proclaimed by Jesus receives a new definition here and takes on a new mode of presence; a new “imminent expectation”, so to speak, comes into existence: the “Kingdom of God” arrives where “ecclesiastical faith” is vanquished and superseded by “religious faith”, that is to say, by simple rational faith. In 1794, in the text Das Ende aller Dinge (“The End of All Things”) a changed image appears. Now Kant considers the possibility that as well as the natural end of all things there may be another that is unnatural, a perverse end. He writes in this connection: “If Christianity should one day cease to be worthy of love... then the prevailing mode in human thought would be rejection and opposition to it; and the Antichrist... would begin his—albeit short—regime (presumably based on fear and self-interest); but then, because Christianity, though destined to be the world religion, would not in fact be favored by destiny to become so, then, in a moral respect, this could lead to the (perverted) end of all things”[18].

20. The nineteenth century held fast to its faith in progress as the new form of human hope, and it continued to consider reason and freedom as the guiding stars to be followed along the path of hope. Nevertheless, the increasingly rapid advance of technical development and the industrialization connected with it soon gave rise to an entirely new social situation: there emerged a class of industrial workers and the so-called “industrial proletariat”, whose dreadful living conditions Friedrich Engels
described alarmingly in 1845. For his readers, the conclusion is clear: this cannot continue; a change is necessary. Yet the change would shake up and overturn the entire structure of bourgeois society. After the bourgeois revolution of 1789, the time had come for a new, proletarian revolution: progress could not simply continue in small, linear steps. A revolutionary leap was needed. Karl Marx took up the rallying call, and applied his incisive language and intellect to the task of launching this major new and, as he thought, definitive step in history towards salvation—towards what Kant had described as the “Kingdom of God”. Once the truth of the hereafter had been rejected, it would then be a question of establishing the truth of the here and now. The critique of Heaven is transformed into the critique of earth, the critique of theology into the critique of politics. Progress towards the better, towards the definitively good world, no longer comes simply from science but from politics—from a scientifically conceived politics that recognizes the structure of history and society and thus points out the road towards revolution, towards all-encompassing change. With great precision, albeit with a certain one-sided bias, Marx described the situation of his time, and with great analytical skill he spelled out the paths leading to revolution—and not only theoretically: by means of the Communist Party that came into being from the Communist Manifesto of 1848, he set it in motion. His promise, owing to the acuteness of his analysis and his clear indication of the means for radical change, was and still remains an endless source of fascination. Real revolution followed, in the most radical way in Russia.

21. Together with the victory of the revolution, though, Marx's fundamental error also became evident. He showed precisely how to overthrow the existing order, but he did not say how matters should proceed thereafter. He simply presumed that with the expropriation of the ruling class, with the fall of political power and the socialization of means of production, the new Jerusalem would be realized. Then, indeed, all contradictions would be resolved, man and the world would finally sort themselves out. Then everything would be able to proceed by itself along the right path, because everything would belong to everyone and all would desire the best for one another. Thus, having accomplished the revolution, Lenin must have realized that the writings of the master gave no indication
as to how to proceed. True, Marx had spoken of the interim phase of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a necessity which in time would automatically become redundant. This “intermediate phase” we know all too well, and we also know how it then developed, not ushering in a perfect world, but leaving behind a trail of appalling destruction. Marx not only omitted to work out how this new world would be organized—which should, of course, have been unnecessary. His silence on this matter follows logically from his chosen approach. His error lay deeper. He forgot that man always remains man. He forgot man and he forgot man's freedom. He forgot that freedom always remains also freedom for evil. He thought that once the economy had been put right, everything would automatically be put right. His real error is materialism: man, in fact, is not merely the product of economic conditions, and it is not possible to redeem him purely from the outside by creating a favorable economic environment.

22. Again, we find ourselves facing the question: what may we hope? A self-critique of modernity is needed in dialogue with Christianity and its concept of hope. In this dialogue Christians too, in the context of their knowledge and experience, must learn anew in what their hope truly consists, what they have to offer to the world and what they cannot offer. Flowing into this self-critique of the modern age there also has to be a self-critique of modern Christianity, which must constantly renew its self-understanding setting out from its roots. On this subject, all we can attempt here are a few brief observations. First we must ask ourselves: what does “progress” really mean; what does it promise and what does it not promise? In the nineteenth century, faith in progress was already subject to critique. In the twentieth century, Theodor W. Adorno formulated the problem of faith in progress quite drastically: he said that progress, seen accurately, is progress from the sling to the atom bomb. Now this is certainly an aspect of progress that must not be concealed. To put it another way: the ambiguity of progress becomes evident. Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph 3:16; 2 Cor 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man
and for the world.

23. As far as the two great themes of “reason” and “freedom” are concerned, here we can only touch upon the issues connected with them. Yes indeed, reason is God’s great gift to man, and the victory of reason over unreason is also a goal of the Christian life. But when does reason truly triumph? When it is detached from God? When it has become blind to God? Is the reason behind action and capacity for action the whole of reason? If progress, in order to be progress, needs moral growth on the part of humanity, then the reason behind action and capacity for action is likewise urgently in need of integration through reason’s openness to the saving forces of faith, to the differentiation between good and evil. Only thus does reason become truly human. It becomes human only if it is capable of directing the will along the right path, and it is capable of this only if it looks beyond itself. Otherwise, man's situation, in view of the imbalance between his material capacity and the lack of judgment in his heart, becomes a threat for him and for creation. Thus where freedom is concerned, we must remember that human freedom always requires a convergence of various freedoms. Yet this convergence cannot succeed unless it is determined by a common intrinsic criterion of measurement, which is the foundation and goal of our freedom. Let us put it very simply: man needs God, otherwise he remains without hope. Given the developments of the modern age, the quotation from Saint Paul with which I began (Eph 2:12) proves to be thoroughly realistic and plainly true. There is no doubt, therefore, that a “Kingdom of God” accomplished without God—a kingdom therefore of man alone—inevitably ends up as the “perverse end” of all things as described by Kant: we have seen it, and we see it over and over again. Yet neither is there any doubt that God truly enters into human affairs only when, rather than being present merely in our thinking, he himself comes towards us and speaks to us. Reason therefore needs faith if it is to be completely itself: reason and faith need one another in order to fulfill their true nature and their mission.

The true shape of Christian hope

24. Let us ask once again: what may we hope? And what may we not hope? First of all, we must acknowledge that incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere. Here, amid our growing knowledge of
the structure of matter and in the light of ever more advanced inventions, we clearly see continuous progress towards an ever greater mastery of nature. Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew. These decisions can never simply be made for us in advance by others—if that were the case, we would no longer be free. Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning. Naturally, new generations can build on the knowledge and experience of those who went before, and they can draw upon the moral treasury of the whole of humanity. But they can also reject it, because it can never be self-evident in the same way as material inventions. The moral treasury of humanity is not readily at hand like tools that we use; it is present as an appeal to freedom and a possibility for it. This, however, means that:

a) The right state of human affairs, the moral well-being of the world can never be guaranteed simply through structures alone, however good they are. Such structures are not only important, but necessary; yet they cannot and must not marginalize human freedom. Even the best structures function only when the community is animated by convictions capable of motivating people to assent freely to the social order. Freedom requires conviction; conviction does not exist on its own, but must always be gained anew by the community.

b) Since man always remains free and since his freedom is always fragile, the kingdom of good will never be definitively established in this world. Anyone who promises the better world that is guaranteed to last for ever is making a false promise; he is overlooking human freedom. Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good. Free assent to the good never exists simply by itself. If there were structures which could irrevocably guarantee a determined—good—state of the world, man's freedom would be denied, and hence they would not be good structures at all.

25. What this means is that every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs; this task is never simply completed. Yet every generation must also make its
own contribution to establishing convincing structures of freedom and of
good, which can help the following generation as a guideline for the proper
use of human freedom; hence, always within human limits, they provide a
certain guarantee also for the future. In other words: good structures help,
but of themselves they are not enough. Man can never be redeemed simply
from outside. Francis Bacon and those who followed in the intellectual
current of modernity that he inspired were wrong to believe that man
would be redeemed through science. Such an expectation asks too much of
science; this kind of hope is deceptive. Science can contribute greatly to
making the world and mankind more human. Yet it can also destroy
mankind and the world unless it is steered by forces that lie outside it. On
the other hand, we must also acknowledge that modern Christianity, faced
with the successes of science in progressively structuring the world, has to a
large extent restricted its attention to the individual and his salvation. In so
doing it has limited the horizon of its hope and has failed to recognize
sufficiently the greatness of its task—even if it has continued to achieve
great things in the formation of man and in care for the weak and the
suffering.

26. It is not science that redeems man: man is redeemed by love. This
applies even in terms of this present world. When someone has the
experience of a great love in his life, this is a moment of “redemption”
which gives a new meaning to his life. But soon he will also realize that the
love bestowed upon him cannot by itself resolve the question of his life. It
is a love that remains fragile. It can be destroyed by death. The human
being needs unconditional love. He needs the certainty which makes him
say: “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things
present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor
anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of
God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38- 39). If this absolute love exists,
with its absolute certainty, then—only then—is man “redeemed”, whatever
should happen to him in his particular circumstances. This is what it means
to say: Jesus Christ has “redeemed” us. Through him we have become
certain of God, a God who is not a remote “first cause” of the world,
because his only-begotten Son has become man and of him everyone can
say: “I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for
me” (Gal 2:20).
27. In this sense it is true that anyone who does not know God, even though he may entertain all kinds of hopes, is ultimately without hope, without the great hope that sustains the whole of life (cf. Eph 2:12). Man's great, true hope which holds firm in spite of all disappointments can only be God—God who has loved us and who continues to love us “to the end,” until all “is accomplished” (cf. Jn 13:1 and 19:30). Whoever is moved by love begins to perceive what “life” really is. He begins to perceive the meaning of the word of hope that we encountered in the Baptismal Rite: from faith I await “eternal life”—the true life which, whole and unthreatened, in all its fullness, is simply life. Jesus, who said that he had come so that we might have life and have it in its fullness, in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10), has also explained to us what “life” means: “this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). Life in its true sense is not something we have exclusively in or from ourselves: it is a relationship. And life in its totality is a relationship with him who is the source of life. If we are in relation with him who does not die, who is Life itself and Love itself, then we are in life. Then we “live”.

28. Yet now the question arises: are we not in this way falling back once again into an individualistic understanding of salvation, into hope for myself alone, which is not true hope since it forgets and overlooks others? Indeed we are not! Our relationship with God is established through communion with Jesus—we cannot achieve it alone or from our own resources alone. The relationship with Jesus, however, is a relationship with the one who gave himself as a ransom for all (cf. 1 Tim 2:6). Being in communion with Jesus Christ draws us into his “being for all”; it makes it our own way of being. He commits us to live for others, but only through communion with him does it become possible truly to be there for others, for the whole. In this regard I would like to quote the great Greek Doctor of the Church, Maximus the Confessor († 662), who begins by exhorting us to prefer nothing to the knowledge and love of God, but then quickly moves on to practicalities: “The one who loves God cannot hold on to money but rather gives it out in God's fashion... in the same manner in accordance with the measure of justice”[19]. Love of God leads to participation in the justice and generosity of God towards others. Loving
God requires an interior freedom from all possessions and all material goods: the love of God is revealed in responsibility for others. This same connection between love of God and responsibility for others can be seen in a striking way in the life of Saint Augustine. After his conversion to the Christian faith, he decided, together with some like-minded friends, to lead a life totally dedicated to the word of God and to things eternal. His intention was to practice a Christian version of the ideal of the contemplative life expressed in the great tradition of Greek philosophy, choosing in this way the “better part” (cf. Lk 10:42). Things turned out differently, however. While attending the Sunday liturgy at the port city of Hippo, he was called out from the assembly by the Bishop and constrained to receive ordination for the exercise of the priestly ministry in that city. Looking back on that moment, he writes in his Confessions: “Terrified by my sins and the weight of my misery, I had resolved in my heart, and meditated flight into the wilderness; but you forbade me and gave me strength, by saying: ‘Christ died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died’ (cf. 2 Cor 5:15)”.

29. For Augustine this meant a totally new life. He once described his daily life in the following terms: “The turbulent have to be corrected, the faint-hearted cheered up, the weak supported; the Gospel’s opponents need to be refuted, its insidious enemies guarded against; the unlearned need to be taught, the indolent stirred up, the argumentative checked; the proud must be put in their place, the desperate set on their feet, those engaged in quarrels reconciled; the needy have to be helped, the oppressed to be liberated, the good to be encouraged, the bad to be tolerated; all must be loved.” —producing that healthy fear which prevents us from living for ourselves alone and compels us to pass on the hope we hold in common. Amid the serious difficulties facing the Roman Empire—and also posing a serious threat to Roman Africa, which was actually destroyed at the end of Augustine's life—this was what he set out to do: to transmit hope, the hope which came to him from faith and which, in complete contrast with his introverted temperament, enabled him to take part decisively and with all his strength in the task of building up the city. In the same chapter of the Confessions in which we have just noted
the decisive reason for his commitment “for all”, he says that Christ “intercedes for us, otherwise I should despair. My weaknesses are many and grave, many and grave indeed, but more abundant still is your medicine. We might have thought that your word was far distant from union with man, and so we might have despaired of ourselves, if this Word had not become flesh and dwelt among us”[24]. On the strength of his hope, Augustine dedicated himself completely to the ordinary people and to his city—renouncing his spiritual nobility, he preached and acted in a simple way for simple people.

30. Let us summarize what has emerged so far in the course of our reflections. Day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life. Sometimes one of these hopes may appear to be totally satisfying without any need for other hopes. Young people can have the hope of a great and fully satisfying love; the hope of a certain position in their profession, or of some success that will prove decisive for the rest of their lives. When these hopes are fulfilled, however, it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain. In this regard our contemporary age has developed the hope of creating a perfect world that, thanks to scientific knowledge and to scientifically based politics, seemed to be achievable. Thus Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been displaced by hope in the kingdom of man, the hope of a better world which would be the real “Kingdom of God”. This seemed at last to be the great and realistic hope that man needs. It was capable of galvanizing—for a time—all man's energies. The great objective seemed worthy of full commitment. In the course of time, however, it has become clear that this hope is constantly receding. Above all it has become apparent that this may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me.

And however much “for all” may be part of the great hope—since I cannot be happy without others or in opposition to them—it remains true that a hope that does not concern me personally is not a real hope. It has also become clear that this hope is opposed to freedom, since human affairs depend in each generation on the free decisions of those concerned. If this
freedom were to be taken away, as a result of certain conditions or structures, then ultimately this world would not be good, since a world without freedom can by no means be a good world. Hence, while we must always be committed to the improvement of the world, tomorrow's better world cannot be the proper and sufficient content of our hope. And in this regard the question always arises: when is the world “better”? What makes it good? By what standard are we to judge its goodness? What are the paths that lead to this “goodness”? 

31. Let us say once again: we need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain. The fact that it comes to us as a gift is actually part of hope. God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await: a life that is “truly” life. Let us now, in the final section, develop this idea in more detail as we focus our attention on some of the “settings” in which we can learn in practice about hope and its exercise.

“Settings” for learning and practicing hope

I. Prayer as a school of hope

32. A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me any more, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, he can help me[25]. When I have been plunged into complete solitude...; if I pray I am never totally alone. The late Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, a prisoner for thirteen years, nine of them
spent in solitary confinement, has left us a precious little book: *Prayers of Hope*. During thirteen years in jail, in a situation of seemingly utter hopelessness, the fact that he could listen and speak to God became for him an increasing power of hope, which enabled him, after his release, to become for people all over the world a witness to hope—to that great hope which does not wane even in the nights of solitude.

33. Saint Augustine, in a homily on the *First Letter of John*, describes very beautifully the intimate relationship between prayer and hope. He defines prayer as an exercise of desire. Man was created for greatness—for God himself; he was created to be filled by God. But his heart is too small for the greatness to which it is destined. It must be stretched. “By delaying [his gift], God strengthens our desire; through desire he enlarges our soul and by expanding it he increases its capacity [for receiving him]”. Augustine refers to Saint Paul, who speaks of himself as straining forward to the things that are to come (cf. *Phil 3:13*). He then uses a very beautiful image to describe this process of enlargement and preparation of the human heart. “Suppose that God wishes to fill you with honey [a symbol of God’s tenderness and goodness]; but if you are full of vinegar, where will you put the honey?” The vessel, that is your heart, must first be enlarged and then cleansed, freed from the vinegar and its taste. This requires hard work and is painful, but in this way alone do we become suited to that for which we are destined[26]. Even if Augustine speaks directly only of our capacity for God, it is nevertheless clear that through this effort by which we are freed from vinegar and the taste of vinegar, not only are we made free for God, but we also become open to others. It is only by becoming children of God, that we can be with our common Father. To pray is not to step outside history and withdraw to our own private corner of happiness. When we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God—what is worthy of God. We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment—that meager, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes. We must free ourselves from the hidden lies with which we deceive ourselves. God sees through them, and when we come before God, we too are forced to recognize them.
“But who can discern his errors? Clear me from hidden faults” prays the Psalmist (Ps 19:12 [18:13]). Failure to recognize my guilt, the illusion of my innocence, does not justify me and does not save me, because I am culpable for the numbness of my conscience and my incapacity to recognize the evil in me for what it is. If God does not exist, perhaps I have to seek refuge in these lies, because there is no one who can forgive me; no one who is the true criterion. Yet my encounter with God awakens my conscience in such a way that it no longer aims at self-justification, and is no longer a mere reflection of me and those of my contemporaries who shape my thinking, but it becomes a capacity for listening to the Good itself.

34. For prayer to develop this power of purification, it must on the one hand be something very personal, an encounter between my intimate self and God, the living God. On the other hand it must be constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by liturgical prayer, in which the Lord teaches us again and again how to pray properly. Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan, in his book of spiritual exercises, tells us that during his life there were long periods when he was unable to pray and that he would hold fast to the texts of the Church’s prayer: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the prayers of the liturgy. Praying must always involve this intermingling of public and personal prayer. This is how we can speak to God and how God speaks to us. In this way we undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings. We become capable of the great hope, and thus we become ministers of hope for others. Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well. It is an active hope, in which we struggle to prevent things moving towards the “perverse end”. It is an active hope also in the sense that we keep the world open to God. Only in this way does it continue to be a truly human hope.

II. Action and suffering as settings for learning hope

35. All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. This is so first of all in the sense that we thereby strive to realize our lesser and greater hopes, to complete this or that task which is important for our onward journey, or we work towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future. Yet our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives
and in working for the world's future either tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance. If we cannot hope for more than is effectively attainable at any given time, or more than is promised by political or economic authorities, our lives will soon be without hope. It is important to know that I can always continue to hope, even if in my own life, or the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for. Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love, and that this gives them their meaning and importance, only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere. Certainly we cannot “build” the Kingdom of God by our own efforts—what we build will always be the kingdom of man with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope. And we cannot—to use the classical expression—”merit” Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just as being loved is never something “merited”, but always a gift. However, even when we are fully aware that Heaven far exceeds what we can merit, it will always be true that our behavior is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good. This is what the saints did, those who, as “God’s fellow workers”, contributed to the world's salvation (cf. 1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thess 3:2). We can free our life and the world from the poisons and contaminations that could destroy the present and the future. We can uncover the sources of creation and keep them unsullied, and in this way we can make a right use of creation, which comes to us as a gift, according to its intrinsic requirements and ultimate purpose. This makes sense even if outwardly we achieve nothing or seem powerless in the face of overwhelming hostile forces. So on the one hand, our actions engender hope for us and for others; but at the same time, it is the great hope based upon God's promises that gives us courage and directs our action in good times and bad.
36. Like action, suffering is a part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today. Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering. These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life. Great progress has been made in the battle against physical pain; yet the sufferings of the innocent and mental suffering have, if anything, increased in recent decades. Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. This is simply because we are unable to shake off our finitude and because none of us is capable of eliminating the power of evil, of sin which, as we plainly see, is a constant source of suffering. Only God is able to do this: only a God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history. We know that this God exists, and hence that this power to “take away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29) is present in the world. Through faith in the existence of this power, hope for the world’s healing has emerged in history. It is, however, hope—not yet fulfillment; hope that gives us the courage to place ourselves on the side of good even in seemingly hopeless situations, aware that, as far as the external course of history is concerned, the power of sin will continue to be a terrible presence.

37. Let us return to our topic. We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering by withdrawing from anything that might involve hurt, when we try to spare ourselves the effort and pain of pursuing truth, love, and goodness, that we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater. It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love. In this context, I would like to quote a passage from a letter written by the Vietnamese martyr Paul Le-Bao-Tinh († 1857) which illustrates this transformation of suffering through the power of
hope springing from faith. “I, Paul, in chains for the name of Christ, wish to relate to you the trials besetting me daily, in order that you may be inflamed with love for God and join with me in his praises, for his mercy is for ever (Ps 136 [135]). The prison here is a true image of everlasting Hell: to cruel tortures of every kind—shackles, iron chains, manacles—are added hatred, vengeance, calumnies, obscene speech, quarrels, evil acts, swearing, curses, as well as anguish and grief. But the God who once freed the three children from the fiery furnace is with me always; he has delivered me from these tribulations and made them sweet, for his mercy is for ever. In the midst of these torments, which usually terrify others, I am, by the grace of God, full of joy and gladness, because I am not alone—Christ is with me... How am I to bear with the spectacle, as each day I see emperors, mandarins, and their retinue blaspheming your holy name, O Lord, who are enthroned above the Cherubim and Seraphim? (cf. Ps 80:1 [79:2]). Behold, the pagans have trodden your Cross underfoot! Where is your glory? As I see all this, I would, in the ardent love I have for you, prefer to be torn limb from limb and to die as a witness to your love. O Lord, show your power, save me, sustain me, that in my infirmity your power may be shown and may be glorified before the nations... Beloved brothers, as you hear all these things may you give endless thanks in joy to God, from whom every good proceeds; bless the Lord with me, for his mercy is for ever... I write these things to you in order that your faith and mine may be united. In the midst of this storm I cast my anchor towards the throne of God, the anchor that is the lively hope in my heart”[28]. This is a letter from “Hell”. It lays bare all the horror of a concentration camp, where to the torments inflicted by tyrants upon their victims is added the outbreak of evil in the victims themselves, such that they in turn become further instruments of their persecutors' cruelty. This is indeed a letter from Hell, but it also reveals the truth of the Psalm text: “If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world, you are present there... If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light’ —for you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day; darkness and light are the same” (Ps 139 [138]:8-12; cf. also Ps 23 [22]:4). Christ descended into “Hell” and is therefore close to those cast into it, transforming their darkness into light. Suffering and torment is still terrible and well-nigh unbearable. Yet the star of hope has risen—the anchor of the heart reaches
the very throne of God. Instead of evil being unleashed within man, the light shines victorious: suffering—without ceasing to be suffering—becomes, despite everything, a hymn of praise.

38. The true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society. A society unable to accept its suffering members and incapable of helping to share their suffering and to bear it inwardly through “com-passion” is a cruel and inhuman society. Yet society cannot accept its suffering members and support them in their trials unless individuals are capable of doing so themselves; moreover, the individual cannot accept another’s suffering unless he personally is able to find meaning in suffering, a path of purification and growth in maturity, a journey of hope. Indeed, to accept the “other” who suffers, means that I take up his suffering in such a way that it becomes mine also. Because it has now become a shared suffering, though, in which another person is present, this suffering is penetrated by the light of love. The Latin word consolatio, “consolation”, expresses this beautifully. It suggests being with the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude. Furthermore, the capacity to accept suffering for the sake of goodness, truth and justice is an essential criterion of humanity, because if my own well-being and safety are ultimately more important than truth and justice, then the power of the stronger prevails, then violence and untruth reign supreme. Truth and justice must stand above my comfort and physical well-being, or else my life itself becomes a lie. In the end, even the “yes” to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my “I”, in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of myself, for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.

39. To suffer with the other and for others; to suffer for the sake of truth and justice; to suffer out of love and in order to become a person who truly loves—these are fundamental elements of humanity, and to abandon them would destroy man himself. Yet once again the question arises: are we capable of this? Is the other important enough to warrant my becoming, on his account, a person who suffers? Does truth matter to me enough to make suffering worthwhile? Is the promise of love so great that it justifies
the gift of myself? In the history of humanity, it was the Christian faith that had the particular merit of bringing forth within man a new and deeper capacity for these kinds of suffering that are decisive for his humanity. The Christian faith has shown us that truth, justice and love are not simply ideals, but enormously weighty realities. It has shown us that God—Truth and Love in person—desired to suffer for us and with us. Bernard of Clairvaux coined the marvelous expression: Impassibilis est Deus, sed non incompassibilis[29]—God cannot suffer, but he can suffer with. Man is worth so much to God that he himself became man in order to suffer with man in an utterly real way—in flesh and blood—as is revealed to us in the account of Jesus’ Passion. Hence in all human suffering we are joined by one who experiences and carries that suffering with us; hence con-solatio is present in all suffering, the consolation of God’s compassionate love—and so the star of hope rises. Certainly, in our many different sufferings and trials we always need the lesser and greater hopes too—a kind visit, the healing of internal and external wounds, a favorable resolution of a crisis, and so on. In our lesser trials these kinds of hope may even be sufficient. But in truly great trials, where I must make a definitive decision to place the truth before my own welfare, career and possessions, I need the certitude of that true, great hope of which we have spoken here. For this too we need witnesses—martyrs—who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way—day after day. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day—knowing that this is how we live life to the full. Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity. Yet this capacity to suffer depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon. The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope.

40. I would like to add here another brief comment with some relevance for everyday living. There used to be a form of devotion—perhaps less practiced today but quite widespread not long ago—that included the idea of “offering up” the minor daily hardships that continually strike at us like irritating “jabs”, thereby giving them a meaning. Of course, there were some exaggerations and perhaps unhealthy applications of this devotion, but we need to ask ourselves whether there
may not after all have been something essential and helpful contained within it. What does it mean to offer something up? Those who did so were convinced that they could insert these little annoyances into Christ's great “com-passion” so that they somehow became part of the treasury of compassion so greatly needed by the human race. In this way, even the small inconveniences of daily life could acquire meaning and contribute to the economy of good and of human love. Maybe we should consider whether it might be judicious to revive this practice ourselves.

III. Judgment as a setting for learning and practicing hope

41. At the conclusion of the central section of the Church's great Credo—the part that recounts the mystery of Christ, from his eternal birth of the Father and his temporal birth of the Virgin Mary, through his Cross and Resurrection to the second coming—we find the phrase: “he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead”. From the earliest times, the prospect of the Judgment has influenced Christians in their daily living as a criterion by which to order their present life, as a summons to their conscience, and at the same time as hope in God's justice. Faith in Christ has never looked merely backwards or merely upwards, but always also forwards to the hour of justice that the Lord repeatedly proclaimed. This looking ahead has given Christianity its importance for the present moment. In the arrangement of Christian sacred buildings, which were intended to make visible the historic and cosmic breadth of faith in Christ, it became customary to depict the Lord returning as a king—the symbol of hope—at the east end; while the west wall normally portrayed the Last Judgment as a symbol of our responsibility for our lives—a scene which followed and accompanied the faithful as they went out to resume their daily routine. As the iconography of the Last Judgment developed, however, more and more prominence was given to its ominous and frightening aspects, which obviously held more fascination for artists than the splendor of hope, often all too well concealed beneath the horrors.

42. In the modern era, the idea of the Last Judgment has faded into the background: Christian faith has been individualized and primarily oriented towards the salvation of the believer's own soul, while reflection on world history is largely dominated by the idea of progress. The fundamental content of awaiting a final Judgment, however, has not disappeared: it has
simply taken on a totally different form. The atheism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is—in its origins and aims—a type of moralism: a protest against the injustices of the world and of world history. A world marked by so much injustice, innocent suffering, and cynicism of power cannot be the work of a good God. A God with responsibility for such a world would not be a just God, much less a good God. It is for the sake of morality that this God has to be contested. Since there is no God to create justice, it seems man himself is now called to establish justice. If in the face of this world's suffering, protest against God is understandable, the claim that humanity can and must do what no God actually does or is able to do is both presumptuous and intrinsically false. It is no accident that this idea has led to the greatest forms of cruelty and violations of justice; rather, it is grounded in the intrinsic falsity of the claim. A world which has to create its own justice is a world without hope. No one and nothing can answer for centuries of suffering. No one and nothing can guarantee that the cynicism of power—whatever beguiling ideological mask it adopts—will cease to dominate the world. This is why the great thinkers of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, were equally critical of atheism and theism. Horkheimer radically excluded the possibility of ever finding a this-worldly substitute for God, while at the same time he rejected the image of a good and just God. In an extreme radicalization of the Old Testament prohibition of images, he speaks of a “longing for the totally Other” that remains inaccessible—a cry of yearning directed at world history. Adorno also firmly upheld this total rejection of images, which naturally meant the exclusion of any “image” of a loving God. On the other hand, he also constantly emphasized this “negative” dialectic and asserted that justice—true justice—would require a world “where not only present suffering would be wiped out, but also that which is irrevocably past would be undone”[30]. This, would mean, however—to express it with positive and hence, for him, inadequate symbols—that there can be no justice without a resurrection of the dead. Yet this would have to involve “the resurrection of the flesh, something that is totally foreign to idealism and the realm of Absolute spirit”[31].

43. Christians likewise can and must constantly learn from the strict rejection of images that is contained in God's first commandment (cf. Ex
The truth of negative theology was highlighted by the Fourth Lateran Council, which explicitly stated that however great the similarity that may be established between Creator and creature, the dissimilarity between them is always greater. In any case, for the believer the rejection of images cannot be carried so far that one ends up, as Horkheimer and Adorno would like, by saying “no” to both theses—theism and atheism. God has given himself an “image”: in Christ who was made man. In him who was crucified, the denial of false images of God is taken to an extreme. God now reveals his true face in the figure of the sufferer who shares man's God-forsaken condition by taking it upon himself. This innocent sufferer has attained the certitude of hope: there is a God, and God can create justice in a way that we cannot conceive, yet we can begin to grasp it through faith. Yes, there is a resurrection of the flesh. There is justice. There is an “undoing” of past suffering, a reparation that sets things aright. For this reason, faith in the Last Judgment is first and foremost hope—the need for which was made abundantly clear in the upheavals of recent centuries. I am convinced that the question of justice constitutes the essential argument, or in any case the strongest argument, in favor of faith in eternal life. The purely individual need for a fulfillment that is denied to us in this life, for an everlasting love that we await, is certainly an important motive for believing that man was made for eternity; but only in connection with the impossibility that the injustice of history should be the final word does the necessity for Christ's return and for new life become fully convincing.

44. To protest against God in the name of justice is not helpful. A world without God is a world without hope (cf. Eph 2:12). Only God can create justice. And faith gives us the certainty that he does so. The image of the Last Judgment is not primarily an image of terror, but an image of hope; for us it may even be the decisive image of hope. Is it not also a frightening image? I would say: it is an image that evokes responsibility, an image, therefore, of that fear of which Saint Hilary spoke when he said that all our fear has its place in love. God is justice and creates justice. This is our consolation and our hope. And in his justice there is also grace. This we know by turning our gaze to the crucified and risen Christ. Both these things—justice and grace—must be seen in their correct inner relationship. Grace does not cancel out justice. It does not make wrong into right. It is
not a sponge which wipes everything away, so that whatever someone has
done on earth ends up being of equal value. Dostoevsky, for example, was
right to protest against this kind of Heaven and this kind of grace in his
novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. Evildoers, in the end, do not sit at table at
the eternal banquet beside their victims without distinction, as though
nothing had happened. Here I would like to quote a passage from Plato
which expresses a premonition of just judgment that in many respects
remains true and salutary for Christians too. Albeit using mythological
images, he expresses the truth with an unambiguous clarity, saying that in
the end souls will stand naked before the judge. It no longer matters what
they once were in history, but only what they are in truth: “Often, when it
is the king or some other monarch or potentate that he (the judge) has to
deal with, he finds that there is no soundness in the soul whatever; he finds
it scourged and scarred by the various acts of perjury and wrong-doing...; it
is twisted and warped by lies and vanity, and nothing is straight because
truth has had no part in its development. Power, luxury, pride, and
debauchery have left it so full of disproportion and ugliness that when he
has inspected it (he) sends it straight to prison, where on its arrival it will
undergo the appropriate punishment... Sometimes, though, the eye of the
judge lights on a different soul which has lived in purity and truth... then
he is struck with admiration and sends him to the isles of the blessed”[36].
In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (cf. *Lk* 16:19-31), Jesus
admonishes us through the image of a soul destroyed by arrogance and
opulence, who has created an impassable chasm between himself and the
poor man; the chasm of being trapped within material pleasures; the chasm
of forgetting the other, of incapacity to love, which then becomes a burning
and unquenchable thirst. We must note that in this parable Jesus is not
referring to the final destiny after the Last Judgment, but is taking up a
notion found, *inter alia*, in early Judaism, namely that of an intermediate
state between death and resurrection, a state in which the final sentence is
yet to be pronounced.

45. This early Jewish idea of an intermediate state includes the view
that these souls are not simply in a sort of temporary custody but, as the
parable of the rich man illustrates, are already being punished or are
experiencing a provisional form of bliss. There is also the idea that this
state can involve purification and healing which mature the soul for communion with God. The early Church took up these concepts, and in the Western Church they gradually developed into the doctrine of Purgatory. We do not need to examine here the complex historical paths of this development; it is enough to ask what it actually means. With death, our life-choice becomes definitive—our life stands before the judge. Our choice, which in the course of an entire life takes on a certain shape, can have a variety of forms. There can be people who have totally destroyed their desire for truth and readiness to love, people for whom everything has become a lie, people who have lived for hatred and have suppressed all love within themselves. This is a terrifying thought, but alarming profiles of this type can be seen in certain figures of our own history. In such people all would be beyond remedy and the destruction of good would be irrevocable: this is what we mean by the word Hell. On the other hand there can be people who are utterly pure, completely permeated by God, and thus fully open to their neighbors—people for whom communion with God even now gives direction to their entire being and whose journey towards God only brings to fulfillment what they already are.

46. Yet we know from experience that neither case is normal in human life. For the great majority of people—we may suppose—there remains in the depths of their being an ultimate interior openness to truth, to love, to God. In the concrete choices of life, however, it is covered over by ever new compromises with evil—much filth covers purity, but the thirst for purity remains and it still constantly re-emerges from all that is base and remains present in the soul. What happens to such individuals when they appear before the Judge? Will all the impurity they have amassed through life suddenly cease to matter? What else might occur? Saint Paul, in his First Letter to the Corinthians, gives us an idea of the differing impact of God's judgment according to each person's particular circumstances. He does this using images which in some way try to express the invisible, without it being possible for us to conceptualize these images—simply because we can neither see into the world beyond death nor do we have any experience of it. Paul begins by saying that Christian life is built upon a common foundation: Jesus Christ. This foundation endures. If we have stood firm on this foundation and built our life upon it, we know that it cannot be taken away from us even in death. Then Paul continues: “Now if any one
builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each man's work will become manifest; for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work which any man has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Cor 3:12-15). In this text, it is in any case evident that our salvation can take different forms, that some of what is built may be burned down, that in order to be saved we personally have to pass through “fire” so as to become fully open to receiving God and able to take our place at the table of the eternal marriage-feast.

47. Some recent theologians are of the opinion that the fire which both burns and saves is Christ himself, the Judge and Saviour. The encounter with him is the decisive act of judgment. Before his gaze all falsehood melts away. This encounter with him, as it burns us, transforms and frees us, allowing us to become truly ourselves. All that we build during our lives can prove to be mere straw, pure bluster, and it collapses. Yet in the pain of this encounter, when the impurity and sickness of our lives become evident to us, there lies salvation. His gaze, the touch of his heart heals us through an undeniably painful transformation “as through fire”. But it is a blessed pain, in which the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God. In this way the inter-relation between justice and grace also becomes clear: the way we live our lives is not immaterial, but our defilement does not stain us for ever if we have at least continued to reach out towards Christ, towards truth and towards love. Indeed, it has already been burned away through Christ's Passion. At the moment of judgment we experience and we absorb the overwhelming power of his love over all the evil in the world and in ourselves. The pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy. It is clear that we cannot calculate the “duration” of this transforming burning in terms of the chronological measurements of this world. The transforming “moment” of this encounter eludes earthly time-reckoning—it is the heart's time, it is the time of “passage” to communion with God in the Body of Christ. The judgment of God is hope, both because it is justice and because it is grace. If it were merely grace, making all earthly things cease
to matter, God would still owe us an answer to the question about justice—the crucial question that we ask of history and of God. If it were merely justice, in the end it could bring only fear to us all. The incarnation of God in Christ has so closely linked the two together—judgment and grace—that justice is firmly established: we all work out our salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). Nevertheless grace allows us all to hope, and to go trustfully to meet the Judge whom we know as our “advocate”, or parakletos (cf. 1 Jn 2:1).

48. A further point must be mentioned here, because it is important for the practice of Christian hope. Early Jewish thought includes the idea that one can help the deceased in their intermediate state through prayer (see for example 2 Mac 12:38-45; first century BC). The equivalent practice was readily adopted by Christians and is common to the Eastern and Western Church. The East does not recognize the purifying and expiatory suffering of souls in the afterlife, but it does acknowledge various levels of beatitude and of suffering in the intermediate state. The souls of the departed can, however, receive “solace and refreshment” through the Eucharist, prayer and almsgiving. The belief that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues beyond the limits of death—this has been a fundamental conviction of Christianity throughout the ages and it remains a source of comfort today. Who would not feel the need to convey to their departed loved ones a sign of kindness, a gesture of gratitude or even a request for pardon? Now a further question arises: if “Purgatory” is simply purification through fire in the encounter with the Lord, Judge and Saviour, how can a third person intervene, even if he or she is particularly close to the other? When we ask such a question, we should recall that no man is an island, entire of itself. Our lives are involved with one another, through innumerable interactions they are linked together. No one lives alone. No one sins alone. No one is saved alone. The lives of others continually spill over into mine: in what I think, say, do and achieve. And conversely, my life spills over into that of others: for better and for worse. So my prayer for another is not something extraneous to that person, something external, not even after death. In the interconnectedness of Being, my gratitude to the other—my prayer for him—can play a small part in his purification. And for that there is no need to convert earthly time into God's time: in
the communion of souls simple terrestrial time is superseded. It is never too late to touch the heart of another, nor is it ever in vain. In this way we further clarify an important element of the Christian concept of hope. Our hope is always essentially also hope for others; only thus is it truly hope for me too. As Christians we should never limit ourselves to asking: how can I save myself? We should also ask: what can I do in order that others may be saved and that for them too the star of hope may rise? Then I will have done my utmost for my own personal salvation as well.

Mary, Star of Hope

49. With a hymn composed in the eighth or ninth century, thus for over a thousand years, the Church has greeted Mary, the Mother of God, as “Star of the Sea”: Ave maris stella. Human life is a journey. Towards what destination? How do we find the way? Life is like a voyage on the sea of history, often dark and stormy, a voyage in which we watch for the stars that indicate the route. The true stars of our life are the people who have lived good lives. They are lights of hope. Certainly, Jesus Christ is the true light, the sun that has risen above all the shadows of history. But to reach him we also need lights close by—people who shine with his light and so guide us along our way. Who more than Mary could be a star of hope for us? With her “yes” she opened the door of our world to God himself; she became the living Ark of the Covenant, in whom God took flesh, became one of us, and pitched his tent among us (cf. Jn 1:14).

50. So we cry to her: Holy Mary, you belonged to the humble and great souls of Israel who, like Simeon, were “looking for the consolation of Israel” (Lk 2:25) and hoping, like Anna, “for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38). Your life was thoroughly imbued with the sacred scriptures of Israel which spoke of hope, of the promise made to Abraham and his descendants (cf. Lk 1:55). In this way we can appreciate the holy fear that overcame you when the angel of the Lord appeared to you and told you that you would give birth to the One who was the hope of Israel, the One awaited by the world. Through you, through your “yes”, the hope of the ages became reality, entering this world and its history. You bowed low before the greatness of this task and gave your consent: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). When you hastened with holy joy across the mountains of Judea to see your
cousin Elizabeth, you became the image of the Church to come, which carries the hope of the world in her womb across the mountains of history. But alongside the joy which, with your *Magnificat*, you proclaimed in word and song for all the centuries to hear, you also knew the dark sayings of the prophets about the suffering of the servant of God in this world. Shining over his birth in the stable at Bethlehem, there were angels in splendor who brought the good news to the shepherds, but at the same time the lowliness of God in this world was all too palpable. The old man Simeon spoke to you of the sword which would pierce your soul (cf. *Lk* 2:35), of the sign of contradiction that your Son would be in this world. Then, when Jesus began his public ministry, you had to step aside, so that a new family could grow, the family which it was his mission to establish and which would be made up of those who heard his word and kept it (cf. *Lk*11:27f). Notwithstanding the great joy that marked the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, in the synagogue of Nazareth you must already have experienced the truth of the saying about the “sign of contradiction” (cf. *Lk* 4:28ff). In this way you saw the growing power of hostility and rejection which built up around Jesus until the hour of the Cross, when you had to look upon the Saviour of the world, the heir of David, the Son of God dying like a failure, exposed to mockery, between criminals. Then you received the word of Jesus: “Woman, behold, your Son!” (*Jn* 19:26). From the Cross you received a new mission. From the Cross you became a mother in a new way: the mother of all those who believe in your Son Jesus and wish to follow him. The sword of sorrow pierced your heart. Did hope die? Did the world remain definitively without light, and life without purpose? At that moment, deep down, you probably listened again to the word spoken by the angel in answer to your fear at the time of the Annunciation: “Do not be afraid, Mary!” (*Lk*1:30). How many times had the Lord, your Son, said the same thing to his disciples: do not be afraid! In your heart, you heard this word again during the night of Golgotha. Before the hour of his betrayal he had said to his disciples: “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (*Jn* 16:33). “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (*Jn* 14:27). “Do not be afraid, Mary!” In that hour at Nazareth the angel had also said to you: “Of his kingdom there will be no end” (*Lk* 1:33). Could it have ended before it began? No, at the foot of the Cross, on the strength of Jesus’ own word, you became the mother of believers. In this
faith, which even in the darkness of Holy Saturday bore the certitude of hope, you made your way towards Easter morning. The joy of the Resurrection touched your heart and united you in a new way to the disciples, destined to become the family of Jesus through faith. In this way you were in the midst of the community of believers, who in the days following the Ascension prayed with one voice for the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14) and then received that gift on the day of Pentecost. The “Kingdom” of Jesus was not as might have been imagined. It began in that hour, and of this “Kingdom” there will be no end. Thus you remain in the midst of the disciples as their Mother, as the Mother of hope. Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope, to love with you. Show us the way to his Kingdom! Star of the Sea, shine upon us and guide us on our way!

_Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 30 November, the Feast of Saint Andrew the Apostle, in the year 2007, the third of my Pontificate._

**BENEDICTUS PP. XVI**


Novum Organum I, 117.

Cf. ibid. I, 129.

Cf. New Atlantis.


Chapters on charity, Centuria 1, ch. 1: PG 90, 965.

Cf. ibid.: PG 90, 962-966.

Conf. X 43, 70: CSEL 33, 279.


Sermo 339, 4: PL 38, 1481.

Conf. X 43, 69: CSEL 33, 279.

Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2657.


Testimony of Hope, Boston 2000, pp.121ff.

The Liturgy of the Hours, Office of Readings, 24 November.

Sermones in Cant., Sermo 26, 5: PL 183, 906.


Ibid., Second part, p.207.

DS 806.

Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 988-1004.

Cf. ibid., 1040.
Homily on the occasion of a meeting of Italian Youth (September 2, 2007)

After last night's Vigil, our Meeting in Loreto is now coming to an end around the altar with the solemn Eucharistic celebration. Once again, my most cordial greeting to you all. I extend a special greeting to the Bishops and I thank Archbishop Angelo Bagnasco who has expressed your common sentiments. I greet the Archbishop of Loreto who has welcomed us with affection and kindness. I greet the priests, the men and women religious and all those who have carefully prepared this important event of faith. I offer a respectful greeting to the Civil and Military Authorities present, with a particular remembrance for Hon. Mr. Francesco Rutelli, Vice-President of the Council of Ministers.

This is truly a day of grace! The Readings we have just heard help us to understand the marvelous work the Lord has done in bringing so many of us here to Loreto, to meet in a joyful atmosphere of prayer and festivity. In a certain sense, our gathering at the Virgin's Shrine fulfils the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God." Celebrating the Eucharist in the shadow of the Holy House, we too come to the "festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven." Thus, we can experience the joy of having come "to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect." With Mary, Mother of the Redeemer and our Mother, let us above all go to meet "the Mediator of a New Covenant," Our Lord Jesus.

[36] Gorgias 525a-526c.
[37] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1033-1037.
[38] Cf. ibid., 1023-1029.
[40] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1032.
Christ (cf. *Heb* 12: 22-24). The Heavenly Father, who in many and various ways spoke to our fathers (cf. *Heb* 1: 1), offering his Covenant and often encountering resistance and rejection, desired in the fullness of time to make a new, definitive and irrevocable agreement with human beings, sealing it with the Blood of his Only-Begotten Son, who died and rose for the salvation of all humanity. Jesus Christ, God made man, took on our own flesh in Mary, participated in our life and chose to share in our history. To realize his Covenant God sought a young heart and he found it in Mary, "a young woman."

God also seeks young people today. He seeks young people with great hearts who can make room for him in their lives to be protagonists of the New Covenant. To accept a proposal as fascinating as the one Jesus offers us, to make the covenant with him, it is necessary to be youthful within, to be capable of letting oneself be called into question by his newness, to set out with him on new roads. Jesus has a fondness for young people, as the conversation with the rich young man clearly shows (cf. *Mt* 19: 16-22; *Mk* 10: 17-22); he respects their freedom but never tires of proposing loftier goals for life to them: the newness of the Gospel and the beauty of holy behavior. Following her Lord’s example, the Church continues to show the same attention. This is why, dear young people, she looks at you with immense affection, she is close to you in moments of joy and festivity, in trials and in loss. She sustains you with the gifts of sacramental grace and accompanies you in the discernment of your vocation. Dear young people, let yourselves be involved in the new life that flows from the encounter with Christ and you will be able to be apostles of his peace in your families, among your friends, within your Ecclesial Communities and in the various milieus in which you live and work.

But what is it that makes people "young" in the Gospel sense? Our Meeting, which is taking place in the shadow of a Marian Shrine, invites us to look to Our Lady. Let us therefore ask ourselves: How did Mary spend her youth? Why was it that in her the impossible became possible? She herself reveals it to us in the Canticle of the Magnificat. God "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden" (*Lk* 1: 48a). It was Mary’s humility that God appreciated more than anything else in her. And it is precisely of humility that the other two Readings of today’s liturgy speak to us. Is it not
a happy coincidence that this message is addressed to us exactly here in Loreto? Here, we think spontaneously of the Holy House of Nazareth, which is the Shrine of humility: the humility of God who took flesh, who made himself small, and the humility of Mary who welcomed him into her womb; the humility of the Creator and the humility of the creature. Jesus, Son of God and Son of man, was born from this encounter of humility. "The greater you are, the more you humble yourself, so you will find favor in the sight of the Lord. For great is the might of the Lord" (3: 18-20) says the passage in Sirach; and in the Gospel, after the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus concludes: "Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Lk 14: 11). Today, this perspective mentioned in the Scriptures appears especially provocative to the culture and sensitivity of contemporary man. The humble person is perceived as someone who gives up, someone defeated, someone who has nothing to say to the world. Instead, this is the principal way, and not only because humility is a great human virtue but because, in the first place, it represents God's own way of acting. It was the way chosen by Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant, who "being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2: 8).

Dear young people, I seem to perceive in these words of God about humility an important message which is especially current for you who want to follow Christ and belong to his Church. This is the message: do not follow the way of pride but rather that of humility. Go against the tide: do not listen to the interested and persuasive voices that today are peddling on many sides models of life marked by arrogance and violence, by oppression and success at any cost, by appearances and by having at the expense of being. How many messages, which reach you especially through the mass media, are targeting you! Be alert! Be critical! Do not follow the wave produced by this powerful, persuasive action. Do not be afraid, dear friends, to prefer the "alternative" routes pointed out by true love: a modest and sound lifestyle; sincere and pure emotional relationships; honest commitment in studies and work; deep concern for the common good. Do not be afraid of seeming different and being criticized for what might seem to be losing or out of fashion; your peers but adults too, especially those who seem more distant from the mindset and values of the Gospel, are
crying out to see someone who dares to live according to the fullness of humanity revealed by Jesus Christ.

Therefore, dear friends, the way of humility is not the way of renunciation but that of courage. It is not the result of a defeat but the result of a victory of love over selfishness and of grace over sin.

In following Christ and imitating Mary, we must have the courage of humility; we must entrust ourselves humbly to the Lord, because only in this way will we be able to become docile instruments in his hands and allow him to do great things in us. The Lord worked great miracles in Mary and in the Saints! I am thinking, for example, of Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena, Patrons of Italy. I am thinking also of splendid young people like St Gemma Galgani, St Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin, St Louis Gonzaga, St Dominic Savio, St Maria Goretti, born not far from here, and the Blesseds, Piergiorgio Frassati and Alberto Marvelli. And I am also thinking of numerous young men and women who belong to the ranks of the "anonymous" Saints, but who are not anonymous to God. For him, every individual person is unique, with his or her own name and face. All, and you know it, are called to be Saints!

As you see, dear young people, the humility the Lord has taught us and to which the Saints have borne witness, each according to the originality of his or her own vocation, is quite different from a renunciatory way of life. Let us look above all at Mary. At her school, we too, like her, can experience that "yes" of God to humanity from which flow all the "yeses" of our life. It is true, the challenges you must face are many and important. The first however, is always that of following Christ to the very end without reservations and compromises. And following Christ means feeling oneself a living part of his body which is the Church. One cannot call oneself a disciple of Jesus if one does not love and obey his Church. The Church is our family in which love for the Lord and for our brothers and sisters, especially through participation in the Eucharist, enables us to experience the joy of already having a foretaste, now, of the future life that will be totally illuminated by Love. May our daily commitment be to live here below as though we were already in Heaven above.
Thus, feeling oneself as Church is a vocation to holiness for all; it is a daily commitment to build communion and unity, overcoming all resistance and rising above every incomprehension. In the Church we learn to love, teaching ourselves to accept our neighbor freely, to show caring attention to those in difficulty, to the poor and to the lowliest. The fundamental motivation that unites believers in Christ is not success but goodness, a goodness that is all the more authentic the more it is shared, and which does not primarily consist in having or in being powerful, but in being. In this way one builds the city of God with human beings, a city which at the same time grows on earth and comes down from Heaven because it develops in the encounter and collaboration between people and God (cf. Rev 21: 2-3).

Following Christ, dear young people, also entails the constant effort to make one's own contribution to building a society that is more just and sober and in which all may enjoy the goods of the earth.

I know that many of you are generously dedicated to witnessing to your faith in the various social environments, active as volunteers and working to promote the common good, peace and justice in every community. There is no doubt that one of the fields in which it seems urgent to take action is that of safeguarding creation. The future of the planet is entrusted to the new generations, in which there are evident signs of a development that has not always been able to protect the delicate balances of nature. Before it is too late, it is necessary to make courageous decisions that can recreate a strong alliance between humankind and the earth. A decisive "yes" is needed to protect creation and also a strong commitment to invert those trends which risk leading to irreversibly degrading situations. I therefore appreciated the Italian Church’s initiative to encourage sensitivity to the problems of safeguarding creation by establishing a National Day, which occurs precisely on 1 September. This year attention is focused above all on water, a very precious good which, if it is not shared fairly and peacefully, will unfortunately become a cause of harsh tensions and bitter conflicts.

Dear young friends, after listening to your reflections yesterday evening and last night, letting myself be guided by God's Word, I now want to entrust to you my considerations which are intended as a paternal encouragement to follow Christ in order to be witnesses of his hope and
love. For my part, I will continue to be beside you with my prayers and affection, so that you may persevere enthusiastically on the journey of the Agora, this unique triennial journey of listening, dialogue and mission. Today, concluding the first year with this wonderful Meeting, I cannot fail to invite you to look ahead already to the great event of World Youth Day that will be held in July next year in Sydney. I ask you to prepare yourselves for this important manifestation of youthful faith by meditating on the Message which examines in depth the theme of the Holy Spirit, to live together a new springtime of the Spirit. Therefore, I am expecting many of you even in Australia, at the end of your second year of the Agora. Lastly, let us turn our gaze, our eyes, once again to Mary, model of humility and courage. Virgin of Nazareth, help us to be docile to the work of the Holy Spirit, as you were; help us to become ever more holy, disciples in love with your Son Jesus; sustain and guide these young people so that they may be joyful and tireless missionaries of the Gospel among their peers in every corner of Italy. Amen!

The Pope spoke the following words before imparting his apostolic blessing:

My dear brothers and sisters: we are about to leave this site where we have celebrated the sacred mysteries, a place dedicated to the memory of the Incarnation of the Word. The shrine of Loretto reminds us that in order to fully accept God’s Word it is not enough to conserve the gift we have received: we also have to hasten, by other roads and to other cities, to communicate it with joy and gratitude as the young Mary of Nazareth did. My dear young people, conserve the memory of this place in your hearts and, like the seventy-two disciples of Jesus, set forth with determination and freedom of spirit. Spread peace to those around you, strengthen the weak, prepare hearts for the newness of Christ. Proclaim that the kingdom of God is near.

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Homily at the Christmas Midnight Mass (December 25, 2007)
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“The time came for Mary to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn” (Lk 2:6f.). These words touch our hearts every time we hear them. This was the moment that the angel had foretold at Nazareth: “you will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Lk 1:31). This was the moment that Israel had been awaiting for centuries, through many dark hours — the moment that all mankind was somehow awaiting, in terms as yet ill-defined: when God would take care of us, when he would step outside his concealment, when the world would be saved and God would renew all things. We can imagine the kind of interior preparation, the kind of love with which Mary approached that hour. The brief phrase: “She wrapped him in swaddling clothes” allows us to glimpse something of the holy joy and the silent zeal of that preparation. The swaddling clothes were ready, so that the child could be given a fitting welcome. Yet there is no room at the inn. In some way, mankind is awaiting God, waiting for him to draw near. But when the moment comes, there is no room for him. Man is so preoccupied with himself, he has such urgent need of all the space and all the time for his own things, that nothing remains for others — for his neighbor, for the poor, for God. And the richer men become, the more they fill up all the space by themselves. And the less room there is for others.

Saint John, in his Gospel, went to the heart of the matter, giving added depth to Saint Luke's brief account of the situation in Bethlehem: “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not” (Jn 1:11). This refers first and foremost to Bethlehem: the Son of David comes to his own city, but has to be born in a stable, because there is no room for him at the inn. Then it refers to Israel: the one who is sent comes among his own, but they do not want him. And truly, it refers to all mankind: he through whom the world was made, the primordial Creator-Word, enters into the world, but he is not listened to, he is not received.

These words refer ultimately to us, to each individual and to society as a whole. Do we have time for our neighbor who is in need of a word from us, from me, or in need of my affection? For the sufferer who is in need of
help? For the fugitive or the refugee who is seeking asylum? Do we have time and space for God? Can he enter into our lives? Does he find room in us, or have we occupied all the available space in our thoughts, our actions, our lives for ourselves?

Thank God, this negative detail is not the only one, nor the last one that we find in the Gospel. Just as in Luke we encounter the maternal love of Mary and the fidelity of Saint Joseph, the vigilance of the shepherds and their great joy, just as in Matthew we encounter the visit of the wise men, come from afar, so too John says to us: “To all who received him, he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). There are those who receive him, and thus, beginning with the stable, with the outside, there grows silently the new house, the new city, the new world. The message of Christmas makes us recognize the darkness of a closed world, and thereby no doubt illustrates a reality that we see daily. Yet it also tells us that God does not allow himself to be shut out. He finds a space, even if it means entering through the stable; there are people who see his light and pass it on. Through the word of the Gospel, the angel also speaks to us, and in the sacred liturgy the light of the Redeemer enters our lives. Whether we are shepherds or "wise men" — the light and its message call us to set out, to leave the narrow circle of our desires and interests, to go out to meet the Lord and worship him. We worship him by opening the world to truth, to good, to Christ, to the service of those who are marginalized and in whom he awaits us.

In some Christmas scenes from the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, the stable is depicted as a crumbling palace. It is still possible to recognize its former splendor, but now it has become a ruin, the walls are falling down — in fact, it has become a stable. Although it lacks any historical basis, this metaphorical interpretation nevertheless expresses something of the truth that is hidden in the mystery of Christmas. David’s throne, which had been promised to last for ever, stands empty. Others rule over the Holy Land. Joseph, the descendant of David, is a simple artisan; the palace, in fact, has become a hovel. David himself had begun life as a shepherd. When Samuel sought him out in order to anoint him, it seemed impossible and absurd that a shepherd-boy such as he could become the bearer of the promise of Israel. In the stable of Bethlehem, the very town
where it had all begun, the Davidic kingship started again in a new way — in that child wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The new throne from which this David will draw the world to himself is the Cross. The new throne — the Cross — corresponds to the new beginning in the stable. Yet this is exactly how the true Davidic palace, the true kingship is being built. This new palace is so different from what people imagine a palace and royal power ought to be like. It is the community of those who allow themselves to be drawn by Christ's love and so become one body with him, a new humanity. The power that comes from the Cross, the power of self-giving goodness — this is the true kingship. The stable becomes a palace — and setting out from this starting-point, Jesus builds the great new community, whose key-word the angels sing at the hour of his birth: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to those whom he loves” — those who place their will in his, in this way becoming men of God, new men, a new world.

Gregory of Nyssa, in his Christmas homilies, developed the same vision setting out from the Christmas message in the Gospel of John: “He pitched his tent among us” (Jn 1:14). Gregory applies this passage about the tent to the tent of our body, which has become worn out and weak, exposed everywhere to pain and suffering. And he applies it to the whole universe, torn and disfigured by sin. What would he say if he could see the state of the world today, through the abuse of energy and its selfish and reckless exploitation? Anselm of Canterbury, in an almost prophetic way, once described a vision of what we witness today in a polluted world whose future is at risk: “Everything was as if dead, and had lost its dignity, having been made for the service of those who praise God. The elements of the world were oppressed, they had lost their splendor because of the abuse of those who enslaved them for their idols, for whom they had not been created” (PL 158, 955f.). Thus, according to Gregory’s vision, the stable in the Christmas message represents the ill-treated world. What Christ rebuilds is no ordinary palace. He came to restore beauty and dignity to creation, to the universe: this is what began at Christmas and makes the angels rejoice. The Earth is restored to good order by virtue of the fact that it is opened up to God, it obtains its true light anew, and in the harmony between human will and divine will, in the unification of height and depth, it regains its beauty and dignity. Thus Christmas is a feast of restored
creation. It is in this context that the Fathers interpret the song of the angels on that holy night: it is an expression of joy over the fact that the height and the depth, Heaven and Earth, are once more united; that man is again united to God. According to the Fathers, part of the angels’ Christmas song is the fact that now angels and men can sing together and in this way the beauty of the universe is expressed in the beauty of the song of praise. Liturgical song — still according to the Fathers — possesses its own peculiar dignity through the fact that it is sung together with the celestial choirs. It is the encounter with Jesus Christ that makes us capable of hearing the song of the angels, thus creating the real music that fades away when we lose this singing-with and hearing-with.

In the stable at Bethlehem, Heaven and Earth meet. Heaven has come down to Earth. For this reason, a light shines from the stable for all times; for this reason joy is enkindled there; for this reason song is born there. At the end of our Christmas meditation I should like to quote a remarkable passage from Saint Augustine. Interpreting the invocation in the Lord’s Prayer: “Our Father who art in Heaven”, he asks: what is this — Heaven? And where is Heaven? Then comes a surprising response: “… who art in Heaven — that means: in the saints and in the just. Yes, the heavens are the highest bodies in the universe, but they are still bodies, which cannot exist except in a given location. Yet if we believe that God is located in the heavens, meaning in the highest parts of the world, then the birds would be more fortunate than we, since they would live closer to God. Yet it is not written: ‘The Lord is close to those who dwell on the heights or on the mountains’, but rather: ‘the Lord is close to the brokenhearted’ (Ps 34:18[33:19]), an expression which refers to humility. Just as the sinner is called ‘Earth’, so by contrast the just man can be called ‘Heaven’” ( Sermo in monteII 5, 17). Heaven does not belong to the geography of space, but to the geography of the heart. And the heart of God, during the Holy Night, stooped down to the stable: the humility of God is Heaven. And if we approach this humility, then we touch Heaven. Then the Earth too is made new. With the humility of the shepherds, let us set out, during this Holy Night, towards the Child in the stable! Let us touch God’s humility, God’s heart! Then his joy will touch us and will make the world more radiant. Amen.
Address on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (December 8, 2007)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At an event which has now become a tradition, we are meeting here at the Spanish Steps to offer our floral tribute to Our Lady on the day when the whole Church celebrates the feast of her Immaculate Conception. Following in the footsteps of my Predecessors, I also join you, dear faithful of Rome, to pause at Mary's feet with filial affection and love. For 150 years she has watched over our City from the top of this pillar. Today's act is a gesture of faith and devotion which our Christian community repeats from year to year, as if to reaffirm its commitment of fidelity to she who in every circumstance of daily life assures us of her help and motherly protection.

This expression of piety is at the same time an opportunity to offer to all who live in Rome or who are spending a few days as pilgrims and tourists, an opportunity, despite the diversity of cultures, to feel they are one family gathered around a Mother who has shared the daily efforts of every woman and mother of a family. She is, however, a completely singular mother, for she was chosen in advance by God for a unique and mysterious mission: to bring forth to earthly life the Father's Eternal Word, who came into the world for the salvation of all people. And Mary, Immaculate in her conception - this is how we venerate her today -, traveled her earthly pilgrimage sustained by undaunted faith, steadfast hope and humble and boundless love, following in the footsteps of her Son, Jesus. She was close to him with motherly solicitude from his birth to Calvary, where she witnessed his crucifixion, transfixed by suffering but with unwavering hope. She then experienced the joy of the Resurrection, at dawn on the third day, the new day, when the Crucified One left the tomb, overcoming for ever and definitively the power of sin and death.
Mary, in whose virginal womb God was made man, is our Mother! Indeed, from the Cross before bringing his sacrifice to completion, Jesus gave her to us as our Mother and entrusted us to her as her children. This is a mystery of mercy and love, a gift that enriches the Church with fruitful spiritual motherhood. Let us turn our gaze to her, especially today, dear brothers and sisters, and imploring her help, prepare ourselves to treasure all her maternal teaching. Does not our Heavenly Mother invite us to shun evil and to do good, following with docility the divine law engraved in every Christian’s heart? Does not she, who preserved her hope even at the peak of her trial, ask us not to lose heart when suffering and death come knocking at the door of our homes? Does she not ask us to look confidently to our future? Does not the Immaculate Virgin exhort us to be brothers and sisters to one another, all united by the commitment to build together a world that is more just, supportive and peaceful?

Yes, dear friends! On this solemn day, the Church once again holds up Mary to the world as a sign of sure hope and of the definitive victory of good over evil. The one whom we invoke as "full of grace" reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters and that God is our Creator and our Father. Without him, or even worse, against him, we human beings will never be able to find the way that leads to love, we will never be able to defeat the power of hatred and violence, we will never be able to build a lasting peace.

May the people of every nation and culture welcome this message of light and hope: may they accept it as a gift from the hands of Mary, Mother of all humanity. If life is a journey and this journey is often dark, difficult and exhausting, what star can illuminate it? In my Encyclical Spe Salvi, published at the beginning of Advent, I wrote that the Church looks to Mary and calls on her as a "star of hope" (n. 49). During our common voyage on the sea of history, we stand in need of "lights of hope", that is, of people who shine with Christ’s light and "so guide us along our way" (ibid.). And who could be a better "Star of Hope" for us than Mary? With her "yes", with the generous offering of freedom received from the Creator, she enabled the hope of the millennia to become reality, to enter this world and its history. Through her God took flesh, became one of us and pitched his tent among us.

Thus, inspired by filial trust, we say to her: "Teach us, Mary, to believe,
to hope, to love with you; show us the way that leads to peace, the way to the Kingdom of Jesus. You, Star of Hope, who wait for us anxiously in the everlasting light of the eternal Homeland, shine upon us and guide us through daily events, now and at the hour of our death. Amen!"

*The Holy Father said the following words before imparting his Apostolic Blessing.*

I join the pilgrims who have gathered at the Marian Shrines of Lourdes and Fourvière to honor the Virgin Mary in this Jubilee Year of the 150th anniversary of Our Lady's apparitions to St Bernadette. Thanks to their trust in Mary and her example, these pilgrims will become true disciples of the Saviour. With their pilgrimages they offer the many faces of the Church to those who are seeking and who come to visit the Shrines. On their spiritual journey they are called to demonstrate the grace of their Baptism, to be nourished with the Eucharist, to find in prayer the strength for witness and solidarity with all their brothers and sisters in humanity. May shrines develop their vocation to prayer and to offering hospitality to people who desire to rediscover the path to God, especially through the Sacrament of Forgiveness. I also address my cordial greetings to all those, in particular young people, who are joyfully celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception, especially to the organizers of the lighting display of the city of Lyon. I ask the Virgin Mary to watch over the inhabitants of Lyon and of Lourdes, and I impart an affectionate Apostolic Blessing to them all as well as to the pilgrims who have joined the celebrations.
Decree granting the liturgical status of memoria ad libitum (optional memorial) for the celebration of the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Germany (December 3, 2007)

Decree granting the liturgical status of memoria ad libitum (optional memorial) for the celebration of the Mass in honor of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Germany (December 3, 2007)

CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 879/07/L

GERMANIAE

Instante Eminentissimo Domino Carolo Cardinali Lehmann, Praeside-Conferentiae Episcoporum Germaniae, litteris die 16 mensis iulii anno 2007 datis, vigore facultatum huic Congregationi a Summo Pontifice BENEDICTO XVI tributarum, perlibenter concedimus ut celebratio Sancti Iosephmariae Escrivá de Balaguer, presbyteri, in Calendarium proprium eiusdem nationis inseri valeat, die 26 iunii gradu memoriae ad libitum quotannis peragenda.

Contrariis quibuslibet minime obstantibus.

Ex aedibus Congregationis de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum,

die 3 mensis decembris anno 2007.

+ Franciscus Card. Arinze

Praefectus

+ Albertus Malcolmus Ranjith
PRELATE

• New Circumscriptions
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New Circumscriptions

New circumscriptions

On September 25, 2007, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, established the Quasi-Region of Austria, which will now include Austria and Hungary, and Czechia and Slovakia as a Delegation dependent on the Prelate, through the following decree:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Perspectis nn. 150 et 152, §2 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei.

De Consiliï Generalis atque Assessoratus Centralis consensu, detracta parte territórii quæ ad interim ad Quasi-Regionem Austriæ pertinebat, decreto hoc nostro:

Statuimus ut Quasi-Regio Austriæ ad fines Austriæ et Hungariæ contrahatur.

Pariter, auditis Consilio Generali et Assessoratu Centrāli:

Novam erigimus Prælaturæ circumscriptionem, nempe Delegationem Cechiæ et Slovachiæ a Nobis dependentem, quæ harum Rerum Publicarum territória complectatur.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiae, die 25 mense septembri anno 2007.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiae Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 27
On December 18, 2007, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarria, established the Quasi-Region of Ivory Coast, formerly a Delegation dependent on the Prelate, through the following decree:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Cum Delegatio Litoris Eburnei, a Prælato dependens, eum progressionis gradum attigerit, qui requiritur ut in Quasi-Regionem erigatur.

Perspectis nn. 150 et 152, §1 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei.

De Consilii Generalis atque Assessoratus Centralis consensu, Praelaturæ Quasi-Regionem Litoris Eburnei erigo atque erectam declaro.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Praelatitiæ, die 18 mense decembri, anno 2007.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 28

On December 24, 2007, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarria, established the Delegation of El Bajío—with its seat in Aguascalientes—dependent on the Regional Commission of Mexico, through the following decree:

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Perspecto n. 153 Codicis iuris particularis Operis Dei. Ad meliorem curam exercendam laboris apostolici in Regione Mexici, auditis Consilio
Generali atque Assessoratu Centrali necnon Vicario Regionali Mexici iisque quorum interest, hoc præsenti decreto Prælaturæ Delegationem El Bajío, a Commissione Regionis Mexicanæ dependentem et in civitate Aquarium Calentium sedem habentem, erigo atque erectam declaro.


Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 24, mense decembri, anno 2007.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Rev. mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 28

Appointments

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev. dum D. num D. rem Emmanuelem Lobo Gutiérrez, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro
Delegatione Cechiæ et Slovachìæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitious adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.


+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 27
Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus
DECRETUM

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Christianum Van der Ploeg, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Quasi-Regione Nederlandiæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexis.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam gloriam et Ecclesiæ bonum propitious adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiae Prælatitiæ, die 20 mense decembri anno 2007.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA
Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart
Curiae Prælatitiæ Cancellarius
Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 28
Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips: Valencia (Spain), Almaty (Kazakhstan)

The Prelate of Opus Dei spent a few days in Valencia, at the beginning of the summer, for the dedication ceremony of the parish of St. Josemaría.

On Saturday, June 30, shortly after his arrival in Valencia, he went to the Basilica of Our Lady of the Forsaken. There he was received by the Rector, who took him to the alcove of our Lady where he could pray close to the statue. That same day, in the afternoon, he had a get-together with a large number of people at the Valencian Exposition Center.

The ceremony of dedication of the parish took place on the morning of Sunday, July 1. It was presided over by Archbishop Agustín García-Gasco of Valencia. Following the ceremony, the Prelate went to the Archbishop's residence, where he spoke with the Archbishop. In the afternoon he went to the Xabec Center for Professional Formation, a corporative apostolate of Opus Dei that was established in connection with the canonization of St. Josemaría.

On Monday morning, July 2, Bishop Echevarría met again with various groups of faithful of Opus Dei from the Valencian region and, in the afternoon, left for Madrid.

Bishop Echevarría spent the 19th and the 20th of October, in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where faithful of the Prelature have been working since 1997.
During his stay he met with people of Opus Dei and others who take part in the Prelature’s formative activities. Among those present were not only Catholics but also Orthodox and non-Christians, some of them from the Muslim tradition. He encouraged everyone to take advantage of their own work as a place to find God.

He also visited the Catholic Cathedral, the only parish in Almaty. In the choir of the Church he was shown some liturgical objects that, during the time of Soviet domination, had been piously preserved by the Catholics of Almaty and neighboring localities. Afterward the Prelate visited the diocesan bishop, the Most Reverend Henry T. Howaniec, OFM.

During his brief visit to Almaty he also prayed before a reproduction of the icon of Our Lady of Kazan, which is venerated in the Orthodox Cathedral of the Ascension of the Lord.

Pastoral Letters

Letter of July 2007

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

As in past years, on June 26 the liturgical celebration of the feast of St. Josemaría Escrivá was held in many places throughout the world. Devotion to our Father is a reality that is growing each day without restrictions of geography, language, race or social status. Millions of people turn to his intercession for their spiritual and material needs, and are inspired by his life and teachings to put into practice the demands of the Gospel.

His example is very timely and will always be so, with God’s grace, and will help many men and women to discover the paths that lead to the Blessed Trinity, amid all noble human realities: the family, work, social relationships, etc.
Our Lord wants us, in struggling for sanctity each day in accord with the spirit of Opus Dei, to strive to faithfully follow the paths that St. Josemaría opened by his docility to the divine will. Thus, with the witness of our interior struggle (at times victorious and other times not, but always beginning again joyfully) and with our words of encouragement, many others will be enheartened to undertake this way of sanctification in daily work and in the fulfillment of the Christian’s ordinary duties, which is the Work.

Today I want to remind you of some teachings of our Father connected with the first Christians, who received the Gospel message directly from the Apostles or from their immediate co-workers. He used to point to them as an example of how we should live in the midst of the world. Just yesterday we celebrated the liturgical memorial of the first martyrs of Rome, men and women who bore supreme witness to Christ in the Eternal City during the persecution of Nero. Upon introducing their feast in the universal calendar, the Church decided it would be celebrated on June 30, right after the solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, as though to stress their close union with the ones who had transmitted to them Christ’s holy teaching.

To explain Opus Dei’s mission, St. Josemaría often turned to those first sisters and brothers of ours in the faith. If you want a point of comparison, he would say, the easiest way to understand Opus Dei is to consider the life of the early Christians. They lived their Christian vocation seriously, seeking earnestly the holiness to which they had been called by their Baptism. Externally they did nothing to distinguish themselves from their fellow citizens. Similarly, he added, the faithful of Opus Dei are ordinary people. They work like everyone else and live in the midst of the world just as they did before they joined. There is nothing false or artificial about their behavior. They live like any other Christian citizen who wants to respond fully to the demands of his faith, because that is what they are.

In mentioning these ideas I am also moved by the desire to second the teachings of the Pope, who in his Wednesday audiences has been speaking for quite some time now about the early Fathers and writers of the Church. His words can help us to imitate the example of those who lived at the
dawn of Christianity. In general, the circumstances surrounding their witness to the faith do not seem all that different from our own.

The first point that stands out is the optimism, filled with confidence and conviction (from their faith!), with which they confronted the pagan world. With the light of our Lord’s teaching, they were able to discern the positive elements in the social customs of their times, and to reject what was not in accord with the new vision of life Christ’s doctrine had given them.

The Pope points out, for example, that St. Justin (a layman and philosophy teacher in Rome), basing himself on Sacred Scripture, shows first of all the divine plan of creation and salvation that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Logos, that is, the eternal Word, eternal Reason, creative Reason. And he stresses how that ancient Father of the Church held that every person as a rational being shares in the Logos, carrying within himself a “seed,” and can perceive glimmers of the truth. Thus, the same Logos who revealed himself as a prophetic figure to the Hebrew people under the old Law also manifested himself partially, in “seeds of truth,” in Greek philosophy. Now, Justin concludes, since Christianity is the historical and personal manifestation of the Logos in his totality, it follows that “whatever things were rightly said among all men are the property of us Christians.”

In many countries, we who know we are God’s children find ourselves submerged in a neo-pagan society, and (let us never doubt it) we have been entrusted with the marvelous mission of redirecting it to God. The apostolic response of each and every one of us has to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us. Firmly grounded in Catholic teaching, we have to act without any inferiority complex in the heart of the civil society to which we belong by our own right, and—without arrogance—transform it from within acting as a leaven in the mass, for mankind’s temporal and eternal good.

So let us be optimistic and objective. Although we see deficiencies and errors, there are always many positive attitudes and good realities in the men and women we find alongside us and in the environment around us. In carrying out our apostolate, we have to discover and appreciate these riches, in order to lead those we are dealing with towards the Truth. By
stressing these points of common interest, it will be easier to bring souls to God. Our greatest ally for the new evangelization of society—besides the guardian angels of those we are dealing with—is precisely the divine residue that is always found in every human being (although at times they don’t realize it), even among those who are furthest from God.

So let us be filled with optimism, and try to spread this outlook to others who perhaps are discouraged in the face of the moral and spiritual decadence that has arisen in so many places. In our personal conversations with friends and colleagues, as well as in the more or less public interventions that we might be called upon to make, we should rely on the two “wings” of faith and reason, as the Pope repeats untiringly, without separating one from the other. Thus we will counteract the relativism around us, a manifestation of a lack of faith and a lack of trust in reason.

Recalling as well our beloved John Paul II, let us put into effect his advice: “Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ! Open to his saving power the borders of states, the economic and political systems, the broad fields of culture, of civilization, of development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows what is in man’s heart. He alone knows it!” We need to make this a reality first of all in ourselves, allowing our Lord to enter our souls and to rule there; and also in those we are dealing with, accompanying them so that they reach the conviction that Jesus is their best Friend.

Therefore it is essential that we constantly improve our theological formation, that we go deeper—in accord with each one’s needs and circumstances—into the topics of public discussion related to the fundamental aspects of revelation.

In explaining the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church, the Pope stresses another point of great importance for today’s world. He states that the great error of the ancient pagan religions consisted in not adhering to the paths traced out by divine wisdom in the depths of man’s soul. Therefore, the decline of the pagan religion was inevitable: it was a logical consequence of the detachment of religion—reduced to an artificial collection of ceremonies, conventions and customs—from the truth of being. The early Fathers and Christian writers, in contrast, made the choice of the truth of being against the myth of custom. Tertullian, the
Pope recalls for us, wrote: *Dominus noster Christum veritatem se, non consuetudinem, cognominavit*. Christ our Lord affirmed that he was the Truth, not custom. And Benedict XVI remarked: it should be noted in this regard that the term consuetudo, used here by Tertullian in reference to the pagan religion, can be translated into modern languages with the expressions “cultural fashion,” “current fads.”

Today as well, the shipwreck of those who try to do without God is certain. Despite the apparent victory of relativism in some places, this way of thinking and of living will end up collapsing like a house of cards, since it is not anchored in the truth of God the Creator and in his divine Providence, which directs the paths of history.

We Christians know that we are freer than anyone, because we do not allow ourselves to be dragged about by momentary fads. The Church wants her children to be responsible and consistent Catholic citizens, so that the mind and heart of each of us are not dispersed, each going in its own direction, but consistent and firm, doing at every moment what one clearly sees has to be done, without letting oneself be dragged along, through lack of personality and of loyalty to one’s conscience, by passing tendencies or fashions: so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles (*Eph* 4:14).

At the beginning of this letter I mentioned that devotion to St. Josemaría is continuing to spread throughout the world. A few days ago (and these are not the only quite recent examples) a stone plaque was unveiled in Reggio Calabria commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of our Father’s visit to that city, and a street in Fiuggi was named after him. And today, July 1, a parish church in Valencia is being dedicated to St. Josemaría. This is why my letter is dated here, since I have come to this city through the invitation of my dear friend and brother in the episcopate, Archbishop García Gasco, to take part in the liturgical ceremony. Please join me in giving thanks, and let us continue working, each in one’s own place, so that this spirit of God may reach new environments and people.

It gives me great joy to tell you that since this past June 26 your brothers who are beginning the stable activity of the Work in Russia have
been in Moscow. Let us accompany them closely with our prayer, during these first moments and always; and let us prepare for the future expansion.

Upon seeing all of your letters on the occasion of my birthday, I was filled with embarrassment and joy. I have thanked each and every one of you. As our Father used to say, ask Him about it, if you have any doubts.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father
+ Javier

Valencia, July 1, 2007

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Letter of August 2007

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

I reminded you last month, with the example of the early Christians, that the apostolate of God’s children should be optimistic, filled with the assurance of its effectiveness. The Master told us: euntes docete omnes gentes (Mt 28:19)—go throughout the whole world, teaching the Gospel to every creature. And he did not leave us alone: I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28:20).

One can understand why, for St. Josemaría, the world seemed small. I recall (I heard him recount it) something that happened in April 1936. He had gone to Valencia to prepare the ground for the first apostolic expansion of Opus Dei outside of Madrid. While there he spoke to a university student about the possibility of joining the Work. As they were walking along, they reached the shore of the Mediterranean. The fellow remarked: “Father, how big the sea is!” St. Josemaría immediately replied: But to me it seems small. He was thinking of other seas and other lands, where his daughters and sons were to go as soon as possible, carrying with them the spirit received from God. And his heart was filled with zeal for souls right to the last moment.

In those years, due to the hazards of the Spanish Civil War, the desired
apostolic expansion could not be carried out. He was not discouraged, not even when in August 1936 he was forced to leave the house where he lived with his mother and brother and sister, fleeing from the religious persecution that had been unleashed.

Several very difficult months followed, during which our Founder found himself at least twice on the verge of martyrdom. In those circumstances, as you know, he took refuge in various places that offered a modicum of safety. Nevertheless, he continued exercising his priestly ministry to the extent possible and provided spiritual care to the first members of the Work. When on August 31, 1937—seventy years ago now—he was able to leave the precarious refuge where he had remained for several months, he dedicated himself with renewed intensity to his spiritual work (which he had also carried out in the Honduran Consulate), even risking his life. The fruit of that sowing was not lost. Apart from the fact that it was plentiful even then, it was gathered abundantly later on, thanks to the splendid flourishing of people chosen by God to serve him in Opus Dei.

St. Josemaría felt himself to be a citizen of the world. He didn’t consider himself a foreigner anywhere. He discovered right away the positive side of each country and tried to learn from the people there. He was concerned about every human being, also those he didn’t yet know. During his apostolic trips, he prayed generously for everyone. He could truly state that he had carried out the “prehistory” of the Work—the preparation for its future apostolic work—in many countries where the faithful of Opus Dei would later carry out their apostolate. I would say in all of them, because in his periods of prayer before the tabernacle and in his long hours of work in his office, he would go again and again throughout the whole world, putting at our Lord’s feet the future work of his daughters and sons. He liked to have a map of the world on his table; it helped him to travel around the world in his imagination, with a hunger to Christianize or re-Christianize it.

We too, like our Father, have to go out in search of everyone. We can’t be indifferent about anyone: out of a hundred souls we are interested in a hundred (St. Josemaría, Furrow, no. 183). Consider these words of Benedict XVI addressed to all Catholics: we cannot keep to ourselves the
joy of the faith. We must spread it and pass it on, and thereby also strengthen it in our own hearts. If faith is truly the joy of having discovered truth and love, we inevitably feel the desire to transmit it, to communicate it to others. The new evangelization to which our beloved Pope John Paul II called us passes mainly through this process.

With delicacy and respect we must address a special but clear and courageous invitation to follow Jesus to those young men and women who appear to be the most attracted and fascinated by friendship with him (Address at the inauguration of the diocesan assembly of Rome, June 11, 2007).

We have to place before many young girls and boys the possibility of serving the Church and souls in Opus Dei, in celibacy or in marriage. Our Lord is determined to send a great number of apostles to all parts of the world to spread the joyful announcement of the Gospel, with the example of their lives and the force of their words. Let us not be held back by difficulties raised by the culture or environment, even if these are objective. Because God’s grace is also very “objective.” It is the principal factor on which we always have to count. Therefore, with words of our Father, I repeat: it’s a matter of faith!

Let’s be convinced that God, from before the creation of the world (Cf. Eph 1:4), has chosen many women and men to be fishers of men (Lk 5:10), serving him indiviso corde (Cf. 1 Cor 7:25-30), with undivided heart, without the mediation of a human love. Let us consider then, as addressed us, those words from the prophet Jeremiah that our Father applied to the specific circumstances of each person. Behold, I am sending many fishermen, says the Lord, and I will catch those fishes (Jer 16:16). That is his way of explaining the great task we have before us: we must become fishermen. The world is often compared, in conversation or in books, with the sea. It is a good comparison, for in our lives, just as in the sea, there are quiet times and stormy seasons, periods of calm and gusts of strong wind. One often finds souls swimming in difficult waters, in the midst of heavy waves. They travel through stormy weather, their journey a sad rushing around, despite their apparently cheerful expressions and their boisterousness. Their bursts of laughter are a cover for their discouragement and ill-temper. Their lives are bereft of charity and understanding. Men, like fish, devour each other.
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,’ (Mt 4:19), he says to Peter and Andrew (St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 259).

Benedict XVI, in the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, insisted: as we follow Christ in this mission to be fishers of men, we must bring men and women out of the sea that is salted with so many forms of alienation and onto the land of life, into the light of God...There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him. The task of the shepherd, the task of the fisher of men, can often seem wearisome. But it is beautiful and wonderful, because it is truly a service to joy, to God’s joy which longs to break into the world (Homily, April 24, 2005).

It should not surprise us that some people put up resistance to this marvelous invitation. Including men or women with excellent human qualities, people who could give a lot of glory to God and be effective instruments in his hands, and who nevertheless do not respond, or at least not as quickly as one would like. As St. Josemaría said: What compassion you feel for them! You would like to cry out to them that they are wasting their time. Why are they so blind, and why can't they perceive what you—a miserable creature—have seen? Why don't they go for the best?

Pray and mortify yourself. Then you have the duty to wake them up, one by one, explaining to them—also one by one—that they, like you, can find a divine way, without leaving the place they occupy in society (St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 182).

Look at what St. Augustine says regarding those who did not seem disposed to listen to him when he urged them to change their behavior, to be good Christians. Speaking of the duties of the good shepherd—and all of us in the Church have to be at the same time both sheep and shepherd—the Holy Doctor wrote: “There are obstinate sheep. When you seek them, because they are astray, they say in their error and for their
perdition that they have nothing to do with us. ‘Why do you want us? Why are you seeking us?’ As though the reason we are concerned about them and are seeking them were not that they are in error and are lost. They answer: ‘If I am in error, if I am lost, why do you want me? Why are you looking for me?’ Because you are in error and I want to call you back, because you are lost and I want to find you. ‘But I want to be in error, I want to be lost.’ You want to be in error and be lost? Then how much greater is my desire to prevent it! I dare to be even inopportune. Listen to the Apostle’s advice: “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2). To whom in season? To whom out of season? In season to those who want it; out of season to those who do not want it” (St. Augustine, Sermon 46, On Shepherds, no. 14).

My daughter, my son, are you doing apostolate every day? Do you take advantage of all the opportunities, without human respect? Do you remember those words from the Gospel—hominem non habeo (Jn5:7)—so that no one may say of us, of you, that he did not have anyone to help him?

As we do every year around this time, we are preparing for the great solemnity of the Assumption of our Lady, when we renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When asking her, echoing our Father and our beloved Don Alvaro, to prepare and preserve a safe way for us—iter para tutum, iter serva tutum!—let us especially place in her hands the apostolic expansion in so many countries: those in which we are beginning, those others to which we hope to go as soon as possible, and those in which we have been working for years, so that the spirit of the Work may arrive as soon as possible to many other places.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Pamplona, August 1, 2007
My dear children: may Jesus watch over my sons and daughter for me!

It fills me with joy to tell you how I saw our Father’s gratitude and happiness grow when All Saints’ Day arrived, the solemnity we are celebrating today. He was also deeply moved by frequently meditating on the hymn to the Cross attributed to the apostle St. Andrew, whose feast we celebrate on the 30th. Lying between those two feasts are other commemorations that can help us place our spiritual life in step with the rhythm marked out for us by the Church in the liturgy, remembering St. Josemaría’s advice that our prayer should be liturgical (cf. St. Josemaría, The Way, no. 86).

On today’s solemnity, we want to express our gratitude as we reflect on the Communion of Saints: one of the articles of faith that we profess in the Creed. The Church triumphant, suffering and militant—the one Church founded by Christ, in the various states in which it now finds itself—becomes very present to us today. Let us meditate frequently on this consoling truth: “The saints are not a small caste of chosen souls but an innumerable crowd to which the liturgy urges us to raise our eyes. This multitude not only includes the officially recognized saints, but the baptized of every epoch and nation who sought to carry out the divine will faithfully and lovingly. We are unacquainted with the faces and even the names of many of them, but with the eyes of faith we see them shine in God’s firmament like glorious stars” (Benedict XVI, Homily, November 1, 2006).

No Christian should feel alone, for if he shares in the divine life through grace, he is always in close union with Jesus and his Blessed Mother, with the angels and the blessed who are enjoying God in heaven; with the holy souls being purified in Purgatory; and with all those who are still journeying on earth, fighting joyfully, as Sacred Scripture tells us, the battles of God (cf. 1 Macc 3:2). Let us stir up in our soul the fortitude this reality brings, and spread this truth in our conversations with others.

When you pray, work or rest, in the various moments of your day, strive to pray, work and rest close to our Lord, accompanying your brothers and sisters throughout the whole world, especially those who live and work in places where the Church faces more difficulties. How aware are you that
people need your fidelity, your fraternity? Does this thought help you to raise your mind to God, to feel the urgency of the new evangelization?

A few days ago I made a quick trip to Kazakhstan, to accompany your sisters and brothers in that country. I went there also in your name, with the desire to bring them the warmth of your affection, your charity, your interest. Thanks be to God, supported by our prayers, they are working with joy and filled with hope. And the fruit is already beginning to appear. The number of men and women interested in the Catholic faith and the spirit of Opus Dei is growing. They dream of the day when the Church, and therefore the Work, will have sunk deep roots in all of Central Asia. Let us accompany them in their apostolic efforts with our prayer and small mortifications, which, through the Communion of Saints, will be very efficacious. Does our zeal for souls lead us each day to travel in our thoughts throughout the world? Do we consider the apostolate being done in every country?

The same can be said of those working in Russia, in South Africa, in India, in the Nordic countries... in so many places throughout the world. Aren't you eager, like St. Josemaría, to travel throughout the whole world in your prayer, to bring the strength of your dedication? Do you try to imbue each day, from morning to night, with the clear awareness that the new evangelization and the apostolic expansion is everyone's task, each in his or her own place? I see that I am asking you and myself many questions, but they are springing forth spontaneously because we have received from the Master this mission: Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15).

On the 2nd, the commemoration of the faithful departed, we will naturally keep especially present our loved ones—faithful of the Work, members of our respective families, friends and acquaintances—who have already gone to the other life. On that day priests are allowed to celebrate three Masses offered in suffrage for the dead. In many places, it is also customary for the faithful to visit cemeteries and decorate the graves with flowers. Let us carry out these good traditions with piety, trying to highlight the Christian meaning they contain, and teach others to do likewise.
We will also celebrate two feasts in the middle of the month that should help to strengthen our union with the Roman Pontiff, praying with greater intensity for him and for his intentions, and praying assiduously for those who assist him in the government of the Church. The 9th is the liturgical commemoration of the dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the cathedral of Rome, the Mother and Head of all the churches of the city of Rome and of the world, as an inscription on its façade says. And on the 18th, we will celebrate the dedication of the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul.

Let us beseech God that Catholics may grow in their love for the One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church, as our Father liked to emphasize. Thus we will show “with exquisite fidelity our union with the Pope, which is union with Peter. Love for the Roman Pontiff,” wrote St. Josemaría, “must be in us a wonderful passion, for in him we see Christ” (St. Josemaría, Homily, *Loyalty to the Church*, June 4, 1972).

At the same time, we should react to the criticisms or failures to obey the Pope’s decisions that we may have witnessed like a child who truly loves his parents: with a firmer union to his indications and teachings, with a more willing obedience and with a greater effort to ensure that those we are in contact with—and if we have the opportunity, also those who work in the media—show respect and adhesion, in word and in deed, to the Vicar of Christ and the See of Rome. Let us always be optimistic because the word of God cannot fail. As Benedict XVI reminds us: “Our Lord entrusts Peter with the mission of strengthening the brethren through the promise of his prayer. Peter’s mission is anchored in Jesus’ prayer. It is this that gives him the certainty that he will persevere despite all human wretchedness” (Benedict XVI, Homily, June 29, 2006).

On November 21, the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, we are invited to reflect on Mary’s total dedication to God right from her childhood. It is a good opportunity to make a deep examination: let us desire with all the strength of our soul to be completely God’s. Let us make a greater effort to be very faithful to the Christian vocation we received in baptism. And in order to do so, let us consider how lovingly we have recourse, with the necessary frequency, to the holy sacrament of Penance. We need to overcome any difficulties, so as to avoid delaying it.
I don’t want to fail to mention that on this Marian feast, on the night between the 21st and 22nd of November 1937, seventy years ago now, our Lady wanted to offer St. Josemaría a visible sign that she was accompanying him very closely during those days filled with great hardship of the crossing of the Pyrenees: a gilded wooden rose that had probably adorned one of the altars in a church near where he had spent the night (cf. Andrés Vázquez de Prada, The Founder of Opus Dei, vol. II, pp. 140-147).

Let us unite ourselves in a special way to our Founder on that significant date, with deep gratitude to God and to our Mother, for their constant protection of the Church, the Work, and each one of us.

Sunday, the 25th, is the solemnity of Christ the King. Once more we will renew the consecration of Opus Dei to the Most Sacred and Merciful Heart of Jesus, which St. Josemaría did for the first time in October 1952. Then he asked especially for peace in the world, in the Church, in the Work, in souls. This petition continues being timely and urgent, which will always be the case, since humanity easily strays off the path that leads to God and, as a result, men and women lose their peace. On renewing this consecration, ask Jesus to illumine especially the minds of those who govern the various countries, so that they may strive to foster peace, true peace: that which begins in the heart of each person and from there spreads to others.

Pray also for your brothers who will receive diaconal ordination in Rome on the eve of this solemnity. May our Lord make them very holy for us!

Almost at the end of the month, on November 28th, we will have the joy of celebrating the 25th anniversary of the pontifical act by which John Paul II erected Opus Dei as a personal Prelature. How many memories come to my head as I recall the gifts we have received from God during these years! I have very present to me our Father, who joyfully accepted not seeing the fulfillment of his “special intention,” so that it might become a reality during the years of his successor; and the faith and strength of our dearly beloved Don Alvaro, who was supported by the prayer and sacrifice of countless persons throughout the whole world, so that Heaven would grant this to us. I feel the need to remind you that we cannot consider those times as a “golden age” in the history of the Work, as something that one
recalls with gratitude, but that now has passed. These times have to be always very present to us. We will bring this about by our fidelity to the spirit of Opus Dei, by the intensity of our prayer, by our constant apostolic zeal.

You will have heard by now that, with the desire to honor our Lady, whom “we find smiling on all the crossroads of our path” (St. Josemaría, Notes taken in a meditation, October 11, 1964), in commemoration of the establishment of the Prelature and as a preparation for the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Work, we will live in Opus Dei a Marian year, which will last from the upcoming November 28th until the same date in 2008. I can imagine your joy on learning of this decision. I want to follow in the footsteps of our most dearly beloved Don Alvaro (I don’t mind repeating that superlative) who in 1978 convoked a Marian year in preparation for the golden anniversary of the Work: a period that later, providentially, was extended until the end of 1980. Let us live this new Marian year with the spirit transmitted by our Father’s first successor, which he had personally contemplated in St. Josemaría. I remind you of this with words taken from the family letter he wrote to us on January 9, 1978.

He told us that on the last day of 1977, when praying before the holy remains of our Founder, and upon considering that the year just beginning would be the golden anniversary of Opus Dei, he asked himself: “What will we do so that our thanksgiving isn’t just a passing flash of light, or something expressed only with our lips, but rather the sign of a permanent leap of quality in our interior struggle, that is to say, of greater union with God in everything?

“The answer came to my mind immediately. I sensed right away (without anything miraculous) a clear suggestion from our Father, to give us specific guidance in the year we are beginning: go by the short-cut that I have taught you, in order to draw closer to God. My daughters and sons, the advice is clear: we will go to the protection of “the Lady of the sweet name, Mary,” as our Father wrote in Holy Rosary. We will love our Lady more, and be more attentive to her. We will entrust each day, to the one who is the Daughter, Mother and Spouse of God, and our Mother, the homage of our self-giving, to present it before the Blessed Trinity as a
heartfelt sign of thanksgiving. In a word, I reached the conclusion that to live a prolonged and authentic act of thanksgiving during this time, the best way, the way most pleasing to God, is to make this year a Marian year” (Don Alvaro del Portilllo, Family Letters, vol. II, no. 131).

Let us imitate such a good example, with the eagerness to turn each of our days into Marian days, through the love we show our Mother.

We will end the month of November with the feast of St. Andrew, the brother of the Prince of the Apostles, so venerated by the Eastern Churches. Let us go to his intercession so that all who are honored with the name of Christian may reach full union with St. Peter’s successor.

With all my affection, I bless you and ask for your prayers—as always!

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, November 1, 2007

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**Homilies**

At the inauguration of the academic year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Basilica of St. Apollinaris, Rome (October 8, 2007)

*Inaugurating the academic year,*

*Pontifical University of the Holy Cross,*

*Basilica of St. Apollinaris*

Dear professors, students, and staff:
At the beginning of this new academic year, as we celebrate the Mass of the Holy Spirit, we invoke the Paraclete to illuminate our hearts and intercede for our protection.

The renovation of this building, which offers us so many new possibilities for our work, is reason to give thanks to God. It also invites us to renovate our lives with a desire to praise the Lord through our work. If you permit me this comparison, we can see in the reinforcement of the walls and foundation together with the renovation of the windows, a symbol of our own work, which we want to fulfill every day with greater love and perfection.

Many people from all over the world send their prayers and generous contributions to support the work we are endeavoring to carry out in our university for the good of the Church. This is great responsibility. It is beyond any merely human power and requires a full and decisive effort.

When I think of the activity of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, I am reminded of an aspiration that Saint Josemaría liked to repeat: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam,* “All with Peter to Jesus through Mary.”[1] Today these words can help us, in the presence of God, to consider the need for renewing our academic and spiritual life, which is necessary for fulfilling the mission our Lord has given us.

*Omnes Cum Petro*

For us, this *Omnes cum Petro* calls to mind that we are in Rome. We have come to the city which holds the remains of Saint Peter. Here lives his successor, head of the universal Church, the “sweet Christ on earth,” as Saint Catherine of Siena used to call him. In the city of Rome, the first Christians listened to the voices of Peter and Paul. Here they heard the words of God directly from an Apostle who had lived with Jesus for three years. Rome is the city which became the engine of evangelization for the entire empire.

Dear students and professors, your family and friends probably look at you with holy envy—and rightly so—because you are so close to where the Holy Father lives. From various places in this very building, one need only raise his eyes to see the dome of Saint Peter’s. Coming from every continent, you feel in this city the breath and vitality of the universal
Church. We manifest the unity of the universal Church when we feel the Holy Father to be a true father, present in our hearts, a father whom we should accompany with filial love, with our prayer, and with our work.

We should manifest our closeness to the Holy Father in concrete acts: praying for him at Holy Mass; offering our small difficulties to God for his intentions; listening to his pastoral teaching; obeying him as sons in everything.

*Omnes cum Petro, ad Iesum per Mariam…*

*Ad Iesum...* Jesus should be the center of our lives. He is the reason why we work here. Our life on earth is circumscribed by time. We must use this time well, for if it is lived with intensity and supernatural vision, it links us with eternity.

Every year, ineluctably, people dear to us pass away. Through them, our Lord reminds us that we are only passing through this life. Some of them have been in our classrooms as professors, students, employees, benefactors, and relatives. We remember them in our prayer. This prayer helps us raise our eyes to eternity, to Jesus, our Savior. Jesus is the meaning of our lives. He is the object of our study. He is the reason why we work. Without Him, without our desire to place Him constantly in the center of our life, we would be missing what is most fundamental.

Benedict XVI desires that the 2000th anniversary of Saint Paul’s birth be celebrated in a special way in 2008. We will recall his zeal for souls and his love for Jesus, which can be seen in the letter he wrote to the Romans of his time and to all of us who now live in Rome: “I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, neither present nor what will come, nor power, nor the heights nor depths, nor any other creature can ever separate us from the love of God, in Jesus Christ, our Lord” (*Rom* 8:38-39).

The task to which we are all dedicated, each in his own way, is to announce Jesus, to know his love, and to make Him known. We know that the work done here will help give sustenance to millions of souls who are starving for eternal truth. Jesus is truly and substantially present in the Eucharist. In the Sacrifice of the Mass, He gives himself to everyone. We
should correspond to his love by our desire to make him known and spread his message. He awaits us in the tabernacle, seeking our intimacy, our friendship, and our love.

_Omnes cum Petro, ad Iesum per Mariam…_

_Per Mariam..._Over the centuries Christians have lived the month of October with special love for Mary, and have sought Jesus through her in the mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Throughout the entire academic year, Holy Mary our Mother will look upon us with love and joy, just as she has throughout our lives, as a mother with her son. When we look affectionately at the picture of Mary which, next to the crucifix, presides over every classroom, she appreciates our love. She directs our gaze to Him who made her blessed to all generations. May she direct us to Jesus, so that He may become the center of our lives and we may find in Him all that we need.

Amen.

[1] _Christ is Passing By_, no. 139.

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At the diaconal ordination of faithful of the Prelature, St. Eugene's Basilica, Rome (November 24, 2007)

_At the diaconal ordination_
_of 36 faithful of the Prelature,_

_St. Eugene's Basilica_

My dear Brothers and Sisters:

My dear sons who will soon receive the diaconate:

1. There come to mind the words with which St. Josemaría began a letter, back in 1956, to priests incardinated in Opus Dei: “You have been ordained to serve...Your priestly mission is a mission of service.”[1]
These words—to serve—are very appropriate for the event that has brought us together in the Basilica of St. Eugene. Not only because thirty-six faithful of the Prelature will be receiving the order of the diaconate, but also because in the Holy Mass, making present the salvific work fulfilled on Calvary, our Lord Jesus Christ is inviting us to participate personally in the great work of service to humanity that is the Redemption.

I would like to remind you that the desire to serve God and all souls has to be one of the essential characteristics of Christians, of all of us, both laity and priests. Our Founder, in the letter I just cited, added, while giving thanks to God for his mercy: “I know that this phrase, ‘to serve,’ sums up your desires, your whole life, and it is your pride and my consolation.”

The solemnity of Christ, King of the universe, highlights in a special way this intense desire. The kingdom promised to David, to which the first reading refers, was only a foreshadowing—a shadow in respect to the reality—of the messianic kingdom that Christ would come to inaugurate. Christ’s kingdom—“a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace,” as we proclaim in the Preface—is not conquered by force, but by humility; it consists not in domination, but in service; it is identified not with political or economic power, but with the forgiveness of sins and an outpouring of God’s grace (cf. Col 1:12-20).

All of this, which has been fully accomplished by Christ on Calvary, becomes present in a sacramental way in every celebration of the Eucharist. The Holy Mass is the principal service that the Church, and, in its name, the sacred ministers, can render to humanity. As Benedict XVI stressed on the occasion of a priestly ordination: “the mystery of the Cross is at the center of Jesus’ service as a shepherd: it is the great service that he renders to all of us. He gives himself, and not only in a distant past. In the Holy Eucharist he does so every day; he gives himself through our hands, he gives himself to us.”

Look at Christ’s triumphal throne: the wood of the Cross, as St. Luke tells us in today’s Gospel. I am always moved by the scene we have just read. Jesus, on the Cross, at the point of death, hears the humble prayer of the good thief. Let us pause once more at this human and divine dialogue,
words that will often give us strength and confidence to return anew to our Lord. Hearing the petition of Dismas, “Jesus, remember me, when you come into your kingdom,” our Lord responds: “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23, 42-43). As St. Josemaría liked to say, this thief “recognized that he himself deserved that awful punishment... And with a word he stole Christ’s heart and opened up for himself the gates of heaven.”[4] Such is the great power of contrition, of sincere sorrow for our sins, with a resolution to never commit them again!

2. All of us, as Christian faithful, are called to assist Christ in applying the work of redemption. To carry out this service, we have everything necessary: prayer and the sacraments. Let us pray, then, for our relatives, friends and acquaintances. Let us invite them to frequently receive Penance, the sacrament of divine mercy, and the Eucharist, sacramentum caritatis, the pledge of eternal life.

Each of us should carry out this service with the example of our irreproachable Christian behavior, with an opportune word, with good advice.... You, my deacon sons, besides the ways that are common to all the faithful, from today on will be called to assist in the extension of Christ’s kingdom through the exercise of the diaconate, which will enable you to offer, in the name of Christ and the Church, the service of the altar, of the word and of charity. Later, when you receive the priesthood, your way of assisting will be even more efficacious, since you will be able to act in the name and in the person of Christ, especially in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

All the faithful, as members of Christ’s Mystical Body, have the right and duty to participate in the Church’s mission, and therefore in its work of fostering the unity of Christians. I remind you that, to hasten the longed-for moment when all Christians are united under the guidance of the Roman Pontiff, the principal means is constant and faith-filled prayer. Let us pray, then, for the Pope and for all those who assist him in governing the Church. Let us pray for the bishops, the priests, the seminarians of the whole world. Oremus pro unitate apostolatus: this is the first and fundamental way we can lend assistance. We should unite to our prayer the offering of our work and rest, of the joys and hardships of life.
These reflections are very timely, since, as you know, the Holy Father has this morning celebrated a public consistory for the appointment of new cardinals. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit that they be—as the ancient formula for their oath of investiture says—*fideles usque ad sanguinis effusionem*, faithful to the Church and the Pope until death. In the past few days, Benedict XVI has placed before the College of Cardinals the study of several topics related to ecumenism. We too should feel the urgency of this ardent desire, praying for this intention with greater intensity and constancy.

3. I don't want to end without alluding to a significant event that we will recall in Opus Dei within a few days, on the 28th of this month: the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the personal prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei.

I have already had occasion to point out that, for the faithful of the Prelature, the priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, and the cooperators and all those who assist in the Work’s apostolates, this date has to be an occasion for fervent thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity for the gift that was granted to us twenty-five years ago, and for so many others that have followed in the course of these two-and-a-half decades.

Despite our littleness, the Prelature, in full harmony with the spirit that our Lord infused into St. Josemaría’s soul on October 2, 1928, has provided so many pastoral services to the universal Church, to the local Churches and to a very great number of souls throughout the world and from every walk of life. Faced with this reality, our prayer can be summed up in a single phrase: *Deo omnis gloria!* Let us give all the glory to God.

As well as to God and our Lady, our gratitude is directed in a special way to the unforgettable Pope John Paul II, who erected the Prelature through his apostolic authority. We also give thanks to our Father, a priest who was completely faithful to the divine will, and to our beloved Don Álvaro del Portillo, who with God’s help brought to completion the task our Founder entrusted to him.

My dear brothers and sisters, beloved daughters and sons: Let us entrust our gratitude to Mary, our Mother, through whose intercession all of heaven’s graces reach us. I encourage you to stay very close to Mary each
day. In this way, the upcoming year that will end on November 28, 2008, will truly be a Marian year for all of us.

May Jesus Christ be praised!


[2] Ibid.


At the Marian Family Congress, Shrine of Torreciudad (September 8, 2007)

At the Marian Family Congress,

the Shrine of Torreciudad

My dear brothers and sisters:

We thank you, our triune God, and also you, Holy Mary, for the gift of being able to take part in this 18th Marian Family Congress, at the Shrine of Torreciudad.

We feel closely united, through the Communion of Saints, with all the families in Spain, and those throughout the world, as we beseech the abundant blessings of heaven for each home. The founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá, taught us by his example to have an ardent love for our Mother, who will always be a sure recourse for us and for our families as we travel along the pathways of this earth. It is only natural that we go especially to the Virgin Mary and put these days under the protection of the Family of Nazareth, a close and perpetual model of the true family. But today we also have a reason for special joy; for we are celebrating with the whole Church the great feast of the Birth of the Mother of God.

The motto chosen for this year is The family, sanctuary of life. These words are very appropriate for today’s feast, because our Mother is the
primary Sanctuary of Life. As the entrance antiphon in today’s Mass says, Mary is worthy of all praise, because “from you came forth the son of justice, Christ, our Lord.”

We are filled with joy because we are commemorating the coming into this world of Mary, the Mother of the one who is Life, with a capital letter. In God’s loving plans, Mary is the person who brought to joyful fulfillment what had been announced by the prophet: “the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son and he shall be called Emmanuel.”[1] Thus, Mary is also the door through which we attain Life, the path to grow in our love for Christ. Thank you Mother because, as St. Josemaría taught us, “With that word of yours—fiat, ‘be it done’—you have made us brothers of God and heirs to his Glory. —Blessed art thou!”[2] “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,” our Lord says (Jn14:6). And St. Augustine comments: “He is the Life because he has possessed it from all eternity with the Father (cf. Jn 1:4), and because he has made us, through grace, sharers in that same divine life” (De verb. Dom. Serm. 54). Here is where our certainty is grounded, despite the many difficulties that may arise during our passage through this world.

The apostle St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, writes “We know that in everything God works for the good with those who love him.”[3] With a deep theological faith and hope, St. Josemaría summed this up in three words: omnia in bonum! For those who love God everything works for the good. We are not frightened by the abundance of evil. “God can do more!” He is all powerful, all merciful, ever faithful to his promises. He is, as St. John writes, a God who “loved us to the very end.”[4] And so that we may never doubt it, St. Mathew ends the Gospel passage we have just read with the meaning of the name Emmanuel: “God with us.”[5]

My dear families: Let us ask our Lady of Torreciudad that all the world’s families may learn to be sanctuaries of life. First, that they may accept joyfully, because it is a divine blessing, each daughter or son God sends them. I recall some words of my beloved predecessor Bishop Alvaro del Portillo: “Our Lord delights in large families, more necessary today than ever. With the ethos of material well-being—of selfishness—supported by a thousand unreasonable arguments, a propaganda campaign fostering fear of children has been skillfully organized. The rejection of the offspring God grants has taken root in many places, and in an especially alarming way in
countries where hedonism reigns. The natural order has been perverted to
give way to a defense of the instincts. Each one of you,” concluded Don
Alvaro, “is confronted with a marvelous task. Ask God to bless you with a
crown of children, in order to raise them as good sons and daughters of
God.”[6]

Let us also help families to accept and to increase, each day more
ardently, the divine life that Jesus has brought us through the Redemption.
And in a special way, let us urge them to ardently desire, and to beseech
God insistently, that he call their children to serve him in whatever way he
wants, through their sincerely Christian conduct. These are the greatest
“treasures” that are “guarded” in homes.

You know very well that the family is indispensable for society and for
the Church, because it is the setting where an integral formation and the
transmission of the faith takes place. As Benedict XVI recalled, “Christian
families are a crucial resource for education in the faith, for the building up
of the Church...as well as for acting as a Christian leaven in the cultural at
large and in social structures.”[7] Now, my dear sisters and brothers, when
the true nature of the family and marriage, one man with one woman, is
confronted with great dangers and menaces, we have an opportunity to
make known, with our words and our deeds, the great importance of these
fundamental truths.

Therefore, I insist, ask God for many offspring. But don’t be satisfied
with just bringing these children into the world. Continue giving your
entire life, as you are doing now, for each one of them. Also give them your
unfailing love and your supernatural outlook, so that they learn how to
behave as good Christians, and therefore as good citizens. Never be
satisfied with what you have already done, no matter how much it seems.
Keep in mind what the Holy Father often stresses: “Today, a particularly
insidious obstacle to the task of educating children is the massive presence
in our society and culture of relativism. Recognizing nothing as definitive,
relativism leaves as the ultimate criterion only the ego and its whims. And
under the guise of freedom, it becomes a prison for each one who falls prey
to it, since it separates people from one another, locking each person within
his or her own ‘ego.’”[8]
One often hears it said that, in this day and age, raising children isn't easy. With a marked pessimism, some people claim that even when parents and brothers and sisters do everything they can, it still isn't possible to prevent at least one of the children from going astray; or they may add that it's almost a utopia when all the children end up leading morally upright lives. Don't be discouraged. With God's grace this can always be achieved. There are so many examples of homes in which, through persistent effort and Christian and human optimism, the sound "family atmosphere" that helps children to develop correctly is found.

In this context, I want to comment briefly on a particularly important point. If you want, as you certainly do, that your homes be sanctuaries of life, where that marvelous atmosphere is breathed, take very much into account Benedict XVI's words: “for an authentic work of educating, it is not enough to communicate a correct theory or doctrine. Something far greater is needed: the daily experience of being close to others that is proper to love, found especially in the family community.”[9]

Therefore, if you want to attain this closeness with each daughter and son, dedicate the best of your time to them: “Your children are the most important thing—more important than your business or work or rest,” St. Josemaría stressed.[10] Listen to them patiently; show them your trust; dialogue with them; have meals with them whenever you can—overcoming all the obstacles. Try to take part together in liturgical celebrations and family feasts; help them in their “day to day” lives. Through this daily family unity you will be the first ones to learn; and also, by your example (“parents teach their children mainly through their own conduct”[11]), your children will grow in the virtues. You will come to appreciate how they mature, and how the older children “draw” the younger ones upward. You will thank God for your home, a true seedbed of life. And don't forget that, as a reward for your generosity and dedication, they will be able to respond to their Christian vocation, in whatever form it takes in God’s plans.

Here I would like to pass on a wish that I carry deep in my heart: be eager for God to grant the gift of apostolic celibacy to your daughters or sons, if that is his will. See this always as something joyful, because it truly is. St. Josemaría said on one occasion: “And so a Christian who seeks to sanctify himself in the married state and is conscious of the greatness of his
own vocation, spontaneously feels a special veneration and deep affection towards those who are called to apostolic celibacy. When one of his children, by God’s grace, sets out on this path, he truly rejoices.”[12]

I also remind you that, as you carry out your work as mothers and fathers, you are not alone. You can count on the help of so many people who pray for you, and who are ready to help you in the task of educating young people. But above all, you can count on God’s help. Our Lord is always close to you. In this task of formation and the transmission of the faith, we should make use, first of all, of the supernatural means: prayer, assiduous conversation with our Lord, the reception of the sacraments. Pray, speak with God about your children. I will add what St. Josemaría often advised: “If I were to give advice to parents, I would tell them, above all, let your children see that you are trying to live in accordance with your faith...that God is not only on your lips, but also in your deeds; that you are trying to be loyal and sincere, and that you love each other and you really love them too.”[13]

“God with us.” Christ himself has remained really present, “always, to the close of the age,”[14] in the Holy Eucharist. He is the Bread of Life: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”[15] Nourish and sustain your family life with this divine treasure, so that all its members will have life. Try to take part at least at Sunday Mass; and if you can go every day, all the better. And go to adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, through brief visits, or accompany him from your home, from your place of work.

Act in such a way that your children can sense your faith in the real presence of Christ when you make a genuflection before the tabernacle; when you follow each part of the Mass with attention and devotion; and when you prepare with dignity and reverence, even in the way you dress, to receive our Lord in Holy Communion. Don Alvaro del Portillo said that our Lady, “to be worthy to become the Mother of God, was conceived without stain of original sin, preserved immune from any personal fault, no matter how slight, and enriched with every gift and grace through the Holy Spirit.”[16] Mary was the first sanctuary of life.
My dear families, I repeat once more: Don't be afraid of life! God's strength is always far greater than any difficulties! And we have access to this strength above all in the Eucharist,[17] as John Paul II stressed right from the beginning of his Pontificate. And he added: “The future of humanity passes by way of the family.”[18]

Let us go to the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth. May it be for everyone and for our homes a point of reference, an object of constant trusting prayer. And at the same time, may it be a model in our efforts to give witness to Christ and to bring, to those around us, the life of the children of God. Amen.

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[18] John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio, no. 86.
At the inauguration of the academic year, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 8, 2007)

At the inauguration of the academic year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

Most excellent and honored guests, professors, students and all who work at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross:

With our heart full of thanks to our Lord, we are here once again to start a new academic year, the 24th of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Seeing the basilica of Saint Apollinare and the building where we sit, our gratitude is almost tangible. Over many centuries these buildings have witnessed the tradition of ecclesiastical studies; now, happily, their renovation has restored them to their former splendor.

The remodeling of the library building is also near completion. My thoughts go out to all those who in various ways have made these goals possible: to the numerous benefactors throughout the entire world and their generous support, and to all of you, faculty, administrators and students, who have worked throughout this year with the unavoidable distractions caused by the construction.

All this effort allows our University to better fulfill its mission of service to the Church, through teaching and research in the various sacred disciplines, and in sincere dialogue with contemporary culture and society. As our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us, we live in a society which is suffering a “crisis of culture and identity, which in these
decades dramatically places itself before our eyes. The University is one of the best qualified places to attempt to find opportune ways to exit from this situation.”[1]

This opening to the world, to its problems and hopes, characterizes the specific mission of a university, and especially a university dedicated to ecclesiastical studies, which by their nature depend on divine revelation. With great emotion, I recall that Holy Mass which Saint Josemaría Escrivá celebrated on the campus of the University of Navarre exactly forty years ago, on the 8th of October 1967. There the Founder of Opus Dei gave an unforgettable homily, later published with the particularly expressive title of “Passionately Loving the World.” In this homily he outlined, in a penetrating way, the limitless panorama of holiness in the middle of the world, in and through one’s professional work lived as an authentic Christian vocation.

Now I would like to refer to this homily and draw your attention to something that touches the everyday task of each of you, faculty, students, administrative and technical personnel. You dedicate your strength and energies to this academic community, which serves people from all over the world who come to Rome, led by their desire to grow in faith and then communicate it to others with passion and drive.

In a well known quotation from the homily, Saint Josemaría forcefully reminds us that: “there is a something holy, divine, hidden in the most common situations, something which touches each of us which we are called to discover.”[2] That fascinating and pressing invitation directly concerns us, as we are about to begin another academic year. It pertains to the work of all of you, who in different ways participate in the realization of this initiative.

Of course, this invitation is worthwhile for every profession or activity in which a person may be involved, because it is a real path to union with God and with humanity. But it must be heeded in a special way when one's study, research and teaching involve God Himself and his revelation. That something divine, hidden in the everyday, demands that a soul to be attentive and docile to the actions of the Holy Spirit. It demands a sincere desire to open oneself to the mysteries of God in their entirety and an effort
personally to identify oneself with Jesus Christ and with his Word of
salvation. This permits us to discover unexpected panoramas and delineates
the university’s task in the Church and in society.

Certainly there will be moments in which this search for the divine
may become more difficult: in monotonous work that seems repetitive, in
the difficulty inherent in the completion of one’s own tasks, in the apparent
sterility of the work undertaken. In these moments, the task sustained by
the grace of God permits us to experience what Saint Josemaría promised:
“I assure you, my sons and daughters, that when a Christian carries out
with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with
the transcendence of God. That is why I have told you repeatedly, and
hammered away once and again on the idea that the Christian vocation
consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day.”[3]

I encourage you, professors, to give yourselves passionately to study and
research with creative originality, to know how to prepare yourselves to
meet the demands of contemporary culture. In a constructive dialogue with
your colleagues, you must see that you are the guides and teachers of the
next generation, which is being formed in your classroom.

I turn now to you, students, who have come from all over the world
and now spend these years in Rome, a privileged place to experience the
Church’s Catholicity. May these years be an occasion not only to learn
seriously your area of study, but also, through these studies, to open
yourself to the horizons of the Church alive in every part of the Earth, and
to rededicate yourself to the charity of Christ, which will help you to be of
authentic service to all men.

Those of you who have tasks of administration and technology, your
valuable work allows the teaching, study and research to be orderly and
efficient. By fulfilling your tasks with professionalism and competence, and
with your warm and attentive manner, you will make all those who come to
these buildings feel as if they were “at home.”

And finally, following the teachings of the gospel, I would like to
remind you that the something divine is found above all in charity, which
makes us discover the face of Christ in the people around us. They will
share the efforts, work and joy that we will encounter in this academic year
2007-2008 which, under the intercession of Holy Mary, we proclaim inaugurated.


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Articles and Interviews

"To attain the greatest "benefits" Revista Antiguos Alumnos del IESE, Barcelona, (December, 2007)

“Attaining the Greatest ‘Benefit’” an article published in Revista Antiguos Alumnos del IESE, Barcelona, on the school’s fiftieth anniversary

My first reaction on learning that the fiftieth anniversary of the IESE School of Business Management was approaching, was one of deep gratitude to God for the graces that have been poured forth on many people through this university center.

Also very present to me was the supernatural and human enthusiasm of St. Josemaría Escrivá when he urged forward this initiative. He had a clear awareness of the good that IESE, inspired by the spirit of the Gospel, could bring to society. In fostering its start, he contemplated in advance the development that, over time, would come to an institution of great professional prestige, dedicated to the formation of business people and executives who, at the heart of their mission, would have a great eagerness to serve and a desire to give their work a fully Christian orientation, and therefore a truly human one.
From IESE’s first steps—made possible by the interest of civil society—faithful of Opus Dei, cooperators and friends, together with many other people, have given their full backing to the project, aware they were contributing to giving sound orientation to the work of directing businesses, and thus to the bettering of society. My prayer and gratitude go out to all these people—to those who are assisting this apostolic work here below, and also to those who are now doing so from heaven.

In addition to the foundational mission entrusted to IESE, this golden anniversary leads me to recall some of St. Josemaría’s teachings on the sanctification of ordinary work. These teachings have a permanent value for all sectors of human activity, and therefore also for persons involved in tasks of management. They provide a point of reference for efforts to improve that professional field, which each day is more important for the human and social development of peoples.

**Loving people**

I have a very vivid memory of that October day back in 1972, when St. Josemaría held an affectionate dialogue at IESE with the directors of this educational center and other business people, during his unforgettable catechetical trip throughout the Iberian peninsula. One of those present asked him what the principle virtue of someone working in business should be. His answer centered on charity, “because justice alone is not enough,” he emphasized. This was a constant teaching of the founder of Opus Dei, who said that “the best kind of charity is to go overboard in regard to justice.”

He also said: “justice is to give each person what is his own; but I would add that this is not enough. No matter how much each deserves, we have to give more, because each soul is a masterpiece of God.”

Of course, charity should not be confused with a vague feeling of solidarity with needy persons or countries that are distant from us. This is not the same as true Christian solidarity, upon which John Paul II has left us teachings of great depth. It is very human to sympathize with the needs of others, but charity entails much more. “The charity of Christ is not merely a benevolent sentiment for our neighbor; it is not limited to a penchant for philanthropy. Poured out in our soul by God, charity transforms our mind and will from within. It provides the supernatural
foundation for friendship and the joy of doing what is right...Christian charity cannot be limited to giving things or money to the needy. It seeks, above all, to respect and understand each person for what he is, in his intrinsic dignity as a man and child of God.”[3]

Transcending ambitious plans and large profits, the most important thing in a business is to promote the good of those who work there or who are in contact with that enterprise. Despite the heightened demands of a competitive market, this primordial requirement of Christian morality can never be overlooked. The core of Christian morality comes down to following and imitating Jesus Christ, especially in his love.[4] As the beloved Pope John Paul II taught: “Jesus' way of acting and his words, his deeds and his precepts constitute the moral rule of Christian life.”[5] In his deeds and words, always centered on the commandment of fraternal charity (cf. Jn 13:34-35), Jesus' love for his Father and for mankind is revealed in an unequivocal way. Benedict XVI has forcefully recalled that God is Love (cf. 1Jn 4:16). “Since God has first loved us (cf. 1 Jn 4:10), love is now no longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.”[6]

St. Josemaría’s great love for his fellow men and women led him to stress the perennial Christian teaching on the intrinsic value of each person, created in God's image and called to be his son or daughter. This requires not only respecting all men and women, and never manipulating them or using them for one’s own self-interest; it also means truly loving each person, beginning with those closest to us, and manifesting that affection in specific deeds of service.

Professionalism, justice, and concern for all

A person with a right intention, with nobility of soul, knows how to seek justice and do good in the area of labor relations. A business that is properly oriented pursues the good of persons, and not merely material gain. The social doctrine of the Church stresses that economic activity should not be aimed only at producing more goods, solely for the purpose of augmenting profit or power; rather it should be ordained above all to the service of persons, of the whole person and the entire human community.[7] Respecting the rights of workers, clients and consumers, is an inalienable
demand of justice. But the effort to truly further the good of persons leads one to go beyond what is merely just, striving to make this world of ours more human.

Personal integrity and justice, since they are necessary in all human relations, also have to be put into practice in the sphere of business. We should never forget that someone who lacks the will to give to each person what is truly owed to them impoverishes himself and makes it difficult for people to live together. All injustice fosters divisions and tensions that can even provoke grave violence.

St. Josemaría referred frequently to the importance of always being truthful and just, in big things as well as small ones. In one of his homilies, he encouraged us to “resolve not to judge others, not to doubt their good will, to drown evil in an abundance of good, sowing loyal friendship, justice, and peace all around us.”[8]

In businesses, as in other spheres of life, circumstances can arise that make it difficult for people to live in harmony. Envy, rancor, discord, personal insults or injuries, and even natural differences of character and legitimate points of view, can make it difficult to attain common objectives and, what is most important, to exercise Christian charity. St. Josemaría, well aware of these risks, encouraged people to exercise the virtue of charity and the virtues that accompany it—availability to assist others, understanding, patience, the ability to forgive, etc. All of this comes down to fostering a true spirit of service. As he once said: “How difficult it often seems to eliminate the barriers to human harmony! And yet we Christians are called to bring about that miracle of brotherhood. We must work so that everyone, with God’s grace, can live in a Christian way, ‘bearing one another’s burdens’ (cf. Gal 6:2), keeping the commandment of love which is the bond of perfection and the essence of the law (cf. Col 3:14; Rom 13:10).”[9]

Unity of Life

Another of St. Josemaría’s central teachings is the importance of “unity of life.” This refers to the effort to live with Christian integrity in all areas of life. In a homily preached before more than twenty thousand people on the campus of the University of Navarra in October of 1967, he summed up
some essential features of this spirit, which he had been spreading since October 2, 1928, the date on which our Lord let him “see” Opus Dei. He recalled in his 1967 homily that, right from the beginning of his apostolic work, he would tell those coming to him that “they had to know how to ‘materialize’ their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side, an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities.”[10]

In that homily of his, preached forty years ago, he encouraged those present to foster a strong unity between the faith they professed and their specific way of acting. He urged them to be consistent with their condition as Christians in their family, at work, and in social relations. And he added forcefully: “There is only one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is that life which has to become, in both body and soul, holy and filled with God: we discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.”[11]

St. Josemaría was saddened by the fact that “many Christians are no longer convinced that the fullness of life that God rightly expects from his children means that they have to have a careful concern for the quality of their everyday work, because it is this work, even in its most minor aspects, which they have to sanctify....The work of each one of us, the activities that take up our time and energy, must be an offering worthy of our Creator. It must be operatio Dei, a work of God that is done for God: in short, a task that is complete and faultless.”[12]

One would fail to live as a child of God if, while excelling in a professional activity, the spirit of the Gospel did not have access to one's workday, or one failed to live up to fundamental ethical norms. A Christian can never stop being Christian: neither in business, nor in any other sphere of life. In addition to acquiring a sound knowledge of the moral law, especially as it relates to one’s specific profession, one has the duty of prudence to avoid decisions or strategies or organizational structures that could harm others unjustly or cause scandal.

St. Josemaría taught that a necessary consequence of love for personal freedom is pluralism.[13] There is room for many different business models and styles of management, but a person with faith, a well-formed,
responsible Christian with an upright conscience, will strive to ensure that these are always consistent with Christ’s faith and morality. This requires evaluating theories and proposals critically, filtering or adjusting them from a Christian viewpoint of the human person, in accord with the general principles of the Church’s social doctrine.\[14\]

The key is to grasp more deeply the meaning of one’s own work, an instrument for contributing to the progress of society and a principal means for personal sanctity and apostolate. “Get accustomed to referring everything to God,”\[15\] St. Josemaría advised. “When a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God.”\[16\]

When someone in the business sector works in this way, besides financial and social success, that person will attain the greatest “benefit”: encountering God, serving and loving him in their professional occupation and in daily life. In a word, their work truly becomes an instrument for their own sanctification and that of others.

\[1\] St. Josemaría, \textit{Friends of God}, no. 83.

\[2\] Ibid.


\[5\] Ibid., no. 20.

\[6\] Benedict XVI, Encyclical \textit{Deus Caritas Est}, December 25, 2005, no. 1

\[7\] Cf. \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church}, no. 2426

\[8\] St. Josemaría, \textit{Christ Is Passing By}, no. 72.

\[9\] Ibid., no. 157.

\[10\] Homily “Passionately Loving the World” in \textit{ Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá}, no. 114.

\[11\] Ibid.

Interview granted to Avvenire, Milan (November 28, 2007)

Interview granted to
Avvenire, Milan
(by Francesco Ognibene)

Opus Dei is the first and, up till now, the only personal prelature in the Catholic Church. What has this step, taken in 1982, meant for the Work?

John Paul II, with the apostolic constitution Ut Sit, erected Opus Dei, founded by St. Josemaría Escrivá on October 2, 1928, as a personal prelature. This canonical form, foreseen by the Second Vatican Council, is adapted to the spirit and reality of Opus Dei and facilitates the carrying out of the Work's mission in the Church and for the Church, in union with all the bishops of the various dioceses. It helps make the prayer of the Prelature’s faithful, both priests and laity, more fruitful and its evangelizing efforts more incisive. Thus it can offer the Church a solid contribution to the urgent task of evangelizing present-day society.

Why did the Founder, St. Josemaría, desire so strongly this type of juridical form?

Because in that way the canonical norm is aligned with the theological reality desired by our Lord. Opus Dei was founded by divine inspiration, as the apostolic constitution Ut Sit states, and thus has a foundational charism. It is now an ecclesiastical circumscription of a hierarchical
nature—as John Paul II said—made up of priests and laity, with a Prelate at its head, who is appointed by the Pope with the task of directing it, in communion with all the bishops. Opus Dei shares in the marvelous mission of the whole Church. To use an expression of St. Augustine with Pauline echoes, it shares in the mission of reconciling the world with God. Love for God and the love for the world are inseparable in the teaching of St. Josemaría, for in the world we encounter the Creator’s presence and mercy. As the Founder said, the Church is Christ present among us.

**What is the relationship between the Prelature’s faithful and the specific dioceses to which they belong?**

The Prelature of Opus Dei, with its 46 circumscriptions, is working in more than 60 countries and serves the Church in approximately 350 dioceses. Opus Dei’s first service to the dioceses, to the Church, is that of being very faithful to its message, proclaiming the universal call to sanctity in ordinary life and especially in the exercise of professional work. This, in turn, with God’s grace, fosters the growth of Christian life and brings about conversions; it can help increase attendance at Sunday Mass in the parishes and commitment to charitable works, among many other things. In addition, most of the priests of the Prelature provide other direct services to the local Churches, for example, helping out in the parishes, working in hospitals and schools, etc. Moreover, the Prelature always initiates its activities in a diocese with the local bishop’s permission.

**Could you describe the members of Opus Dei? What are they trying to achieve? How do they differ from other Catholics?**

The faithful of the Work are ordinary Catholics who through a specific vocation commit themselves to bringing Christ’s light to their family, social and professional settings. Using a comparison that is perhaps a bit simplistic, one could say that the music is the same for all Catholics, but in the orchestra each one plays a different instrument. The essential thing is the breath of the Holy Spirit. Those who draw close to Opus Dei receive Christian formation and spiritual guidance adapted to their particular circumstances, to help them live their Christian commitments in their ordinary life, each with one’s own responsibility. We don’t consider
ourselves better or different from others; nevertheless, we see an obligation
to live a radical commitment to our faith at each moment.

In these past 25 years, how has the Prelature helped to form lay people able
to confront the complex challenges we are facing today?

To answer this question, I would like to tell you about my recent trip to
Kazakhstan. A few days ago, I spent some time with the faithful of
Opus Dei who are living in a country where Catholics are a tiny minority.
They are working filled with joy and hope in the place in society where
they find themselves. And the first fruits are starting to appear. The
number of men and women interested in the Catholic faith is increasing.
They are dreaming of a future when the faith will set down strong roots in
Central Asia. The same spirit is animating so many people, ordinary
Christians, all over the world: the desire to bring Christ to those around
them through the testimony of their own lives, in ordinary everyday things,
through their example and their capacity to love and serve others. This is
what St. Josemaría called an apostolate of sincere and disinterested
friendship, as in the times of the early Christians. If one truly loves others,
a reciprocal trust and mutual understanding will arise, that soon becomes
true fraternity.

Interview granted to Niedziela,
Czestochowa, Poland (July 24, 2007)

Interview granted to
Niedziela, Czestochowa
(by Wlodzimierz Redzioch)

You are the head of an organisation of the Catholic Church which has
captured the attention of the media throughout the world. Unfortunately, as a
rule they show a distorted picture of the organisation. Could you tell us what
Opus Dei is?
Bishop Javier Echevarría: Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer often repeated that Opus Dei is "a Divine path for Christians who want to live as true Christians." The aim of Opus Dei members is not to do spectacular things. They are ordinary Christians who try to seek sanctity in their daily lives. Since the Prelature, a Church institution, consists of priests and laymen, i.e., ordinary people, we feel comfortable in the world, among people, at work, in our families... I will say even more: not only do we feel at ease in the world but we love the world, we love daily life with its thousands of obligations and tasks. One cannot be a Christian only at church, but one must be a Christian in the ordinary and prosaic affairs of daily life. One should lead a life of faith in God, of hope and love for all people—as the first Christians did—and then every day becomes a holy day. This idea of the “greatness” of daily life is the core of St. Josemaría’s message, an ideal that, thanks to God, is shared by many people, including those who do not belong to Opus Dei.

Concerning the media’s interest in the Prelature, I think that it results from the fact that there are so many persons who, through Opus Dei, are passionate about seeking a transcendent meaning in the reality in which we live. In a word, we are dealing with something that still “draws” people to Christianity, as Benedict XVI has stressed on various occasions.

*Opus Dei is what is known as a personal prelature. We know well what religious congregations or institutes of consecrated life are, but most Catholics have no idea what “personal prelature” means. Could you explain this term to us?*

A personal prelature is different from a religious congregation and from an institute of consecrated life. It is a structure of the Catholic Church to which both priests and laity can belong and whose head is a prelate...

*So we can say that this structure is similar to the structure of a diocese with believers all over the world...*

Not really, because a prelature does not intend to be a particular Church.

*Perhaps it is better to compare it to a military ordinariate?*

Yes, that is a better comparison.
You worked closely with the founder of Opus Dei for many years. What are your recollections of St. Josemaría?

Of course I have very many recollections, but what most struck me about Saint Josemaría was his joy, his faithfulness to the Church and his love for people. Whenever I act, I consider what St. Josemaría would do in a given situation. He was able to create out of nothing this marvelous reality within the Church, extended throughout the world, which is Opus Dei today—not only the lay persons and priests who belong to the Prelature, but also the millions of persons who cooperate with it. Of course, the Prelature wouldn’t exist without the action of God’s grace, but neither would it be possible without the response of one person—St. Josemaría—to God’s call.

St. Josemaría collected his spiritual maxims in a book entitled The Way, which is a true spiritual guide for members of Opus Dei. How can one describe your spirituality?

One important aspect of daily life, which I mentioned a moment ago, is undoubtedly one’s work. Besides encouraging regular prayer and a profound sacramental life, the message of Opus Dei focuses on work, which, if done conscientiously and seen as an offering to God and a service to one’s neighbour, can become a means of sanctification and an encounter with Christ. In the book which you mentioned, St. Josemaría writes: “For a modern apostle, an hour of study is an hour of prayer.” Another aspect of the spirituality of Opus Dei is the awareness of the divine filiation of every Christian. God is a Father, our Father, and this fact, if we fully understand it, changes everything radically; it allows us to face all the challenges of daily life in a positive way. I should also mention freedom, which in St. Josemaría’s message occupies an important place and is presented as a stimulus to a Christian commitment at the same time as it is inseparable from personal responsibility.

What were the relationships between Popes John XXII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Opus Dei?

The relationships between Opus Dei and the above-mentioned Popes were close and deep. Naturally, we should also mention Pius XII, John Paul I and Benedict XVI. As for John Paul II, I can say that he was like a
father to Opus Dei. He was the Pope who established Opus Dei as a personal prelature in 1982, after years of preparation, beginning at the time of the Second Vatican Council and carried on simultaneously with the preparation of the new Code of Canon Law. It was also John Paul II who canonized St. Josemaría in 2002, calling him “the saint of daily life.” One particular gesture of John Paul II made a deep impression on me: at the death of my predecessor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, he came personally to the church of the Prelature to pray before the remains of the deceased. Earlier, in 1984, John Paul II had given Don Álvaro a copy of the image of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Today this image occupies a place of honour in the curia of the prelature in Rome. Every time I see the icon I feel united with all Catholics in Poland. It also reminded me of my numerous pilgrimages to Czestochowa. The first one was with Bishop del Portillo in 1979 and the last one I made, as the prelate of Opus Dei, was on the feast of Our Lady of Jasna Gora, August 26, 2005. I am convinced that John Paul II has given a lot to the world and to the Church. Without any doubt, he gave a lot to Opus Dei, thanks to his spiritual fatherhood.

Many people were surprised that the Prelature’s response to the slanders contained in Dan Brown’s book, while unequivocal, was also tempered: you did not initiate a lawsuit against him or seek any compensation. Why did the Prelature react in this way?

Bishop Javier Echevarría: I would like to point out the fact that the most unfortunate aspect of Brown’s book is not what he says about Opus Dei but the falsified image of Christ and his Church that he presents to his readers. Opus Dei, which is a part of the Church, is a young, vibrant and beautiful reality. A writer’s inventions can obscure this beauty, and this is sad. However, we realise that the beauty of the Church, which includes Opus Dei, is revealed in its fullness when we show the love of Christ and do not yield to hurt feelings. In this perspective love is the best way to present the figure of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Church. This is why our reaction, which was decisive but also courteous, was a manifestation of our sense of responsibility. Let us not forget that love is Christ’s commandment and in fact his most important commandment.

I’ll repeat once again: what is most painful about The Da Vinci Code is the way in which the author attempts to trivialize the Person of Christ. It is
good to see that Pope Benedict XVI's new book established, at the center of cultural dialogue, the historical reality—human and divine—of Jesus Christ. This is a wonderful occasion for Christians and all people to get to know Jesus and deepen their relationship with the Son of God who became man.

The 80th anniversary of Opus Dei falls next year. How are you preparing for this event?

Bishop Javier Echevarría: First of all, each of us is preparing for it through a personal conversion. We must ask ourselves before God: How are we serving the Church, the Pope and others?

As far as the Prelature is concerned it will be an opportunity to explain what Opus Dei is. Just now, as the 80th anniversary of Opus Dei draws near, Opus Dei is beginning its work in Russia, and soon we will also be present in Romania.

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ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Oratory next to "Taipei 101"

“On Saturday, July 7, we installed the paintings in the church, on the two sides of the sanctuary,” wrote Father Esteban in a letter to his friends back in Spain. “We took advantage of some moldings already there that had some angels on top. It turned out very well. Sunday at Mass the faithful got to see them for the first time. Now we are going to print prayer cards with a short biography of the two saints.”

Esteban Aranaz is a priest who came to Taiwan from the Aragonese diocese of Tarazona. His parish in Taipei is next to the tallest building in the world, Taipei 101. The small church is a place of prayer and peace next to that 101 floor colossus, 1,670 feet in height, with an elevator that climbs at 55 feet per second.

The church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, was founded by Vincentian missionaries from Holland.

Recently the auxiliary bishop of Taipei blessed three new images for the church: one of St. Joseph, patron saint of China; another of St. Vincent de Paul, Founder of the Vincentians; and the other of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei.

Also taking part in the ceremony with Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Zhong were the Vicar of Opus Dei for Southeast Asia, the Provincial of the Vincentian Fathers, and the Provincial Superior of the Sisters of Charity.

The pastor of the church explained a connection between two of these saints: “On October 2, 1928, the Founder of the Work was making a retreat in the house of the Vincentian Fathers in Madrid, next to the Basilica of the Miraculous Medal, when he received the grace of 'seeing' Opus Dei. Since I belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, I viewed this as a gift when I first arrived at this parish in Taipei two years ago.”

The portrait of St. Vincent shows the sanctity and love for the Cross in the life of the French missionary, Founder of the Vincentian Fathers and of the Sisters of Charity.
St. Josemaría’s expression in the painting—with his hands open, as though initiating a dialogue—is related to an incident in the life of Fr. Esteban in his native land of Aragon.

“I had been going to various villages and parishes to show some videos about the Founder of the Work. I wanted to make him known and encourage devotion to him among the people there, since he is an Aragonese saint. In one village, as the video was beginning, a lady spontaneously turned to her friend and said: “Maria, look, a saint who talks!” Up until then, this good woman had only seen saints peaceful and silent on the altars and in their niches, but this was different. This anecdote has often given me food for thought, for it’s true that St. Josemaría is a saint who speaks to people’s hearts; he speaks with God and about God. Therefore when I commissioned these paintings, I told the painter that I wanted an expression like that.”

First edition of Holy Rosary in Arabic

In September, 2007, the first edition of an Arabic translation of St. Josemaría’s book *Holy Rosary* was published. The 2000 copy edition was produced in Lebanon by Le Laurier publishers.

The Maronite bishop of Byblos, the Most Reverend Bechara Raï, presented the book. In his address, Bishop Raï said that St. Josemaría, using simple and direct language, puts the readers in front of each of the scenes from the Rosary, converting them into a path that leads the ordinary faithful to holiness in the midst of their daily circumstances. Some 200 people attended the presentation.

The Maronite bishop of Beirut ordered 100 copies in order to give one to each priest in his diocese. The Vicar of the Maronite diocese of Sarba also reserved 50 copies for the same purpose. A number of priests have asked for large numbers of copies to distribute among the faithful. The Marian Shrine of Harissa (Our Lady of Lebanon), whose photograph is on the cover of the book, has placed it in a prominent place in its bookstore.
Holy Rosary now joins three other books by St. Josemaría published in Arabic: *The Way*, *The Way of the Cross*, and a selection of homilies from *Christ Is Passing By*. Other works by him are now being translated and will be published in the near future.

Mass of St. Josemaría in Moscow

On October 10, the first Mass in honor of St. Josemaría was celebrated in the Russian capital, in the Catholic Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The celebrant, Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, gave a brief biography of the saint, emphasizing the call to holiness in the midst of ordinary life preached by the Founder of Opus Dei.

Since his canonization on October 6, 2002, devotion to St. Josemaría has expanded to new countries. In some of these places the apostolic work of Opus Dei has begun in a stable way. This is the case in Russia, and also in Slovenia, Croatia, and Latvia.

Conference on "Paths to Freedom" in Pallerols, Spain

For the fifth consecutive year, the Association of Friends of the Pathway from Pallerols of Rialp to Andorra (Associació d'Amics del Cami de Pallerols de Rialb a Andorra) has organized the festival of the finding of the rose (Trobada de la rosa). This event commemorates the passage of the Founder of Opus Dei through the Pyrenees in 1937, some 70 years ago. It takes its name from the gilded wooden rose St. Josemaría found in Pallerols on the morning of November 22, 1937. He had spent the previous night praying insistently to God and our Lady that he might see clearly whether he was doing God's will in making the trip to Andorra in order to continue his pastoral work in
freedom, or whether he should return to Madrid to accompany his mother and the members of the Work who had remained there. The finding of the rose reaffirmed his decision to continue the crossing.

Bishop Joan Enric Vives of Seu d’Urgell celebrated the Holy Eucharist in the open air. He emphasized the importance devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary played in St. Josemaría's life, and especially during those moments spent in the shrine of Pallerols, near the village of Peramola. The conference was also attended by the Vicar of the Prelature of Opus Dei in Catalonia, Fr. Antoni Pujals.

The religious celebration was the central ceremony of the two-day conference, which also included cultural activities and excursions. On Saturday, the first day, Peramola was the site of a roundtable of experts who analyzed the different paths possible for crossing the Pyrenees. Among the authorities present were Joan Ganyet, Director of Architecture and Landscape for the “Generalitat” of Catalonia; the President of the Regional Council of Upper Urgell, Jesús Fierro; and the mayors of Peramola, Joan Pallarès, and of the Baronia de Rialb, Pere Prat.

The feast has also resulted in the restoration of the statue of our Lady of the Rosary. A new sculpture now presides at the shrine. The traditional procession of St. Stephen of Pallerols has also been revived.
News
Pontifical Appointments

On July 31, 2007, Rev. William H. Stetson was appointed as Prelate of Honor of His Holiness.

On October 4, 2007, Rev. Jorge de Salas Murillo was appointed as Chaplain of His Holiness.

New Centers of the Prelature

The regional vicars of Opus Dei have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Maracay (Venezuela), Rome, and San Pedro Sula (Honduras).

Inauguration of the Opus Dei web page in Galician

On October 6, the fifth anniversary of the canonization of St. Josemaría, the Galician version of the Opus Dei webpage was placed online at www.galego.opusdei.org. With Galician, which is spoken by more than two million people, the languages in which the official web page of Opus Dei can be viewed now number 25. The page is edited with local content in 61 countries.

As with the other versions, the Galician Opus Dei webpage includes current information, documents, and testimonies that are periodically renewed. The web allows one to see videos, read the letters of the Prelate, learn about the development or history of Opus Dei in Galicia, or write to the Information Office for more information.
Ceremonies commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Prelature of Yauyos-Cañete (Peru)

The Prelature of Yauyos, Cañete, and Huarochiri, whose pastoral care is entrusted to priests of Opus Dei, was established by Pope Pius XII in 1957, fifty years ago.

The Golden Anniversary celebrations took place in various cities. They began in the Sierra, the original territory of the Prelature (several years later the area was enlarged to include the region of Cañete). In Alis, at over eleven thousand feet in altitude, a colorful committee awaited Bishop Ricardo Garcia, who arrived accompanied by a number of priests. After the religious ceremony, speeches were given by various officials, followed by dances and songs. A Mass was also celebrated in the mining town of Yauricocha, located at an altitude of fifteen thousand feet above sea level (the highest church in the Prelature).

In the city of Yauyos, the original seat of the Prelate, the firing of rockets welcomed the bishop's committee. Accompanying the bishop were several priests who had worked in the mountains years ago and later went back to their homelands. They had returned for a few days to take part in the celebrations and to share the deep emotion of all who had sowed the seed of the Gospel in this region of the Andes. The local people also showed their gratitude for the work of social development and education carried out by the priests in this, one of the poorest areas of the country.

The bishop prelate walked to the church through the same streets that fifty years ago, on October 2, 1957, Msgr. Ignacio Obregoza had traversed with the first five priests who arrived in the Prelature of Yauyos. In the Mass of thanksgiving, the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered to a hundred young people.

The provincial mayor, who wanted to thank the priests for their work, organized addresses, poems and dances, ending with a “fireworks castle.” On the morning of October 2, in the central square of San Vicente de Cañete, current seat of the Prelature, the first five priests who accompanied Don Ignacio to the Prelature once again were honored. Of the five, two
were missing, Bishop Enrique Péchach, who had died on July 19 as Bishop Emeritus of Abancay, and Fr. Alfonso. The flags of Peru, the Vatican, and the Province of Cañete were raised and a reading of a proclamation of recognition by the city took place.

The principal celebration was held in the evening with a Mass of thanksgiving in the Shrine of Our Lady of Fairest Love, whose reredos has a statue of our Lady that was a gift of St. Josemaría. A large number of faithful participated, showing their gratitude to the priests of Opus Dei for the work carried out during these past fifty years.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
International Congress on "Cultures and Reason"

Three years ago, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, through a letter signed by the then Cardinal Ratzinger, suggested to a number of academic centers in various countries the possibility of studying a topic that was “important and urgent” for the Church and humanity: “the presence of the essential contents of the natural moral law in contemporary society.”

The letter alluded to the “difficulty of finding in the present world a common denominator of moral principles shared by all, which, based on the nature of man and society, could serve as basic criteria in legislating on the fundamental problems affecting the rights and duties of every human being.”

The response by the University of Navarra resulted in the organization of five interdisciplinary congresses in which hundreds of professors took part both from Navarra and from other Spanish and foreign universities. The final event, held in November 2007, was an international congress entitled “Reason and Cultures.”

Lines of dialogue and convergence in a pluralistic society

The meeting brought together some fifty specialists from various countries and religions. In his opening address, the president of the University, Ángel J. Gómez Montoro, listed some reasons defenders of ethical relativism usually invoke in defense of their ideas: “permanent conflicts between countries and cultures, unjust invocations of God’s name to justify violence, attacks against the dignity of the person, and abuses of power against religious freedom.” In the light of these disorders, he invited the participants in the congress to seek, in open and sincere dialogue, the “foundations for a universal ethic” that Benedicts XVI spoke about in his recent address to the International Theological Commission.[1]

Rational dialogue between “unlikes”

Where can these fundamental principles be found? The debate, very rich in shades of meaning and points of view, centered on three key ideas.
In first place, the primacy of reason over force. As Gómez Montoro pointed out in his opening lecture, “the worst walls are those built with prejudices and not with bricks.” Secondly, the importance of dialogue to provide bridges between “unlikes.” And finally, the responsibility of religious representatives, people in positions of government, and intellectuals to provide leadership for this rational dialogue between cultures and religions.

The first day was dedicated to an analysis of present-day culture and the reality of globalization. Taking part, among others, were Alejandro Llano, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Navarra; Margaret Archer, a sociologist at the University of Warwick; Jean-Luc Chabot, Professor of Political Science at the University of Grenoble; and Marcello Pera, former president of the Italian Senate and professor of Philosophy of Science at the University of Pisa.

On the second day, the dialogue focused on the possibilities and limits of multiculturalism and on the importance of the use of reason to confront cultural changes. Among those taking part were Pierpaolo Donati, from the University of Bologna; Niyazi Öktem, from the University of Istanbul; Miguel García—Baró, from the Pontifical University of Comillas (Madrid); and Enrich Berti, from the University of Padua. Professor Berti, one of the top world experts in the thought of Aristotle, spoke on the advantages and limits of consensus in relation to the truth.

The last day featured a colloquium of theologians from various religious backgrounds, including Hilarion Alfeyev, the Orthodox bishop of Vienna and representative for the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions in Brussels; Gunther Wenz, a Lutheran pastor and dean of the Evangelical School of Theology at the Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich; Rabbis Ángel Kreiman-Brill and Baruj Garzón; Bishop José María Yanguas of Cuenca; and Archbishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller of Ratisbon.

In Brief

Maracaibo (Venezuela) -- A university gathering

From August 9 to 15, fifty students from various cities in Venezuela and from Trinidad & Tobago took part in a gathering held in the Portones Center in the town of Mara. The aim of the conference was to analyze the theme of the upcoming UNIV 2008 Congress, “To be, to seem, to communicate,” under the perspective of happiness and good humor.

The well-known Venezuelan humorist Laureano Marquez and the composer Luigi Castillo offered their reflections on what true happiness means for each person, and the way of communicating it in one’s family and social circle.

Students had the opportunity to learn about techniques of audiovisual communication. Sessions were held on the creation and presentation of the content of television entertainment, stressing the unity between being, seeming and communicating. The conclusion they arrived at was that, when one possesses a value and truly believes in it, it becomes easy to reflect that value and communicate it to others.

During these days the students also carried out service projects for the benefit of the Wayúu ethnic group living in Mara. They also visited a state geriatric institute and provided the patients with the benefit of their smile and company.

At the end, various students put their experiences into writing. Many of them expressed their gratitude for having had the opportunity to put into practice the exhortations of Benedict XVI in his encyclical Deus Caritas Est, to communicate Christ through their ordinary life.
Montevideo (Uruguay) -- "Living as a Family: Home Zoom"

The third session of the South American Service Conference was held under the title “Living as a Family: Home Zoom,” on October 13 and 14. The focus this year was on the influence of the communication media in creating public opinion regarding the service sector, especially work in the home. Among the young women taking part in the conference were 75 Chilean students, 34 Argentineans, 22 Paraguayans and 25 Uruguayans.

On Saturday, October 13, participants gathered at the “Cabildo” in downtown Montevideo to discuss service tasks from various perspectives. Enrique Baliño, a person with an outstanding academic and managerial career in Latin America and the United States, spoke on “Attitudes and Success.” He emphasized that success cannot be measured only by results, and stressed the need for four qualities: a positive outlook, knowing how to work as a team, a desire to improve, and a sense of responsibility. Other presentations on more specific topics were given by Catalina Bermúdez, Virginia Chaquiriand de Mera and Maria Laura Rodriguez.

On the same day, a panel discussion was held with two journalists: Natalia Roba and Carina Novarese. The former spoke about informative and entertainment programs that transmit testimonies about family life, which draw a larger audience than police series and sensational programs. Carina Novarese spoke about combining dedication to her work outside the home with her role as a mother who needs to reserve time and energy for her husband and children.

On Sunday, the 14th, the participants gathered at the Del Plata School of Hostelry and Gastronomy, the organizing entity. Competitions were held in cooking and hostelry. An Argentinean team presented the results of research on the gastronomic habits of certain countries such as Russia and Korea. And a Uruguayan group presented a report on the compatibility of work in the home and outside the home. Their optimistic conclusion was: “We’re young. We can do it!”
Dublin (Ireland) -- New Technologies

The Anchor Boys Club organized a series of monthly sessions to familiarize parents with the new means of communication used by their children. The sessions dealt with the educational potential and the risks involved in these new media.

In the first meeting, Luison Lassala, the director of Anchor and an information technology consultant, spoke about the social implications of communication via the Internet. In Ireland, web pages such as Bebo, MN or YouTube, which parents generally know little about, form part of the daily life of most young people. The first class introduced parents to the new technologies and shared some practical ideas on how to help their children to use them prudently.

Ed Kellett, a teacher at Rockbrook Park School, gave a conference on video games. He spoke about some habits and attitudes found in young people who abuse these games and encouraged parents to exert some control over the time their children spend in front of the console or computer, as well as over the type of video games they buy or rent.

The final talk was by Donal O’Sullivan, a member of the Family & Media Association. He spoke on telenovels and other television formats (MTV, reality programs, etc.). He urged parents to contact the Media Broadcast Commission (a commission charged with regulating the various communications media) if they felt their children were being exposed to inappropriate content on television or on the radio.

Sydney (Australia) -- Tonga in WYD-08

This coming July, Sydney will receive thousands of pilgrims for World Youth Day. For the young people in Australia and nearby countries, this event will be a unique opportunity to experience the Church’s vitality.
Therefore the Organizing Committee of WYD is trying to encourage many young people from the Pacific Islands to take part in the gathering.

Seeking to lend assistance, Tangara, a high school for girls in Sydney, put into operation its own Project Tonga, with the hope of being able to sponsor ten girls from the island of Tonga among the group that will stay at the school (along with pilgrims from some 20 countries). During their summer vacations, students from Tangara traveled to the island to carry out volunteer projects and to get to know girls who might want to take part in the program.

To prepare for WYD and “Project Tonga,” a one-day gathering was held in Tangara. A tapestry typical of the island decorated the end of the meeting room. Among those invited was Bishop Kevin Manning from the Parramatta Diocese, who spoke about the meaning of World Youth Day. A group of alumnae performed a traditional Tonga dance with the help of Makueta Felila, a university student from the island. They spent many hours preparing their costumes and practicing the dance steps. The gathering ended with Holy Mass celebrated by the Bishop, who expressed his pleasure at seeing the students’ joyful demeanor.

Tallin (Estonia) -- Movie Forum Series

In October of 2007, the Jõemaa Cultural Association began a movie forum for university students. The carefully selected films are analyzed from social-historical and moral points of view. The discussion focuses on the message each movie is trying to convey, and thus helps to develop the critical capacity of each of those present.

The series, which will run throughout the academic year, was well received, especially by students from the Polytechnical University of Tallin, the most prestigious in the country.
Rome (Italy) -- Inauguration of school year at the Celimontano University Residence

On December 16, Celimontano Residence officially inaugurated the school year with an address by Angela Ales Bello, professor at the Pontifical Lateran University. The conference was entitled “Interpersonal Relations: From Empathy to a Dual Anthropology.” This was a continuation of a series begun the previous year at the residence on the differences and affinities between masculine and feminine psychologies.

At the beginning of her talk, Professor Ales Bello emphasized that the human being is a social being who needs to relate to others, as a part of oneself. Therefore, each person searches for affinities in others, which gives rise to the inner experience known as empathy.

She then went on to consider the concept of identity in the man-woman relationship, the specific contribution that femininity makes, and the historical conditions that turned the latter into a cause of discrimination.

In the effort to unmask prejudices and to find common ground, a notable role was played in the 20th century by phenomenology, a philosophical school that, not by chance, counted, especially in Germany, with a high proportion of women in its ranks. An outstanding example was Edith Stein, whose theological reflections on Mary were combined with a philosophical analysis of the contribution femininity makes to humanity.

At the end of the conference, the public, made up of students who live at the residence, their families and friends, raised a number of questions that gave Professor Ales Bello the opportunity to go more deeply into some of the topics discussed.

Nairobi (Kenya) -- Experts on the Family

VOFA (Voice of the Family in Africa) is an association of African couples that seeks to foster family values. Thanks to the help of the Doha
Family foundation, an initiative of the wife of the Emir of Qatar, VOFA has teamed up with Strathmore Business School to begin a Centre for Research on Work and Family (CRWF). In order to make this new initiative known, a round table on the family was held from November 22 to 24 under the title: “The Family in Africa: Challenges in the New Millennium.”

The conference participants included experts on family topics from a wide range of African countries: Sudan, Benin, Ivory Coast, Congo, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya, among others. One of the core sessions was dedicated to family policies in business. Over 70 managers and directors of human resources from some of the most important enterprises in East Africa also took part in the meeting. The importance of fostering family values and employees’ interests was discussed, and statistical evidence was given that promoting these values in businesses improved the productivity of the workers, and therefore the business itself. At the end of the session a prize entitled “The Family Responsible Company Prize” was given to the company with the most advanced and advantageous family policies. Representatives from the press and television covered the event.

Lima (Peru) -- A course in the imperial city of Cuzco

Over the years, the Pukara University Center has been offering formative activities for students at the Andina and San Antonio Abad universities in Cuzco.

The program sessions, which includes case studies and conferences, were given by professors from PAD, the Management School at the University of Piura.

On Thursday, December 13, the program closed with the distribution of certificates. At the end of the course the students were encouraged to carry out a solidarity campaign in the days before Christmas for poor children from the Calpa district. The students took up the challenge and
showed great capacity for initiative. They organized entertainment activities and distributed food and toys.

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Medeiros (Brazil) -- On a lost island

The island of Medeiros is located off the coast of the State of Paraná. It is accessible only by boat, and requires a trip of two and a half hours. One hundred and fifty fishing families live there, in precarious material and spiritual conditions.

Marumbí and Sumaré, two Centers for young people in Curitaba and São Paulo respectively, joined forces in preparing a social service project on the island. It took place in the month of July, during the winter vacation.

The group of volunteers numbered more than fifty, most of them university students. The project included reconstruction of the Catholic chapel, renovation of a school, laying down a cement path to permit access to the church and school during the rainy season (when the pathways become an impassible sea of mud), a campaign of dental care, and an educational program for the children.

A priest of the Opus Dei Prelature stayed at the camp and celebrated Mass each day for the volunteers and the local population. He also heard confessions and gave talks on human and spiritual formation and catechism classes.

Encouraged by the warm reception they received from the people living there, the students worked cheerfully for over eight hours a day. The local people were eager to help out in the work projects, and families in the village often invited students to eat in their own homes. The mayor of the closest mainland city and other municipal authorities visited the island twice to accompany the work of the volunteers. At the end of their stay, a Mass was held in which the whole community on the island took part. The students are enthusiastic about the possibility of repeating this service experience in upcoming vacation periods.
Mexico City (Mexico) -- "Women, business and society"

More than 600 Mexican women business managers and entrepreneurs took part in a conference entitled “Women, Business and Society,” organized by the IPADE Business School. Given the success of the gathering, IPADE has committed itself to organizing an Annual Forum for Women Managers and Entrepreneurs, in response to the need to reflect on the challenges confronting women today.

In his introductory words, Professor Alfonso Bolio Arciniega, IPADE’s General Director, emphasized that the feminine presence in the diverse sectors of human activity (financial, political, business, cultural, etc.) is evident in the programs at IPADE. In its MBA program, for example, thirty percent of the students are women. The inaugural address, given by Margarita Zavala, wife of Mexico’s President, highlighted the importance of women in the labor force. More than five million homes in Mexico depend entirely on the income earned by the mother. “Today one cannot talk about the development of a country without also talking about the development of women,” she said.

Mireia de las Heras, professor at the IESE Business School in Spain, spoke about some of the social, business and family consequences of the integration of work and family. She pointed out three very important needs: forming socially responsible enterprises, creating blocks of time that are independent and balanced for one’s family and work, and applying the techniques of innovation proper to management in one’s personal and family life.

At the end of each of the sessions, the speakers exchanged comments with the participants and received from Professor Bolio a copy of a book commemorating the first 40 years of IPADE, written by Carlos Rossell, a professor emeritus at the School.
San Francisco (United States of America) -- "Christians in the world"

The fifth anniversary of the canonization of St. Josemaría was celebrated with a round table discussion at the Golden Gate Club in San Francisco, California. The topic was “Christians in the world: a story waiting to be told.”

Kelly Macatangay, the moderator, reminded those attending that every canonization proclaims and celebrates a saint, a life lived in Christ. She emphasized that the lives of the great saints are great stories, and that the life of St. Josemaría, specifically, reveals the greatness of ordinary life.

Archbishop George H. Niederauer of San Francisco began his talk with a reflection on the Christian narrative in connection with Pope Benedict XVI’s recent book *Jesus of Nazareth*. Starting with some words of the Pope on the saints as “authentic interpreters of Sacred Scripture,” he insisted on how St. Francis, the patron of the city, had encouraged Christians in the world to live in deep communion with Christ, just as St. Josemaría did at a later date.

William Park, who taught for many years at Sarah Lawrence College in New York, where he created a program of studies in cinematography, spoke about how great literature reflects the existence of a universal moral imagination that points to the divine origin of mankind.

The third speaker was Karen E. Bohlin, the principal of Montrose School in Medfield, Massachusetts and a senior scholar at Boston University. She spoke on the value of everyday stories in the intellectual and moral formation of young people.

The conference concluded with a reception during which the participants were able to greet the Archbishop.

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Santiago (Chile) -- Presentation of the book Jesus of Nazareth

On August 20, 2007, the Spanish edition of the book *Jesus of Nazareth*, by Pope Benedict XVI, was presented in the main auditorium of the University of the Andes.

The session was introduced by the Director of Communications at the University, Cristina Errázuriz Tortorelli, who emphasized the lively interest in the book, reflected in the success of its sales throughout the world. This shows, she said, how people are eager to get to know Jesus Christ better, especially from such an authorized source. Her presentation included reading and commenting on several key passages from the book.

Following her talk, Father José Miguel Ibañez Langlois, a literary critic and poet, gave a lecture entitled “The Jesus of History is the Christ of Faith.” He emphasized that the message of this work by Benedict XVI can be summed up as the need to go to the Gospels to truly know Jesus Christ.

Taking part in the ceremony were academic authorities from the university and an audience of some 250 people.

Santiago de Compostela (Spain) -- Workshop on Questions of the Day

About a hundred priests from all over Galicia gathered on November 8 in the Olbeira Conference Center, in Vilanova de Arousa, to celebrate the 31st Workshop on Questions of the Day, organized by the Porta do Camiño Center for Priests’ Conferences, in Santiago de Compostela.

Cardinal Julián Herranz, President of the Disciplinary Commission of the Roman Curia and President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, gave a conference on “Religious Freedom and Democracy.” In his address Cardinal Herranz analyzed the nature and limits of the fundamental right to religious freedom, which harmonizes
with, rather than conflicts with, the patrimony of cultural traditions found in each country
Faithful of Opus Dei and members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross who died in the second half of the year 2007

In the second half of 2007, 310 faithful of the Prelature and 14 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
A Philosophical Proposal for the Sanctification of Work

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The reality of the universal call to holiness through a Christian's professional work in the middle of the world is a truth that today is ever more widely accepted and lived. Unlike the twentieth century, the twenty-first begins with a clear perception of the responsibility of the lay faithful to help redeem human realities. The magisterium of John Paul II corroborated this message, explicitly present in the Second Vatican Council and announced in a special way by St. Josemaría Escrivá.

In one of his foundational writings, in early 1934, St. Josemaría showed his awareness of how new this message was: “Uniting professional work with ascetical struggle and contemplation—something which may seem impossible, but which is necessary to help reconcile the world with God—and converting ordinary work into an instrument of personal sanctification and apostolate. Isn't this a great and noble ideal worth dedicating one’s life to?”[1] St. Josemaría foresaw the obstacles he would encounter in explaining this path of sanctity that God was asking him to make known. But his “tactic” was not to try to convince others through a theoretical body of truths. Life—the ascetical, pastoral reality—was to come first. And he dedicated his own life to this “noble ideal,” to spreading this message among people of all social and cultural backgrounds, so that eventually this apparent “impossibility,” confirmed by experience, would open up a pathway in the life of the Church and the world.

Although the newness of this message has already been the object of a number of insightful studies, it is worthwhile considering once again the cultural parameters that made it hard for people to grasp the unity between work, virtue and contemplation during the early decades of the twentieth century.

A first answer comes from the history of Catholic spiritual theology. It is here that the separation (and at times the opposition) between the contemplative and active life presented a strong impediment to accepting
this innovation. At the same time, it is also true that the topic of work had already found an echo in the concern of the Church's magisterium for social questions. Nevertheless, although the timeliness of the topic of work was clear, the cultural parameters also included philosophical, economic and social outlooks that impeded a positive approach to work and an adequate anthropological grounding.[2]

This study will endeavor to bring to light the main philosophical prejudices involved, many of them still present in our culture today. In addition, I will also try to offer an adequate anthropological framework for overcoming these prejudices.

*Work from an Aristotelian perspective*

In regard to how philosophy views work, one can point to three main traditions or currents of thought: the Aristotelian, the Protestant, and the Marxist traditions. I call these “traditions” because even though they are outlooks on work that arose at specific times and places, all three reappeared in the twentieth century and exercised great influence on the contemporary philosophical debate. They are, therefore, living traditions that try to provide a rationale for the activity of work and that undoubtedly give interpretive keys for understanding the historical and sociological development of the modern world. Here I will consider only the Aristotelian tradition, both for reasons of space and because of the position I am defending.[3]

First of all, it is worthwhile recalling that in classical philosophy in general, and in Aristotle in particular, work clearly occupies a secondary position. In his Politics, despite correcting Platonic positions in order to stress the important themes of freedom and equality in the polis, Aristotle respects the separation between the liberal and servile arts.[4] This corresponds closely to another distinction that is of great importance here: that between the political man (that is, one who forms part of the polis or city) and the non-political person (women and slaves, who belonged to the sphere of the *oikia* or the household, and who dedicated themselves to manual work and did not fully possess human nature).[5] To be a citizen implies being able to attain the good life, that is, a life that is perfect, rational, free, virtuous and self-sufficient in the polis.[6] Those who
participate in the polis, however, require assistance in their bodily and daily needs, which frees them from tasks that could dull or diminish their rational capacity.[7]

It is in the *oikia*, however, that all these tasks required for daily life and for sustaining the “good life” of the citizens are carried out. There is no equality among the *oikia’s* members, who submit to the “government of a single person,”[8] a “despot”[9] or head of the family, who unites and represents all who form part of the household. Within this setting, the activity *par excellence* is manual work, while its subject *par excellence* is the slave or animate instrument. We find here the sphere of the “economy,” in its earliest sense: the realm of the household, the site of production and reproduction, with neither freedom, nor contemplation of the truth, nor properly human virtues.

The discussion of reason in the Nichomachean Ethics completes this first philosophical explanation of work.[10] In the human soul one can find three types of “reasons” or “uses of reason,”[11] each with its own object: the theoretical, which is directed towards universal and necessary objects that reason grasps immanently and intentionally; *praxis*, which morally perfects the subject through actions and which gives rise to virtuous or vicious habits (the Greek term praxis is usually translated into Latin by *agere, actio*); and *poiesis*, which signifies the action of doing or producing, principally manual and material production (in Latin: *facere* or *factio*), by which one acquires the habit of *téchne*.12 “Action is not production, nor is production action,” says the Stagyrite.[13] The activity of poiesis, which is imperfect and transitive, ceases to exist as soon as the product has been made. In contrast to the theoretical use of reason and ethical praxis, téchne does not perfect the subject as a person. The artifact produced measures the activity of the producer; it is its truth and its good and therefore the paradigm of work.

The person, in contrast, dedicates himself to contemplation and to virtue, according to the activity the Greeks called *schole* and the Romans *otium*, in contrast to the *a-schole* and the *nec-otium*, which are the terms for work. We find here a vision of aristocratic humanism. Only a person who fully possesses human nature is capable of the “good life,” of developing
theoretical reason and the ethical praxis of the polis. And precisely for this reason he does not need to work.

Aristotle’s discussion of work has been developed by contemporary thinkers as diverse as Hannah Arendt, Dominique Méda, and Joseph Pieper. This neo-Aristotelian interest in the topic of work, absent in Greek philosophy, appeared when work began to occupy a preeminent place in culture. More than an interest in ancient philosophy, these authors shared a concern to evaluate a labor-centric civilization that required confronting the negative side of the omnipresence of work. Specifically in the case of Pieper, his defense of leisure clearly stems from an anti-Marxist and anti-Weberian reaction, seeking to restore to the spiritual and intellectual activities of men and women the dignity lost through the devastation of dialectical materialism and the exaltation of work as bureaucracy.

**Hannah Arendt and the distinction between labor and work**

Among the authors mentioned, perhaps the best known and most influential position is that set forth by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition*.\[^{14}\] There she distinguishes three types of human activities: labor, work, and action. To summarize the thesis that she developed at the end of the 1950s, our daily existence entails ordinary actions, which are metabolic and inexorably repetitive, and which end up producing products that are immediately consumed. This is “the labor of our body,” the life basically of an animal, the *animal laborans*. By labor we satisfy the daily needs of our bodies, which has little or nothing to do with heroic action or culture. In contrast work, “the work of our hands” proper to the *homo faber*, contributes directly to creating an artificial world of things and shows the freedom of the worker who is the author of a civilization, because he is capable of inventing machines, constructing buildings, helping the *animal laborans* with instruments or “mute robots,”\[^{15}\] etc. The ideals of the *homo faber* are stability and durability, in contrast to the consumerism and hedonism of the *animal laborans*, in which the body and its needs command and enslave human beings.

Labor does not require special skills; its value is measured by the quantity produced. This product, according to Arendt, is consumed to meet the needs of the body and does not leave any trace behind in culture.
In contrast, work demands skills, and therefore it differs qualitatively from labor. It shows that we are free and intelligent beings, capable of transforming the world. Nevertheless, it is only in action (the third type of human activity) that the human condition is truly perfected. It enables us to dedicate ourselves to discourse and to virtue through heroic actions, which should characterize public life and which make history possible. Here once again we find an exaltation of the extraordinary in an aristocratic humanism, with clear Aristotelian roots.

Certainly, Arendt formulates an important accusation. We live in a society that has emancipated the slaves of the classical epoch, freeing them in the public sphere. But their identity has been maintained. The *animal laborans* and its consumerism has converted the domestic economy into a public economy of squandering and abundance, which makes happiness a function of pleasure. At the same time, our society has lost the notion of virtue and freedom, subordinating them to strictly material productivity, which previously had been restricted to the private sphere.

Drawing inspiration from this denunciation, at the end of the 90’s the French sociologist Dominique Méda seconded Arendt’s distinction and proposed a “disenchantment” of labor. The omnipresence of labor in the contemporary world brings with it a materialistic or economic view of man, exalting repetitive and strictly physical activities. Méda advocates bringing back the human values of autonomy and free time, which enable men and women to carry out virtuous and heroic actions, and thus once again to lead a life of *otium*, of leisure.

Independently of Arendt’s debatable distinction between labor and work; it is evident that her definitions of labor and work are closely related to production. In the case of labor, the object produced is perishable; it is consumed and disappears. In work, the object remains in existence and thus takes on cultural value. But the definitions of both these activities are developed within the “paradigm of a product,” already present in Aristotle. In addition, both are placed in watertight compartments, as is also the case with Arendt’s third category, “action.” Only action is capable of opening up towards virtue and leisure, and thus it alone can bring happiness to human beings.
Work and anthropology

In classical thought, work and labor stand in contrast first of all to _otium_ and to the liberal arts. Later, with the appearance of the monastic life understood as a separation from the world, the contemplative and active lives also are seen as reflecting a certain intrinsic opposition. Work has an inherent difficulty in being defined in these outlooks, since it is viewed primarily in respect to the activity it is opposed to, and to which it is often subordinated. Moreover, within that opposition, work is not situated on the side of human excellence or perfection. In Greek philosophy, the one who works is the slave, incapable of attaining the happiness of the "good life." In the Christian monastic tradition, the contemplation of the monk leads to the ideal of the perfect life that is identified, at least implicitly, with this contemplative attitude. This is "the better portion" that belongs to Mary and not to Martha (cf. _Lk_ 10:42). And in the modern world, even though with the development of technology the active life and work have attained a certain pre-eminence, manual work has been replaced more and more by machinery, and the work that is truly human has come to be seen as intellectual work. This is what I have called elsewhere the "oscillating notion" of work: work, and particularly its first manifestation, manual work, is defined in relation to "what it is opposed to," or "what it is subordinated to." Thus it stands in contrast to human perfection and happiness, to the full development of human reason.

With work and human excellence thus seen as opposed, what ideal of man or woman are we presented with? Obviously there is no anthropological theory common to these "oscillating notions" of work. In the twentieth century, the "Aristotelian" tradition continued to view intellectual work as superior. As Joseph Pieper wrote: "It is essential to transcend the limits of the human and aspire to the realm of the angels, of the pure spirits." Work as fatigue, work as a mechanical and productive activity with "a five-year plan" (as in Marxism) or as a merely bureaucratic activity (as in Max Weber), does not permit contemplation, or virtue, or therefore human happiness. Thus Pieper defends intellectual leisure as the foundation of the liberal arts, as the origin of culture, as an activity valuable for its lack of utility, and places leisure on a higher level, accepting only reluctantly and with many clarifications the term "work of the spirit."
Nevertheless, both in this neo-Aristotelian current (which coincides with the best elements of the Platonic tradition), and in the other theories of work, one can find a tacit and almost dogmatic anthropological assumption: the insignificance of the body, of what is material, and therefore of the vulnerable and dependent human being and of the actions that constitute daily life. As progress makes manual work unnecessary, it should be replaced gradually by machines.

Throughout the history of philosophy (that is, for the last twenty-five centuries), the lack of interest in the topic of work (and in the modern world, specifically of manual work) has gone hand in hand with an exaltation of man (and more recently of woman) in their dimension of hero, of nous or intellect, of scientific and pure reason, of autonomous freedom: of superman or superwoman. Such an anthropology is inherently damaged, since it fails to grasp the importance of the human body.

The few contemporary voices denouncing this situation are found mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world and specifically in the United States. These voices criticize the failure to sufficiently value the body and its basic necessities, especially in extreme moments of sickness. These authors also show new interest in manual work, especially work related to daily actions that hold no apparent importance in the public sphere. They seek to recover the rich cultural traditions related to food, dress and housing, seeing these as essential elements for a fully human life lived in a highly technological and ever more dehumanized society.

Some solutions from philosophy: work and virtue

In light of all this, a first criticism might be the following. If one defines work from the point of view of the product, then attention is centered on goods external to the work itself: its economic value, its so-called artistic or cultural value, its social recognition, etc. Accepting this premise (in which work is defined within the “paradigm of the product”) inevitably means seeing some work as of greater or lesser importance, and thus it is very difficult to establish a relationship between work, especially manual work, and the true perfection or happiness of the human person. In addition, defining work according to its product necessarily brings with it an “economic” view of the person. This is seen both in the Calvinist ethics
of success, which is one of the foundations of capitalism,\textsuperscript{[23]} and in Marxism. The latter views work or “\textit{praxis}” as the source of alienation in the human condition, since the worth of the worker becomes the value of the product of his work.

But if work is not defined principally by its product, then what is the alternative? Is it possible to situate work within a sound anthropological framework? The solution, in my opinion, consists in understanding any work as a channel of internal goods for those who carry it out.\textsuperscript{[24]} That is, work, any work, can be defined as a human activity that is carried out under the guidance of practical reason and that requires effort, concentration and practice. As MacIntyre has argued,\textsuperscript{[25]} all work, including intellectual work, is based on theoretical and practical cognitive advances, with errors, rectifications, and achievements, which contribute to creating an enriching cultural tradition.

This enrichment is not an individual good that belongs to one person, as is often the case with a product that is produced, but rather a common good, a social good. It is the whole community of workers, and hence society as a whole, which benefits from carrying out the task in question. This social dimension reflects another important characteristic: work is learned within a community and requires obedience to norms and traditions.

Work viewed in this way confronts the worker with reality because one’s task begins with and ends in the concrete world. It requires admitting errors in one’s work in order to correct them, and recognizing the accomplishments of others with whom one shares the same work. This confrontation with reality makes it difficult to excuse or justify errors committed in work. Some authors even go so far as to say that manual work can be a good way to begin combating the reigning cultural relativism.\textsuperscript{[26]} It is not the same thing to possess a technique or not to possess it, to work correctly or to be slipshod. This outlook is incompatible with an attitude that accepts everything as good or everything as true. In addition, this way of working encourages commitment and fidelity on the part of the worker, because the spirit of the true artisan is to improve one’s work and seek the goods intrinsic to one’s task, without giving up in the face of difficulties.\textsuperscript{[27]} Work understood in this way shows us our
dependent way of being: dependence on our bodily condition which is the cause of the effort that all work entails; dependence on the reality to which work is directed, which we cannot invent or arbitrarily interpret, and which demands respect, learning, trial and error, and dependence on others, with whom we are related and whom we serve.

Last but not least, work is an activity intrinsically open to a moral dimension. Work is the most common way contemporary men and women can attain specific virtues and through them the moral perfection that leads to happiness. Aristotle insisted that it is a mistake to identify work and morality.[28] He restricted the worker to the ambit of life in the oikia and viewed virtue only within the context of the “good life” of the polis. By doing so he committed an anthropological error. Today we can no longer defend that separation, and we see clearly the relationship between work and morality, including the possibility that work can lead to moral corruption.

The dependent human condition: vulnerability and care

Contemporary philosophers of great stature—for example, Paul Ricoeur and Robert Spaemann—have had important things to say about the interdependence of human persons. Nevertheless, one fails to find in them a more explicit reference to the bodily dimension of our life, which since rationalism and the Cartesian res extensa has been understood above all according to abstract and mechanistic coordinates.[29] In his recent book, Dependent Rational Animals, Alasdair MacIntyre presents a possible solution to this problem. Despite the modern tradition that understands man from the point of view of autonomous reason, and despite some interpretations of Aristotle’s definition of the human being as a rational animal that set aside our obvious animality, we have to admit that we are not totally “autarchic” beings: we are neither angels nor pure reason, but limited and dependent men and women.

To speak of dependence and fragility as a positive human condition[30] implies abandoning the idea that corporal needs are exclusively signs of our animality or an irrational part of the human being. Obviously if we did not have a body we would have no need for food, clothing, or a place to live. But our need for these things and the way we attain them is not simply a
question of material instincts. Attaining these needs is not, as Aristotle claimed, merely a question of “living,” in the sense of “surviving.” Eating and drinking, dressing and dwelling in a specific place are, or can be, actions that are open, innovative, creators of culture, rational and free. But precisely for this reason, they can also be degrading and monstrous. Here again we do not find neutrality: they are not purely natural or biological acts but are marked with a cultural dimension by which they cease to be exclusively animal because they are human.\(^{31}\)

Alasdair MacIntyre, following St. Thomas Aquinas, highlights the importance of mercy, a Christian virtue absent in Aristotle’s philosophy, in which solidarity in the face of basic bodily needs is especially shown.\(^{32}\) Through mercy, in the face of urgent and extreme situations—proper to our vulnerable condition—the question of who is in need is not the key factor. At times of sickness and suffering, mercy becomes a work of solidarity that seeks to alleviate the most basic human needs.

In this context, Daniel Bell has pointed to what he calls the “cultural contradictions of capitalism.”\(^{33}\) When all of one’s efforts go towards advancing technology and progress, towards fostering material well-being, the result is that many people have great difficulty in confronting suffering and death. Or to put it another way: the more material resources we dispose of, the less philosophical, ethical and even religious resources there are to accept the inevitable human condition in its vulnerability and dependence. In addition, the more rational and streamlined the world of work becomes, the less sensitivity there is to valuing work that could respond professionally to the daily vulnerability and dependence of the human person.

**Manual and domestic work**

Here we are confronted with the great paradox of the “welfare state,” which, in the words of Alejandro Llano, has “ignored the principal source of authentic human well-being: the home, which is where one feels most at ease, the family as the primary sources of personalized services.”\(^{34}\) The challenge today, especially in the first world, is to confront the malaise hidden behind widespread material well-being, a malaise that it is difficult even to give a name to: the loneliness of one who has no home, although
apparently possessing a house and family; the sickness and suffering people seek to avoid at all costs, because it is seen as a burden on the others and lacking in meaning; the individualism that refuses to recognize one’s dependence on others and which ends up in a self-centeredness that prefers death to asking others for help.

Dependence on others is a human dimension, including the bodily dependence that requires the care found in a family environment. “The home,” says Wendell Berry, “is the most basic bond of marriage, which grows with it and gives it its substantial being in the world.” Every home is the fruit of specific work, based on certain specific abilities, predominantly manual; every home is based as well on a combination of traditions and scientific knowledge that transcend the material realm and transmit permanent and positive values.

Therefore, the “good life” is not exclusively a public life, but begins in the environment of the home. Pierpaolo Donati describes the undeniable relationship between the family and the polis as the point of contact between private life and public life. Alejandro Llano refers to the whole ensemble of family relationships and the tasks they entail as “primary solidarity,” that is, the indispensable help provided in the sphere of everyday life for the humanization of the person. In the home, thanks to the relationships established there, one learns the “virtues of acknowledged dependency,” which MacIntyre describes as the *conditio sine qua non* for the virtues required by the public life of the citizen.

In short, household tasks entail certain benefits both for the person who carries them out and for the one who receives them. These tasks create a culture and traditions that foster the acquirement of the virtues needed to carry out the adult’s function in society. A person who works in the home has to acquire manual dexterity and techniques, as well as virtues such as a spirit of service, generosity and humility, and, above all, a special capacity for observation to discover the needs of each person, which is given the name of empathy.

Thus we could even come to view these household tasks as the paradigm for all work, including intellectual work. Their value does not depend principally on the product that is produced. They perfect the
person who carries them out, they perfect the persons to whom they are directed, and they perfect the culture and society as a whole. In other words, the attempt by a technological society to replace these tasks by machinery and/or to negate their human, rational and free dimension, leads inevitably to the distorted view of work one finds today. Matthew Crawford, in “Shop Class as Soulcraft,” complains that young people are being steered towards “types of work that are ever more phantasmagoric,” with both “service sector” work and “white-collar jobs” being devalued. In contrast, Crawford proposes giving “public honor to those who acquire the real manual skills on which we all depend every day.”[39]

*Philosophical and theological contemplation*

In viewing work as a skill to be acquired, and more specifically in household tasks, one comes upon the notion of empathy. Empathy in philosophical language refers to a less abstract way of perceiving reality that also captures feelings, emotions, etc. An analysis of this way of knowing was carried out by Edith Stein. By knowing through the body—or better, in it—I attain the personal center of another person. I have a personal experience of their actions and feelings. I can put myself in their place and recognize what they are feeling. Through a single bodily expression—a gesture, a look, a smile—I can experience the nucleus of a person and his or her needs, and try to solve them.[40] It is a “connatural” way of knowing, which is not too far removed from the knowledge involved in tasks directed to caring for bodily needs.

In a recent study, Simon Baron-Cohen, director of the Autism Research Centre at the University of Cambridge, offers the following explanation. This empathetic knowledge is found principally (although not exclusively) in women; specifically in persons who possess the neurological conditions needed for an empathetic grasp of reality, in contrast to a systemic one (more common in males). His thesis is based on a rigorous examination of the physiological conditions of the human brain. Baron-Cohen himself comes to the conclusion that empathy is closely related to the natural desire to care for others, and therefore its proper exercise requires specific abilities to understand human relations. Good communicators are the ones who are especially able to rapidly perceive the needs of others and respond to them effectively.[41] Obviously emphatic
capacity is not an exclusively biological question, but is also affected by cultural and educational factors.

Can we call this capacity for knowing reality “contemplation”? Philosophy has usually understood contemplation in light of the Greek model. A person attains maximum happiness through theoretical or contemplative acts of the nous, which make us like the gods. The properly human, for Aristotle and the neo-Aristotelians, was extolled in otium, in leisure. In modern times, this attitude underwent a change. Although in the Cartesian cogito the human understanding intuits clear and distinct ideas, the *nous* or intellectus has lost its proper activity. More than nous, understanding is seen as a matter of *ratio*, which no longer contemplates but works. Here we see an application of the technical domination and transformation of matter. What reason discovers has to be applied to assure progress. Knowledge is power, proclaimed Francis Bacon even before Descartes. And nevertheless, in both cases—in that of classical and contemplative reason, and in modern and technical reason—there is a univocal explanation of knowing. This is reason of a theoretical or scientific kind, present and extolled in today’s world in the “elites” who devote themselves to advanced technology, to finance, to the abstract and exact sciences.

A primary criticism of this approach is provided once again by Matthew Crawford: “to navigate in the abstract is not necessarily the same as to think.”[42] That is, grasping the quid of reality is not something exclusive to theoretical reason or to intellectual, scientific, analytic, systematic knowledge.[43] On the contrary, contemplation can also take place through practical and emphatic knowledge, and specifically through work characterized by an attitude of caring for others. Paraphrasing Aristotle, we might affirm that “*theorein pollaxos legetai,*” contemplation can be said in many ways. It is not enough, then, for men and women to know theoretically what human being are; they have to attain this knowledge also in practice. Only thus, practically—only if they become “experts in humanity”[44]—can they restore a human face to all the persons, institutions, cultures, etc., that have lost it.

People who work with their hands know what it is to care for material reality, even when it is living and corporeal: such a person does not waste,
or maltreat, or destroy, because their art includes respect for nature. “A person who has developed a skill possesses a kind of empathy with the reality upon which he works, such that he is able to distinguish immediately between the essential and the accidental and grasp quickly what ‘the point’ of the matter is.”

This capacity for discernment is a kind of wisdom which discovers the real in all its profundity. Therefore a correct anthropology that pays attention to the bodily dimension and has room for dependence and vulnerability, opens the door to another meaning of contemplation: that which connects us to the mystery of suffering. This is an essential human path for discovering, as the then Cardinal Ratzinger suggested, our condition as creatures and our dependence on the Creator. As Benedict XVI stated in his recent Encyclical Spe Salvi, “the true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer.”

Up to now we have referred to contemplation in its theoretical or speculative sense and in its natural or empathetic meaning. Now we need to turn to a new meaning which departs from philosophy but which is in continuity with it: the Christian meaning of contemplation. Jose Luis Illanes, professor at the University of Navarra, has pointed out that the reference to the contemplative life present in the history of Christian spirituality does not possess Biblical roots, that is, it stems directly from Greek philosophy. But Christian tradition has contributed to reinterpreting and enriching it. The God of Judaism was totally transcendent to the person, ineffable and invisible. For Christianity, this same God became man in Jesus Christ, and we have become children of God in his Son. Clement of Alexandria and Origen were principally responsible for a new use of the term “contemplation” closely linked to the practice of prayer. Christians are called to attain a personal relationship with the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity.

Within the Christian tradition, the message of Opus Dei is of considerable importance here. In the past, contemplation has been understood principally—if not exclusively—as proper to a life lived separately from the world, to the religious and consecrated life. St. Josemaría expands this vision by insisting that union with God is also
possible through the active life proper to professional work in the world. The prerequisite for human life being raised to the supernatural order is the virtue of charity, which informs the entire life of the baptized person and therefore all of his or her actions, including work.[51]

*Human work and sanctification through work*

The aim of this study is not to attribute to the Founder of Opus Dei the philosophical ideas expressed here. Rather it is an attempt to show how his teaching on the sanctification of ordinary life and professional work has helped foster a sound anthropological conception of the human person.

First of all, his teaching defends the compatibility between leisure and work, between the contemplative and the active life, in the double meaning of contemplation, that is, in its cognitive dimension, but, above all, as a relationship to God attained through faith and love. As we have already seen, he realized right from the start that this would be difficult for many people to accept, but he never wavered in presenting it as the core of his message.[52]

A second point is the centrality of work for the acquisition of virtue and for the attainment of sanctity, and therefore a view of work as a positive human endeavor, as opposed to Aristotelianism and modern rationalism, and the Marxist view of work as alienation.

Third, we find in his teaching the revaluation of ordinary life as a path to sanctity, since no work is of greater or lesser importance. This entails a definition of work that is not centered on the so called “paradigm of profit,” but on the internal goods that are acquired, thus avoiding the danger of considering some activities as intrinsically more important than others. St. Josemaría wrote: “In God’s service, there is no job of little importance. They’re all of great importance. The value of the work depends on the personal conditions of the one carrying it out, on the human seriousness with which it is done, on the love for God that is put into it.”[53]

Referring to the “corporate works of apostolate” to which Opus Dei provides pastoral assistance, he wrote: “The real success or failure of our activities depends on whether, in addition to being humanly well run, they help those who carry them out and those who make use of their services to
love God, to feel their brotherhood with their fellow men, and to manifest these sentiments in a disinterested service of humanity.”[54]

The touchstone of all of his teaching here is the special relevance St. Josemaría attributes to manual and domestic tasks. Speaking about “Women in Social Life and in the Life of the Church,” he stresses the “great human and Christian role”[55] of these tasks in our life, their great dignity and social importance.[56] These tasks require professional preparation and create and sustain a home, which “is a particularly suitable place for the growth of a woman’s personality.”[57]

Writing to the women in Opus Dei who dedicate themselves to domestic work, he began a letter with these words: “I have no need to tell you, my daughters, what our Lord told Martha (cf. Lk 10:40-42). For in all your activities, also when immersed in domestic tasks, without any anxiousness or human outlook, you are always very aware that porro unum est necessarium (Lk 10:42), that only one thing is necessary. And like Mary, you too have chosen the better part, which will never be taken away from you. For you have the vocation of contemplative souls in the midst of the tasks of the world.”[58]

St. Josemaría’s message about the call to holiness truly merits the adjective “universal,” not only because it is addressed to all men and women, but also and especially because it makes all work—including manual, everyday tasks—the hinge for acquiring virtues and attaining contemplation. Thus the opposition philosophy has always seen between human activity and contemplation is overcome.

In a posthumous article, Fernando Inciarte, professor of philosophy at the University of Münster, pointed out the rupture that this message implied in respect to the anthropologies offered up to this time: “For him [for Escrivá], each specific and proper work, including manual work—and in a way that was, if you like, totally non-classical, totally non-Aristotelian—brings with it not only the perfection of the task but also and above all of the person who is acting.”[59]

With the authority of the Church’s magisterium, John Paul II, on the day of St. Josemaría Escrivá’s canonization, declared that the founder of Opus Dei attained to an heroic degree the union mentioned at the
beginning of this study: “uniting professional work with ascetical struggle and contemplation—something which may seem impossible, but which is necessary to help reconcile the world with God.”[60] Thus, the Pope said, St. Josemaría is “the saint of ordinary life.”[61]


[2] John Paul II’s encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, published in 1981, is an important source of recent reflection on work. There the Polish Pontiff develops the distinction between objective and subjective work that was already found in Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski’s book *All You Who Labor*, originally published in the 1950s, which confronts Marxist ideology on this topic.

[3] I deal more extensively with this topic in a study entitled *Labor, The Basis of Culture*, which began at the University of Notre Dame Center for Ethics and Culture, under the direction of Prof. Alasdair MacIntyre.


[5] I realize that this statement could be controversial. In the Nichomachean Ethics (1161 b 1-10), Aristotle says that friendship with a slave is possible inasmuch as he is a man; in addition, the lack of an adequate notion of the human person, and the rigid structure of society in the ancient world, make it difficult to give a definitive interpretation of what the Stagyrite says in different works. Nevertheless, precisely on this point of work and slavery, the Aristotelian position tends to separate the human, rational and free dimension in the city, where all men are equal, from the worker or animate instrument in the household, where inequality reigns and the menial tasks “deprive the mind of leisure and degrade it” (*Politics*, 1337 b 12-14). Moreover, the fact that the dominant culture did not permit a deeper investigation into the notion of human nature, corroborates the position that I hold about the Aristotelian error, which like many of his theses can be overcome with other affirmations of his own.


Aristotle, *L'amministrazione della casa*, by C. Natali, Laterza, Bari 1995, 1343 a 1-5. I thank Prof. Iñaki Yarza for having pointed out this work to me.


Cf. *Book VI, chapters 1-4.*


The Greek term téchne is translated by ars in Latin. The distinction between technique and art is relatively recent. It appears in modern times when reason comes to be seen as an instrument to dominate nature through the invention of machines. It is at this moment that art refuses to follow the new use of reason and begins to understand itself exclusively as an activity that creates beauty.

*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1140 a 5-6.


Cf. ibid., p. 130.

Cf. *Società senza lavoro. Per una filosofia dell’occupazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1997, ch. 10. Méda cites and explicitly follows Arendt in her negative focus on labor and, above all, in exalting leisure as the properly human domain: cf., for example, pp. 117, 136-137, 185-186.

Cf. ibid, pp. 232-233.

It is not my intention here to formulate an in-depth criticism of Arendt’s position. See my more extensive treatment of this question in *Claves para una antropolgia del trabajo*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2006, ch. IV.
Various interpretations have been given regarding the motto ora et labora. Although work takes on here a more positive meaning (as a virtuous disposition to combat laziness), it is contemplation that plays a dominant role in this new paradigm of Christian life.

El ocio y la vida intellectual, Rialp, Madrid 1962, p. 22.

This is the thesis of the whole book and also follows John Henry Newman: cf. ibid., pp. 34-39.


My explanation here owes a lot to the theory of Alasdair MacIntyre on “practices,” which he develops principally in his best known work After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind. 1984, 2nd ed. In the study that I carried out under his
direction (cf. note no. 3 above), I discuss MacIntyre’s suggestion here at length.

[25] This thesis is found in a number of his works: cf. for example, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy and Tradition*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 1990, pp. 61-66.


[30] Some people have seen here a danger of downgrading the value of human independence and personal freedom. This is not the place to confront this objection, although it is interesting to take note of it and to add that both the philosophical and theological developments point towards an understanding of human existence as essentially relational, that is to say, as dependent, without this adjective being understood as something that contradicts our condition as free beings: it simply limits it.

[31] This is also a basic thesis in the work by Leon Kass, *The Hungry Soul*.


[37] This expression appears in Alejandro Llano’s book, *La nueva sensibilidad*, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid 1988 and later is taken up again in *El
Diablo es conservador, ch. 7: La familia ante la nueva sensibilidad.

[38] Cf. Dependent Rational Animals, ch. 10. MacIntyre also speaks of other domains where one learns these virtues: the school, the neighborhood, etc.


[41] Cf. The Essential Difference: The Truth about the Male and Female Brain, Basic Books, New York, 2003, pp. 126-127. All these theses are scientifically grounded in this work. The author explains that he had to postpone the publication of his research at the suggestion of some feminists who advised him that he would meet with opposition. Years later, once extreme positions in this regard had dissipated, Baron-Cohen decided that his study should see the light of day. The reception of the book has been positive.


[43] Here I follow the Thomistic definition of contemplation, which is more of a cognitive nature: simplex intuitus veritatis. Cf. Summa Theologiae, 2-2, q. 180, a. 3 ad 1. In any case, I am not trying to exclude here a loving dimension, which I have tried to include in mentioning mercy, so proper to Christian ethics.

[44] Pope Paul VI used this expression when addressing the United Nations on October 4, 1965, in New York. John Paul II took it up again in his address during the Symposium of the Council of the European Bishops Conferences, on October 11, 1985. In both cases the Popes used it in the sense of the Christian practice of mercy, a virtue which appears in all its newness and richness in Christianity.


[47] St. Thomas Aquinas, in one of the questions of the Summa dedicated to defining the human being, even says that inter ipsos homines qui
sunt melioris tactus, sunt melioris intellectus (among men, those who have the best sense of touch have the highest intelligence). Summa Theologiae, I, q. 76, a. 5, c. Cf. Also Albert Zimmermann, Thomas Iesen, Legenda 2, Frankfurt 2001, p. 194.


[56] Cf. Ibid., no.89

[57] Ibid., no. 87. He finds his guiding principles above all in the hidden life of the Family at Nazareth: cf. “In Joseph’s Workshop,” in Christ Is Passing By, no. 22.


[60] Instruction, March 19, 1934, no. 33
John Paul II, Address following the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Canonization of St. Josemaría, October 7, 2002.