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.

ROMANA, Bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei Semiannual journal — Year XXIV, Number 47 — July-December 2008 Editor: Rev. Davide Maria Emilio Cito Address: viale Bruno Buozzi 73, 00197 Roma Fax: 06/80896420 — E-mail: redazione@romana.org www.romana.org

English edition: ROMANA, 524 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY 10801 Tel: (914) 235-7135 – Fax: (914) 632-5502 – E-mail: romana-us@opusdei.org en.romana.org
(See last page for subscription information)

© 2019 Davide Maria Emilio Cito © Copyright – Libreria Editrice Vaticana – for the texts of the Holy See © 2019 Information Office of the Prelature of Opus Dei © 2019, Homilies, addresses, articles and letters of the Prelate: by Fundación Studium Partial reproduction of the copyrighted texts is authorized providing the source is acknowledged.
EDITORIAL

- Divine Inspirations: On the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of the Opus Dei

HOLY SEE

The Roman Pontiff

- Homily at the Concluding Mass of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome (October 26, 2008)
- General Audience: Christmas, a Universal Feast, St. Peter's Square, Rome (December 17, 2008)
- Homily on the Vespers of the Solemnity of Holy Mary, the Mother of God, and Te Deum, Rome (December 31, 2008)
- Message to the International Congress "Humanae Vitae: Topicality and Prophecy of an Encyclical" (October 2, 2008)
- Address at the 23rd World Youth Day at Randwick Racetrack, Sydney, Australia (July 20, 2008)
- Homily at the inauguration of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome (October 5, 2008)
- Homily on the 150th Anniversary of the Apparitions at Lourdes, France (September 14, 2008)
- Address to the Participants of a Congress Organized by the Lateran Pontifical University on the Tenth Anniversary of Fides et Ratio, Rome (October 16, 2008)
- Meeting with the world of culture in the College of the Bernardins (September 14, 2008)
- Homily at the closing of the 23rd World Youth Day, Sydney, Australia (July 20, 2008)
- Address at the meeting with State Officials in the Elysee Palace, Paris France (September 12, 2008)
- First general audience dedicated to St. Paul for the Pauline Year, Rome (July 2, 2008)

The Roman Curia
• Instruction Dignitas Personae on Some Questions of Bioethics, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (September 8, 2008)

• Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments approving the texts of the Mass of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Estonian and Tagalog (August 11, 2008)

PRELATE

Appointments

• Appointments

Activities of the Prelate

• Pastoral Trips

• Ordination of Deacons

Pastoral Letters

• Letter of December 2008

• Letter of July 2008

Homilies

• Rome, November 5, 2008

• Rome, November 22, 2008

• Rome, November 30, 2008

• Oviedo (Spain), July 5, 2008

Addresses

• Asturias (Spain), July 4, 2008

• Rome, August 7, 2008

• Vatican City, October 14, 2008

Articles and Interviews

• Italy, November 29, 2008

• Argentina, October 2, 2008

• Spain, August 14, 2008

• China, November 16, 2008

• Interview granted to Entre líneas, Venezuela (November 2008)

• Australia, August 1, 2008
Italy, October 3, 2008

ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA

• St. Josemaría Escrivá Church, Munyaka, Kenya
• Publishing news
• A church dedicated to St. Josemaría in Kinkala (R.D. Congo)
• Inauguration of a chapel in the Parish of Our Lady of the Angels (Madrid)
• Statue and paintings of St. Josemaría in Vilnius (Lithuania), Kerala (India), and Aparecida (Brazil)
• Fiftieth Anniversary of St. Josemaría’s first visit to England
• St. Josemaría on video
• Second Conference on "Paths of Freedom through the Pyrenees"

NEWS

• New Centers of the Prelature
• Collection of videos for the Pauline Year
• World Youth Day and Kenhurst Study Centre
• The Tribunal of the Prelature completes the Investigative Phase of the Process of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo (August 7, 2008)
• A Solidarity Project: "Harambee Africa International"
• Letter of the Prelate of Opus Dei to the Rector of the University if Navarra regarding the terrorist attack at the University
• Pontifical appointments
• A Marian Year Concludes for the Prelature
• A video channel on YouTube

INITIATIVES

• Conference on St. Josemaría and artists, Florence (October 3, 2008)

In Brief

• Nairobi, Kenya -- Ethics and leadership
• Madrid, Spain -- Fiction and entertainment at the Santillana Student Residence
• São Paulo, Brazil -- Bioethics for medical students
• Aracaju, Brazil -- Volunteer project in northeast Brazil
• Limbe and Yaoundé, Cameroon -- Lobéké-Dykes Family Weekend
• Santiago, Chile -- Aconcagua Cultural Center: Pauline Congress
• Pamplona, Spain -- "War and Peace in the Promised Land"
• São Paulo, Brazil -- Refresher course for priests
• Arequipa, Peru -- International Conference on Tourism and Culture
• Jaén, Spain -- "The social dimension of life"

IN PACE
• Suffrages for the Deceased

A STUDY
• Development of Societies
EDITORIAL
Divine Inspirations: On the 80th Anniversary of the Founding of the Opus Dei

In 1931 the founder of Opus Dei wrote down a brief account of what had happened during the morning of October 2, 1928, while making a retreat in Madrid on Garcia de Paredes Street. “I received an illumination about the entire Work, while I was reading those papers. Deeply moved, I knelt down—I was alone in my room, at a time between one talk and the next—and gave thanks to our Lord; and I remember with a heart full of emotion the pealing of the bells of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels.... I compiled into some kind of unity the separate notes that I'd been taking up to that time.”[1] These words open for us a window onto his soul while also making clear the divine initiative in what had just occurred.

The light that St. Josemaría had received was an entrance by God into history. God continues to act in the world in the *hic et nunc*, in the here and now of the life of men and women. Opus Dei is a work of God, *operatio Dei*. “God is working,” insisted Pope Benedict XVI in his recent visit to France, citing the Gospel of St. John. “Thus human work was now seen as a special form of human resemblance to God, as a way in which man can and may share in God’s activity as creator of the world.”[2] God always continues working, present in his Church, transforming the world and drawing souls to himself. As the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer says, the Holy Spirit was sent by the Father through the Son to bring to fulfillment his work in the world: *Opus suum in mundo perficiens*.

“I received an illumination about the entire Work.” The whole of Opus Dei was already present on October 2, 1928, although the light received on February 14, 1930, would make St. Josemaría understand that women were also to form part of the Work. While the juridical solution for the priests would not come until February 14, 1943, on October 2nd the priesthood was already present: the first priest of Opus Dei was the founder himself. The Work was born in the Church, and God chose a priest to found it. Opus Dei was to proclaim the universal call to sanctity and apostolate, the sanctifying value of professional work done as well as possible, when it is transformed into prayer and service to others.
“Deeply moved, I knelt down.” The founder’s reaction reflects his faith. To kneel is to recognize that one is facing a Mystery: a reality that is sacred and, therefore, that does not belong to us. If this exterior act is accompanied by an authentic interior attitude, it manifests both faith and humility. Everything comes from God. He counts, certainly, on our generous response, but it is He who has chosen us and loved us first. Faced with God’s goodness, the founder’s heart spontaneously poured forth an act of thanksgiving: “I gave thanks to our Lord.”

In the New Testament, the act of kneeling or of prostrating oneself signifies obedience, respect. This is how the leper acted when he met Christ, and the disciples in the boat, after Jesus calmed the storm. In the darkness of Gethsemane, our Lord, kneeling on the hard rock, spoke a loving “yes” to the Will of the Father. Jesus kneels from the humility of his human will, united to his divine will, with a physical gesture whose symbolism remains valid for all times and cultures. As Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out, in the early Church the devil was portrayed without knees, because he lacks the power of God: he doesn’t know how to love. “The inability to kneel is seen as the very essence of the diabolical.”[3]

In contrast to the fallen angel, the myriad of angels in heaven sing the glories of God. On October 2, 1928, the bells of the church of Our Lady of the Angels were perhaps calling the people to gather for Mass, or simply marking the hours. The pealing of those bells resounded in St. Josemaría’s heart during his whole life. It was in his heart, on the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, that the seed of Opus Dei was born.

With the vision of faith, from that morning on, the founder saw Opus Dei projected in time and space. What did he see? Above all, persons, one by one, many souls, “men and women of God who will lift the cross, with the teachings of Christ, to the pinnacle of all human activities.”[4]

To transmit the seed of Opus Dei is, above all, to bring souls close to God, close to Jesus Christ. And to do so requires a deep sense of our divine filiation, of which St. Josemaría was an efficacious herald throughout his life. The baptized person is a child of God in Christ. “Anyone who does not realize that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about
himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love our Lord above all else.”[5]

A child of God loves the world born good from God’s hands, and all upright professions. Human work is born of love; sanctifying work is an art, a path to God. It is a passionate collaboration with God, which gives meaning to life, and therefore sureness and security because God never abandons us. Each of us has to be a teacher of holiness, even with our miseries, and transmit the faith with a dedication that allows the soft breeze of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, to act.

The center of salvation history is Jesus Christ, true God and true man. We are his people who, convoked in the Eucharist, become the Body of Christ. In the Mass, the Church offers Christ, and offers herself, and thus becomes the Church: the Body of Christ. The same is true of Opus Dei which, as St. Josemaría liked to say, is a small “portion” of the Church. [6] The spirit of the Work encourages us to love to “serve the Church, and all men, without using the Church.”[7] Every Christian carries with them, so to speak, the whole Church, the heavenly hosts, and the saints. All the saints, each one of them, are ours, from the good thief to St. Narcisa, the Ecuadorian woman canonized by Benedict XVI in October 2008. In the first years of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría was already dreaming of the whole world.

On October 2, 1928, when St. Josemaría “saw” the Work, he had just finished celebrating Holy Mass, for the salvation of the world. Through the penitential rite and many other prayers from the Canon, he had shown, with all the passion of a good priest seeking God’s will, his desire to have a clean heart. He did not yet know that he was to be a herald of the sanctification of ordinary life, who would remind so many people of the need to offer God spiritual sacrifices of a pleasing aroma, united to the Sacrifice of the Mass, the center and root of the interior life.

The mystery of the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, had been made present. In the actualization of the paschal mystery, Christ offers himself under the appearances of bread and wine, fruit of the earth, of the vine, and of the work of man. The bread is no longer bread, it is his Body; the wine is his
Blood. Jesus is really and substantially present: *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi*. Heaven has come down to earth, and the celestial liturgy is anticipated, the supper of the marriage feast of the Lamb, as the ordinary form of the Latin Rite emphasizes: *Beati qui ad cenam agni vocati sunt*. St. Josemaría would also have read those words now found in the Missal of Blessed John XXIII: *Corpus tuum, Domine, quod sumpsisti, et Sanguis, quem potavi, adhaereat visceribus meis*. The Body and Blood of Christ filled the soul of that twenty-six-year-old priest, who was about to “see” Opus Dei.

All nations were somehow present in the Mass of the founder, who could well affirm that, in each Mass, “heaven and earth join with the angels of the Lord to sing: Holy, Holy, Holy…” [8] All of creation, because heaven and earth are filled with the divine glory.[9]

On October 2, 1928, now eighty years ago, the founder gave thanks to God and set out to work. “I compiled into some kind of unity the separate notes that I’d been taking up to that time,” he wrote. Although he later thought, in his humility, that he had been slow to follow the divine inspiration, St. Josemaría worked a lot and well. Opus Dei was thus the fruit of divine initiative and human correspondence, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit guiding and sanctifying his people. As the Second Vatican Council teaches,[10] God wants his Church to have a renewed awareness of the universal call to holiness. This is the core of the message that St. Josemaría had received as far back as 1928, and which the faithful of Opus Dei, committed to sanctifying the world from within, seek to spread by their own lives.

The liturgical feast of the Holy Guardian Angels began to be celebrated in Spain and France in the fifth century. In 1670, Pope Clement X extended it to the universal Church, celebrated on the 2nd of October. The fact that God wanted the founder to see the Work on the feast of the Holy Angels is, for us, a call by Providence to never lose our supernatural viewpoint. There are many angels on our path; they guard us obeying God’s commands, and always praise him, as Scripture recalls in texts that, in 1928, were read in the liturgy of the Mass for October 2nd.[11]

In this Marian Year, our acts of thanksgiving are directed to our Lady, the first *opus Dei* by reason of her excellence, as the Holy Father John Paul
Ii said during an audience granted to Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo in the first days of his pontificate. Let us ask our heavenly Mother to make us small, humble, so we may be filled with God.


Back to Contents
HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
- The Roman Curia
The Roman Pontiff

Homily at the Concluding Mass of the Twelfth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome (October 26, 2008)

Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Word of the Lord, resounding a short while ago in the Gospel, reminded us that the whole divine law is summarized in love. The Evangelist Matthew narrates that after Jesus had answered the Sadducees question, thus silencing them, the Pharisees met to put him to the test (cf. 22:34-35). One of them, a doctor of law, asked him: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” (22:36). The question makes apparent the concern, present in ancient Jewish tradition, over finding a unifying principle in the various formulations of God’s will. This was not an easy question, considering that in the law of Moses, a good 613 precepts and prohibitions are contemplated. How does one discern, among all of these, which is the most important? But Jesus does not hesitate, and readily responds: “You shall love the Lord your God with your all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Mt 22:37-38). Jesus quotes the Shemà in his answer, the prayer the pious Israelite recites several times a day, especially in the morning and in the evening (cf. Deut 6: 4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41): the proclamation of the integral and total love due to God, as the only Lord. Emphasis is placed on the totality of this dedication to God, listing the three faculties that define man in his deep psychological structures: heart, soul and mind. The word mind, diánoia, contains the rational element. God is not only the object of love, commitment, will and sentiment, but also of the intellect, which should not be excluded from this milieu. Then, however, Jesus adds something which, in truth, had not been asked by the doctor of law: “And a second is like it, You must love your neighbor as
yourself” (Mt 22:39). The surprising aspect of Jesus’ answer consists in the fact that he establishes a similarity between the first and the second commandments, defined this time too with a biblical formula drawn from the Levitical code of holiness (cf. Lev 19: 18). And thus by the end of the passage the two commandments become connected in the role of a fundamental union upon which all of biblical Revelation rests: “On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well” (Mt 22: 40).

The Gospel passage on which we are focusing makes clear that being disciples of Christ means practicing his teachings, which can be summarized in the first and greatest commandment of the divine law, the commandment of love. Even the First Reading, taken from the Book of Exodus, insists on the duty of love; a love witnessed concretely in relationships between persons, which must be relationships of respect, collaboration, generous help. The neighbor to be loved is the stranger, the orphan, the widow and the needy, in other words, those citizens who have no “defender.” The holy author goes into details, as in the case of the object pawned by one of these poor persons (cf. Ex 22: 25-26). In this case God himself is the one to vouch for the neighbor’s position.

In the Second Reading, we can find a concrete application of the supreme commandment of love in one of the first Christian communities. St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, leading them to understand that, while having known them for such a short time, he appreciates them and holds them dear in his heart. Because of this, he pinpoints them as “a model for all the believers of Macedonia and Achaia” (1 Thess 1: 7). Weaknesses and difficulties are not lacking in this recently founded community, but it is love that surpasses all, renews all, conquers all: the love of those who, knowing their own limits, docilely follow the words of Christ, the divine Teacher, passed down through one of his faithful disciples. “You, in turn, became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word despite great trials, with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit,” the Apostle wrote. He continued: “For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere” (1 Thess 1: 6, 8). The lesson that we can draw from the Thessalonians’ experience, an experience that is truly common in
every authentic Christian community, is that neighborly love is born from docile listening to the divine Word. It is a love that will even withstand difficult trials for the truth of the divine Word, and in this way true love grows and truth shines in all its splendor. How important it is to listen to the Word and incarnate it in personal and community life!

In this Eucharistic celebration, which closes the work of the Synod, we sense, in a particular way, the bond that exists between the loving listening to the Word of God and disinterested service of the brethren. How many times, in the past days, we have heard experiences and reflections that highlight today’s emerging need for a more intimate listening to God, for a truer knowledge of his Word of salvation; for a more sincere sharing of faith which is constantly nourished at the table of the divine Word! Dear and venerable Brothers, thank you for the contribution each of you has offered in analyzing the Synod’s theme: “The Word of God in the life and the mission of the Church.” I greet you all with great affection. I address a special greeting to the Cardinals, the Delegate Presidents of the Synod and the General Secretary, whom I thank for their constant dedication. I greet you, dear brothers and sisters, who have come from every continent bringing your enriching experience. In returning home, give everyone an affectionate greeting from the Bishop of Rome.

I greet the Fraternal Delegates, the Experts, the Auditors and the Invited Guests, the members of the General Secretariat of the Synod, all those who work with the press. A special thought goes to the Bishops of Continental China, who could not be represented during this Synodal Assembly. I would like to speak on behalf of them and thank God for their love for Christ, their communion with the universal Church and their faithfulness to the Successor of the Apostle Peter. They are present in our prayer, along with all the faithful who are entrusted to their pastoral care. We ask the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet 5: 4) of the sheep to give them joy, strength, and apostolic zeal to guide, with wisdom and far-sightedness, the Catholic community of China that we love so dearly.

All of us who have taken part in the work of the Synod will carry with us the renewed awareness that the Church’s principal task, at the start of this new millennium, is above all to nourish herself on the Word of God, in order to make new evangelization, the proclamation in our day, more
effective. What is needed now is that this ecclesial experience reach every community; it is necessary to understand the need to translate the Word we have heard into gestures of love, because this is the only way to make the Gospel proclamation credible, despite the human weaknesses that mark individuals. First of all this requires a more intimate knowledge of Christ and an ever more docile listening to his Word.

In this Pauline year, making the words of the Apostle our own: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16), I hope with all my heart that this yearning of Paul’s will be felt in every community with ever greater conviction as a vocation in the service of the Gospel for the world. At the start of the Synod I recalled Jesus’ appeal: “the harvest is rich” (Mt 9:37), an appeal we must never tire of responding to, no matter what difficulties we might encounter. So many people are seeking, sometimes unknowingly, to encounter Christ and his Gospel; many need to find in him the meaning of their lives. To give a clear and common witness to a life according to the Word of God, demonstrated by Jesus, is therefore an indispensable criterion to verify the mission of the Church.

The Readings today’s liturgy offers for our meditation remind us that the fullness of the law, as all of the divine Scriptures, is love. Therefore anyone who believes they have understood the Scriptures, or at least some part of them, without undertaking to build, by means of their intelligence, the twofold love of God and neighbor, in reality proves to be still a long way from having grasped its deeper meaning. But how can we put this commandment into practice, how can we live the love of God and our brothers without a living and intense contact with the Sacred Scriptures? The Second Vatican Council asserts that “access to sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful” (Dei Verbum, 22), so that persons, encountering the truth, may grow in authentic love. This is a requisite that is indispensable for evangelization today. And since often the encounter with Scriptures is in danger of being not “a fact” of the Church, but informed by subjectivity and arbitrariness, a robust and credible pastoral promotion of the knowledge of Sacred Scripture to announce, celebrate and live the Word in the Christian community becomes indispensable, dialoguing with the cultures of our time, placing ourselves at
the service of truth and not of current ideologies, and increasing the
dialogue God wishes to have with all men (cf. ibid, 21).

To this end special care should be given to the preparation of pastors,
who will then be ready to take whatever action is necessary to spread the
biblical movement with appropriate means. Ongoing efforts to give life to
the biblical movement among lay people should be encouraged, along with
the formation of group leaders, with particular attention being paid to the
young. We must also support the effort to allow faith to be known through
the Word of God to those who are “far away” as well and especially those
who are sincerely seeking the meaning of life.

Many other reflections could be added but I will limit myself to
underlining that the privileged place where the Word of God resounds,
which edifies the Church, as was said many times in the Synod, is
undoubtedly the liturgy. This is where it appears that the Bible is a book of
the people and for the people: a heritage, a testament consigned to readers
so that the salvation history witnessed in the text becomes concrete in their
own lives. There is therefore a vital, reciprocal relationship of belonging
between the people and the Book: the Bible remains a living Book with the
people its subject who read it. The people cannot exist without the Book,
because in it they find their reason for being, their vocation and their
identity. This mutual belonging between people and Sacred Scripture is
celebrated in every liturgical assembly, which, thanks to the Holy Spirit,
listens to Christ, since it is he who speaks when the Scripture is read in the
Church and welcomes the Covenant that God renews with his people.
Scripture and liturgy converge, therefore, with the single aim of bringing
the people to dialogue with the Lord and to obedience to the will of the
Lord. The Word issued from the mouth of God and witnessed in the
Scriptures returns to him in the form of a prayerful response, a response
that is lived, a response that wells up from love (cf. Is 55:10-11).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray that from renewed listening to the
Word of God, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, an authentic
renewal in the universal Church and in every Christian community may
spring forth. We entrust the fruit of this Synodal Assembly to the maternal
intercession of the Virgin Mary. I also entrust to her the Second Special
Assembly of the Synod for Africa, that will take place in Rome in October
of next year. Next March I intend to go to Cameroon to deliver the *Instrumentum laboris* of that Synodal Assembly to representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa. From there, God willing, I will proceed to Angola to pay homage to one of the most ancient sub-saharan Churches. May Mary Most Holy, who offered her life as the “servant of the Lord” (*Lk* 1:38), so that everything would happen according to the divine will and who exhorts us to do whatever Jesus would tell us (cf. *Jn* 2:5), teach us to recognize in our lives the primacy of the Word that alone can grant us salvation. Amen!

Back to Contents

**General Audience: Christmas, a Universal Feast, St. Peter's Square, Rome (December 17, 2008)**

**Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

On this very day, the days of Advent that directly prepare us for the Nativity of the Lord begin: we are in the Christmas Novena which in many Christian communities is celebrated with liturgies rich in biblical texts, all oriented to fostering the expectation of the Savior’s Birth. Indeed, the whole Church focuses her gaze of faith on this Feast that is now at hand, preparing herself, as she does every year, to join in the joyful singing of the Angels who will announce to the shepherds in the heart of the night the extraordinary event of the Birth of the Redeemer, inviting them to go to the Grotto in Bethlehem. It is there that the Emmanuel lies, the Creator who made himself a creature, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a poor manger (cf. *Lk* 2:13-16).

Because of the atmosphere that distinguishes it, Christmas is a universal celebration. In fact, even those who do not profess themselves to be believers can perceive in this annual Christian event something extraordinary and transcendent, something intimate that speaks to the heart. It is a Feast that praises the gift of life. The birth of a child must always be an event that brings joy; the embrace of a newborn baby usually
inspires feelings of kindness and care, of emotion and tenderness. Christmas is the encounter with a newborn baby lying in a humble grotto. In contemplating him in the manger, how can we fail to think of all those children who continue to be born today in great poverty in many regions of the world? How can we fail to think of those newborn infants who are not welcomed, who are rejected, who do not manage to survive because of the lack of care and attention? How can we fail to think also of the families who long for the joy of a child and do not see their hope fulfilled? Unfortunately, under the influence of hedonist consumerism Christmas risks losing its spiritual meaning and being reduced to a mere commercial opportunity for purchases and the exchange of gifts! However, it is true that the difficulties, the uncertainties and the financial crisis itself that numerous families have had to come to terms with in recent months and which is affecting all humanity could be an incentive to rediscover the warmth of simplicity, friendship and solidarity: typical values of Christmas. Stripped of its consumerist and materialistic encrustations, Christmas can thus become an opportunity for welcoming, as a personal gift, the message of hope that emanates from the mystery of Christ’s Birth.

However, none of this enables us to fully grasp the ineffable value of the Feast for which we are preparing. We know that it celebrates the central event of history: the Incarnation of the divine Word for the redemption of humanity. In one of his many Christmas Homilies, St. Leo the Great exclaims: “Let us be glad in the Lord, dearly-beloved, and rejoice with spiritual joy that there has dawned for us the day of ever-new redemption, of ancient preparation, of eternal bliss. For as the year rolls round, there recurs for us the commemoration of our salvation, which promised from the beginning, accomplished in the fullness of time will endure for ever” (Homily XXII). St. Paul returns several times in his Letters to this fundamental truth. For example, he writes to the Galatians: “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law... so that we might receive adoption as sons” (4:4). In the Letter to the Romans he highlights the logic and the demanding consequences of this salvific event: “If we are children of God... then [we are] heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (8:17). However, in the Prologue to the fourth Gospel, it is above all St. John who meditates
profoundly on the mystery of the Incarnation. And it is for this reason that the Prologue has been part of the Christmas liturgy since the very earliest times. Indeed, in it are found the most authentic expression and the most profound synthesis of this Feast and of the basis of its joy. St. John writes: “Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis / and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14).

At Christmas, therefore, we do not limit ourselves to commemorating the birth of a great figure: we do not simply and abstractly celebrate the birth of the man or in general the mystery of life; even less do we celebrate only the beginning of the new season. At Christmas we commemorate something very tangible and important for mankind, something essential for the Christian faith, a truth that St. John sums up in these few words: “The Word became flesh.” This was a historical event that the Evangelist Luke was concerned to situate in a well-defined context: in the days when the decree was issued for the first census of Caesar Augustus, when Quirinius was Governor of Syria (cf. Lk 2:1-7). Therefore, it was on a historically dated night that the event of salvation occurred for which Israel had been waiting for centuries. In the darkness of the night of Bethlehem a great light really was lit: the Creator of the universe became flesh, uniting himself indissolubly with human nature so as truly to be “God from God, Light from Light” yet at the same time a man, true man. What John calls in Greek “ho logos” translated into Latin as “Verbum” and Italian as “il Verbo” also means “the Meaning.” Thus we can understand John’s words as: the “eternal Meaning” of the world made himself tangible to our senses and our minds: we may now touch him and contemplate him (cf. 1 Jn 1:1). The “Meaning” that became flesh is not merely a general idea inherent in the world; it is a “Word” addressed to us. The Logos knows us, calls us, guides us. The Word is not a universal law within which we play some role, but rather a Person who is concerned with every individual person: he is the Son of the living God who became man in Bethlehem.

To many people, and in a certain way to all of us, this seems too beautiful to be true. In fact, here it is reaffirmed to us: yes, a meaning exists, and the meaning is not a powerless protest against the absurd. The meaning has power: it is God. A good God who must not be confused with any sublime and remote being, whom it would never be possible to reach,
but a God who made himself our neighbor and who is very close to us, who has time for each one of us and who came to stay with us. It then comes naturally to ask ourselves: “However could such a thing be possible? Is it dignified for God to make himself a child?” If we are to seek to open our hearts to this truth that illuminates the whole of human existence we must bend our minds and recognize the limitations of our intelligence. In the Grotto of Bethlehem God shows himself to us as a humble “infant” to defeat our arrogance. Perhaps we would have submitted more easily to power and wisdom, but he does not want us to submit; rather, he appeals to our hearts and to our free decision to accept his love. He made himself tiny to set us free from that human claim to grandeur that results from pride. He became flesh freely in order to set us truly free, free to love him.

My dear brothers and sisters, Christmas is a privileged opportunity to meditate on the meaning and value of our existence. The approach of this Solemnity helps us on the one hand to reflect on the drama of history in which people, injured by sin, are perennially in search of happiness and of a fulfilling sense of life and death; and on the other, it urges us to meditate on the merciful kindness of God who came to man to communicate to him directly the Truth that saves, and to enable him to partake in his friendship and his life. Therefore let us prepare ourselves for Christmas with humility and simplicity, making ourselves ready to receive as a gift the light, joy and peace that shine from this mystery. Let us welcome the Nativity of Christ as an event that can renew our lives today. The encounter with the Child Jesus makes us people who do not think only of themselves but open themselves to the expectations and needs of their brothers and sisters. In this way we too will become witnesses of the radiance of Christmas that shines on the humanity of the third millennium. Let us ask Mary Most Holy, Tabernacle of the Incarnate Word, and St. Joseph, the silent witness of the events of salvation, to communicate to us what they felt while they were waiting for the Birth of Jesus, so that we may prepare ourselves to celebrate with holiness the approaching Christmas, in the joy of faith and inspired by the commitment to sincere conversion.

Happy Christmas to you all!
Homily on the Vespers of the Solemnity of Holy Mary, the Mother of God, and Te Deum, Rome (December 31, 2008)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The year that is ending and that which is approaching on the horizon are both under the blessed gaze of the Most Holy Mother of God. The artistic polychrome sculpture set here next to the altar, which portrays her on a throne with the Child giving his Blessing, also recalls her motherly presence. We are celebrating the First Vespers of this Marian Solemnity, in which there are numerous liturgical references to the mystery of the Virgin’s divine motherhood.

“O admirabile commercium! O marvelous exchange!” Thus begins the Antiphon of the first Psalm, to then continue: “man’s Creator has become man, born of a virgin.” “By your miraculous birth of the Virgin you have fulfilled the Scriptures,” proclaims the Antiphon of the Second Psalm, which is echoed by the words of the third Antiphon that introduce us to the canticle taken from the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: “Your blessed and fruitful virginity is like the bush, flaming yet unburned, which Moses saw on Sinai. Pray for us, Mother of God.” Mary’s divine motherhood is also highlighted in the brief Reading proclaimed shortly beforehand, which proposes anew the well-known verses of the Letter to the Galatians: “When the designated time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman... so that we might our status as adopted sons” (Gal 4: 4-5). And again, in the traditional Te Deum that we will raise at the end of our celebration before the Most Holy Sacrament solemnly exposed for our adoration singing, “Tu, ad liberandum suscepturus hominem, non horruisti Virginis uterum,” in English: “when you, O Christ, became man to set us free you did not spurn the Virgin’s womb.”

Thus everything this evening invites us to turn our gaze to the one who “received the Word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world,” and who for this very reason the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council recalls “is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God” (Lumen Gentium, n. 53). Christ’s Nativity, which we are
commemorating in these days, is entirely suffused with the light of Mary and, while we pause at the manger to contemplate the Child, our gaze cannot fail to turn in gratitude also to his Mother, who with her “yes” made possible the gift of Redemption. This is why the Christmas Season brings with it a profoundly Marian connotation; the birth of Jesus as God and man and Mary’s divine motherhood are inseparable realities; the mystery of Mary and the mystery of the Only-Begotten Son of God who was made man form a single mystery, in which the one helps to better understand the other.

Mary Mother of God *Theotokos, Dei Genetrix*. Since ancient times Our Lady has been honored with this title. However, for many centuries in the West there was no feast specifically dedicated to the divine Motherhood of Mary. It was introduced into the Latin Church by Pope Pius XI in 1931 on the occasion of the 15th centenary of the Council of Ephesus, and he chose to establish it on 11 October. On that date, in 1962, the Second Vatican Council was inaugurated. It was then the Servant of God Paul VI who restored an ancient tradition in 1969, fixing this Solemnity on 1 January. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* of 2 February 1974, he explained the reason for his decision and its connection with the World Day of Peace. “In the revised ordering of the Christmas period it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God,” Paul VI wrote. “This celebration... is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the “holy Mother’... It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration to the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. *Lk* 2: 14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace” (n. 5).

This evening, let us place in the hands of the heavenly Mother of God our choral hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord for the gifts he has generously granted us during the past 12 months. The first sentiment which spontaneously rises in our hearts this evening is precisely that of praise and thanksgiving to the One who gave us time, a precious opportunity to do good; let us combine with it our request for forgiveness for perhaps not always having spent it usefully. I am glad to share this thanksgiving with
you, dear brothers and sisters who represent the whole of our diocesan community to which I address my cordial greeting, extending it to all the inhabitants of Rome. I extend a particular greeting to the Cardinal Vicar and to the Mayor, both of whom have begun their different missions this year one spiritual and religious, the other civil and administrative at the service of this city of ours. I extend my greeting to the Auxiliary Bishops, priests, consecrated people and the very many lay faithful who have gathered here, as well as to the authorities present. By coming into the world, the eternal Word of the Father revealed to us God’s closeness and the ultimate truth about man and his eternal destiny; he came to stay with us to be our irreplaceable support, especially in the inevitable daily difficulties. And this evening the Virgin herself reminds us of what a great gift Jesus gave us with his Birth, of what a precious “treasure” his Incarnation constitutes for us. In his Nativity Jesus comes to offer us his Word as a lamp to guide our steps; he comes to offer us himself and we must always affirm him as our unfailing hope in our daily life, aware that “it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear” (Gaudium et Spes, n. 22).

Christ’s presence is a gift that we must be able to share with everyone. It is for this purpose that the diocesan community is making an effort to form pastoral workers, so as to equip them to respond to the challenges modern culture poses to the Christian faith. The presence of numerous highly qualified academic institutions in Rome and the many initiatives promoted by the parishes enable us to look confidently to the future of Christianity in this city. As you well know, encountering Christ renews our personal life and helps us to contribute to building a just and fraternal society. This is why we as believers can also make a great contribution to overcoming the current educational emergency. Thus, for a profound evangelization and a courageous human promotion that can communicate the riches that derive from the encounter with Christ to as many people as possible, an increase in synergy among families, school and parishes is more important than ever. For this I encourage each member of our diocese to continue on the journey they have undertaken, together carrying out the program for the current pastoral year which aims precisely to “educate to hope through prayer, action and suffering.”
In our times, marked by uncertainty and concern for the future, it is necessary to experience the living presence of Christ. It is Mary, Star of Hope who leads us to him. It is she, with her maternal love, who can guide young people especially who bear in their hearts an irrepressible question about the meaning of human existence to Jesus. I know that various groups of parents, meeting in order to deepen their vocation, are seeking new ways to help their children respond to the big existential questions. I cordially urge them, together with the whole Christian community, to bear witness to the new generations of the joy that stems from encountering Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem and did not come to take something from us but rather to give us everything.

On Christmas night I had a special thought for children; instead, this evening it is young people above all on whom I wish to focus my attention. Dear young people, responsible for the future of this our city, do not be afraid of the apostolic task that the Lord is entrusting to you. Do not hesitate to choose a lifestyle that does not follow the current hedonistic mindset. The Holy Spirit assures you of the strength you need to witness to the joy of faith and the beauty of being Christian. The growing need for evangelization requires many laborers in the Lord’s vineyard; do not hesitate to respond to him promptly if he calls you. Society needs citizens who are not concerned solely with their own interests because, as I recalled on Christmas Day, “If people look only to their own interests, our world will certainly fall apart.”

Dear brothers and sisters, this year is ending with an awareness of the spreading social and financial crisis that now involves the whole world; a crisis that asks for greater moderation and solidarity from all, so that they may go to the aid especially of the individuals and families who are in the most serious difficulty. The Christian community is already making efforts toward this and I know that the diocesan Caritas and other relief agencies are doing their utmost. Nonetheless, everyone’s collaboration is necessary, for no one can think of building his own happiness alone. Although many clouds are gathering on the horizon of our future, we must not be afraid. Our great hope as believers is eternal life in communion with Christ and the whole family of God. This great hope gives us the strength to face and to overcome the difficulties of life in this world. This evening the motherly
presence of Mary assures us that God never abandons us if we entrust ourselves to him and follow his teachings. Therefore, while we take our leave of 2008 and prepare to welcome 2009, let us present to Mary our expectations and hopes, as well as our fears and the difficulties that dwell in our hearts, with filial affection and trust. She, the Virgin Mother, offers us the Child who lies in the manger as our sure hope. Full of trust, we shall then be able to sing at the end of the Te Deum: “In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum”—In you, Lord, is our hope: and we shall never hope in vain.” Yes, Lord, in you we hope, today and for ever; you are our hope. Amen!

Message to the International Congress "Humanae Vitae: Topicality and Prophecy of an Encyclical" (October 2, 2008)

To Mons. Livio Melina
President of the John Paul II Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family

I learned with joy that the Pontifical Institute of which you are President and the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart have opportunely organized an International Congress on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the publication of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae, an important Document that treats one of the essential aspects of the vocation to marriage and the specific journey of holiness that results from it. Indeed, having received the gift of love, husband and wife are called in turn to give themselves to each other without reserve. Only in this way are the acts proper and exclusive to spouses truly acts of love which, while they unite them in one flesh, build a genuine personal communion. Therefore, the logic of the totality of the gift intrinsically configures conjugal love and, thanks to the sacramental outpouring of the Holy Spirit, becomes the means to achieve authentic conjugal charity in their own life.
The possibility of procreating a new human life is included in a married couple's integral gift of themselves. Since, in fact, every form of love endeavors to spread the fullness on which it lives, conjugal love has its own special way of communicating itself: the generation of children. Thus it not only resembles but also shares in the love of God who wants to communicate himself by calling the human person to life. Excluding this dimension of communication through an action that aims to prevent procreation means denying the intimate truth of spousal love, with which the divine gift is communicated: "If the mission of generating life is not to be exposed to the arbitrary will of men, one must necessarily recognize insurmountable limits to the possibility of man's domination over his own body and its functions; limits which no man, whether a private individual or one invested with authority, may licitly surpass" (Humanae Vitae, n. 17). This is the essential nucleus of the teaching that my Venerable Predecessor Paul VI addressed to married couples and which the Servant of God John Paul ii, in turn, reasserted on many occasions, illuminating its anthropological and moral basis.

Forty years after the Encyclical's publication we can understand better how decisive this light was for understanding the great "yes" that conjugal love involves. In this light, children are no longer the objective of a human project but are recognized as an authentic gift, to be accepted with an attitude of responsible generosity toward God, the first source of human life. This great "yes" to the beauty of love certainly entails gratitude, both of the parents in receiving the gift of a child, and of the child himself, in knowing that his life originates in such a great and welcoming love.

It is true, moreover, that serious circumstances may develop in the couple's growth which make it prudent to space out births or even to suspend them. And it is here that knowledge of the natural rhythms of the woman's fertility becomes important for the couple's life. The methods of observation which enable the couple to determine the periods of fertility permit them to administer what the Creator has wisely inscribed in human nature without interfering with the integral significance of sexual giving. In this way spouses, respecting the full truth of their love, will be able to modulate its expression in conformity with these rhythms without taking anything from the totality of the gift of self that union in the flesh
expresses. Obviously, this requires maturity in love which is not instantly acquired but involves dialogue and reciprocal listening, as well as a special mastery of the sexual impulse in a journey of growth in virtue.

In this perspective, knowing that the Congress is also taking place through an initiative of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, I am likewise eager to express in particular my appreciation for all that this university institution does to support the International Paul VI Institute for Research in Human Fertility and Infertility for Responsible Procreation (ISI), which it gave to my unforgettable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, thereby desiring to make, so to speak, an institutionalized response to the appeal launched by Pope Paul VI in paragraph n. 24 of the Encyclical, to "men of science". A task of the ISI, in fact, is to improve the knowledge of the natural methods for controlling human fertility and of natural methods for overcoming possible infertility. Today, "thanks to the progress of the biological and medical sciences, man has at his disposal ever more effective therapeutic resources; but he can also acquire new powers, with unforeseeable consequences, over human life at its very beginning and in its first stages" (Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation, Donum vitae, n. 1). In this perspective, "many researchers are engaged in the fight against sterility. While fully safeguarding the dignity of human procreation, some have achieved results which previously seemed unattainable.

"Scientists therefore are to be encouraged to continue their research with the aim of preventing the causes of sterility and of being able to remedy them so that sterile couples will be able to procreate in full respect for their own personal dignity and that of the child to be born" (ibid., n. 8). It is precisely this goal that is proposed by the ISI Paul VI and by other similar centers, with the encouragement of the ecclesiastical authority.

We may ask ourselves: how is it possible that the world today, and also many of the faithful, find it so difficult to understand the Church's message which illustrates and defends the beauty of conjugal love in its natural expression? Of course, in important human issues the technical solution often appears the easiest. Yet it actually conceals the basic question that concerns the meaning of human sexuality and the need for a responsible mastery of it so that its practice may become an expression of personal love.
When love is at stake, technology cannot replace the maturation of freedom. Indeed, as we well know, not even reason suffices: it must be the heart that sees. Only the eyes of the heart succeed in understanding the proper needs of a great love, capable of embracing the totality of the human being. For this, the service that the Church offers in her pastoral care of marriages and families must be able to guide couples to understand with their hearts the marvelous plan that God has written into the human body, helping them to accept all that an authentic process of maturation involves.

The Congress that you are celebrating therefore represents an important moment of reflection and care for couples and families, offering them the results of years of research in both the anthropological and ethical dimensions, as well as that which is strictly scientific, with regard to truly responsible procreation. In this light I can only congratulate you and express the hope that this work will bear abundant fruit and contribute to supporting couples on their way with ever greater wisdom and clarity, encouraging them in their mission to be credible witnesses of the beauty of love in the world. With these hopes, as I invoke the Lord’s help on the work of the congress, I impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all.

Address at the 23rd World Youth Day at Randwick Racetrack, Sydney, Australia (July 20, 2008)

Dear Young People,

Once again this evening we have heard Christ’s great promise—“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” And we have heard his summons—“be my witnesses throughout the world”—(*Acts* 1:8). These were the very last words which Jesus spoke before his Ascension into heaven. How the Apostles felt upon hearing them, we can only imagine. But we do know that their deep love for Jesus, and their trust in his word, prompted them to gather and to wait; to wait not aimlessly, but together, united in prayer, with the women and Mary in the Upper Room (cf. *Acts* 1:13).
Tonight, we do the same. Gathered before our much-traveled Cross and the icon of Mary, and under the magnificent constellation of the Southern Cross, we pray. Tonight, I am praying for you and for young people throughout the world. Be inspired by the example of your Patrons! Accept into your hearts and minds the sevenfold gift of the Holy Spirit! Recognize and believe in the power of the Spirit in your lives!

The other day we talked of the unity and harmony of God’s creation and our place within it. We recalled how in the great gift of baptism we, who are made in God’s image and likeness, have been reborn, we have become God’s adopted children, a new creation. And so it is as children of Christ’s light—symbolized by the lit candles you now hold—that we bear witness in our world to the radiance no darkness can overcome (cf. Jn 1:5).

Tonight we focus our attention on how to become witnesses. We need to understand the person of the Holy Spirit and his vivifying presence in our lives. This is not easy to comprehend. Indeed the variety of images found in scripture referring to the Spirit—wind, fire, breath—indicate our struggle to articulate an understanding of him. Yet we do know that it is the Holy Spirit who, though silent and unseen, gives direction and definition to our witness to Jesus Christ.

You are already well aware that our Christian witness is offered to a world which in many ways is fragile. The unity of God’s creation is weakened by wounds which run particularly deep when social relations break apart, or when the human spirit is all but crushed through the exploitation and abuse of persons. Indeed, society today is being fragmented by a way of thinking that is inherently short-sighted, because it disregards the full horizon of truth—the truth about God and about us. By its nature, relativism fails to see the whole picture. It ignores the very principles which enable us to live and flourish in unity, order and harmony.

What is our response, as Christian witnesses, to a divided and fragmented world? How can we offer the hope of peace, healing and harmony to those “stations” of conflict, suffering, and tension through which you have chosen to march with this World Youth Day Cross? Unity and reconciliation cannot be achieved through our efforts alone. God has made us for one another (cf. Gen 2:24) and only in God and his Church
can we find the unity we seek. Yet, in the face of imperfections and
disappointments—both individual and institutional—we are sometimes
tempted to construct artificially a “perfect” community. That temptation is
not new. The history of the Church includes many examples of attempts to
bypass or override human weaknesses or failures in order to create a perfect
unity, a spiritual utopia.

Such attempts to construct unity in fact undermine it! To separate the
Holy Spirit from Christ present in the Church’s institutional structure
would compromise the unity of the Christian community, which is
precisely the Spirit’s gift! It would betray the nature of the Church as the
living temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 3:16). It is the Spirit, in fact,
who guides the Church in the way of all truth and unifies her in
communion and in the works of ministry (cf. Lumen Gentium, 4).
Unfortunately the temptation to “go it alone” persists. Some today portray
their local community as somehow separate from the so-called institutional
Church, by speaking of the former as flexible and open to the Spirit and
the latter as rigid and devoid of the Spirit.

Unity is of the essence of the Church (cf. Catechism of the Catholic
Church, 813); it is a gift we must recognize and cherish. Tonight, let us
pray for the resolve to nurture unity: contribute to it! resist any temptation
to walk away! For it is precisely the comprehensiveness, the vast vision, of
our faith—solid yet open, consistent yet dynamic, true yet constantly
growing in insight—that we can offer our world. Dear young people, is it
not because of your faith that friends in difficulty or seeking meaning in
their lives have turned to you? Be watchful! Listen! Through the
dissonance and division of our world, can you hear the concordant voice of
humanity? From the forlorn child in a Darfur camp, or a troubled teenager,
or an anxious parent in any suburb, or perhaps even now from the depth of
your own heart, there emerges the same human cry for recognition, for
belonging, for unity. Who satisfies that essential human yearning to be one,
to be immersed in communion, to be built up, to be led to truth? The Holy
Spirit! This is the Spirit’s role: to bring Christ’s work to fulfillment.
Enriched with the Spirit’s gifts, you will have the power to move beyond
the piecemeal, the hollow utopia, the fleeting, to offer the consistency and
certainty of Christian witness!
Friends, when reciting the Creed we state: “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.” The “Creator Spirit” is the power of God giving life to all creation and the source of new and abundant life in Christ. The Spirit sustains the Church in union with the Lord and in fidelity to the apostolic Tradition. He inspired the Sacred Scriptures and he guides God’s People into the fullness of truth (cf. Jn 16:13) In all these ways the Spirit is the “giver of life,” leading us into the very heart of God. So, the more we allow the Spirit to direct us, the more perfect will be our configuration to Christ and the deeper our immersion in the life of the Triune God.

This sharing in God’s nature (cf. 2 Pet 1:4) occurs in the unfolding of the everyday moments of our lives where he is always present (cf. Bar 3:38). There are times, however, when we might be tempted to seek a certain fulfillment apart from God. Jesus himself asked the Twelve: “do you also wish to go away?” Such drifting away perhaps offers the illusion of freedom. But where does it lead? To whom would we go? For in our hearts we know that it is the Lord who has “the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:67-68). To turn away from him is only a futile attempt to escape from ourselves (cf. Saint Augustine, Confessions VIII, 7). God is with us in the reality of life, not the fantasy! It is embrace, not escape, that we seek! So the Holy Spirit gently but surely steers us back to what is real, what is lasting, what is true. It is the Spirit who leads us back into the communion of the Blessed Trinity!

The Holy Spirit has been in some ways the neglected person of the Blessed Trinity. A clear understanding of the Spirit almost seems beyond our reach. Yet, when I was a small boy, my parents, like yours, taught me the Sign of the Cross. So, I soon came to realize that there is one God in three Persons, and that the Trinity is the centre of our Christian faith and life. While I grew up to have some understanding of God the Father and the Son—the names already conveyed much—my understanding of the third person of the Trinity remained incomplete. So, as a young priest teaching theology, I decided to study the outstanding witnesses to the Spirit in the Church’s history. It was on this journey that I found myself reading, among others, the great Saint Augustine.

Augustine’s understanding of the Holy Spirit evolved gradually; it was
a struggle. As a young man he had followed Manichaeism - one of those attempts I mentioned earlier, to create a spiritual utopia by radically separating the things of the spirit from the things of the flesh. Hence he was at first suspicious of the Christian teaching that God had become man. Yet his experience of the love of God present in the Church led him to investigate its source in the life of the Triune God. This led him to three particular insights about the Holy Spirit as the bond of unity within the Blessed Trinity: unity as communion, unity as abiding love, and unity as giving and gift. These three insights are not just theoretical. They help explain how the Spirit works. In a world where both individuals and communities often suffer from an absence of unity or cohesion, these insights help us remain attuned to the Spirit and to extend and clarify the scope of our witness.

So, with Augustine’s help, let us illustrate something of the Holy Spirit’s work. He noted that the two words “Holy” and “Spirit” refer to what is divine about God; in other words what is shared by the Father and the Son—their communion. So, if the distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Spirit is to be what is shared by the Father and the Son, Augustine concluded that the Spirit’s particular quality is unity. It is a unity of lived communion: a unity of persons in a relationship of constant giving, the Father and the Son giving themselves to each other. We begin to glimpse, I think, how illuminating is this understanding of the Holy Spirit as unity, as communion. True unity could never be founded upon relationships which deny the equal dignity of other persons. Nor is unity simply the sum total of the groups through which we sometimes attempt to “define” ourselves. In fact, only in the life of communion is unity sustained and human identity fulfilled: we recognize the common need for God, we respond to the unifying presence of the Holy Spirit, and we give ourselves to one another in service.

Augustine’s second insight—the Holy Spirit as abiding love—comes from his study of the First Letter of Saint John. John tells us that “God is love” (1 Jn 4:16). Augustine suggests that while these words refer to the Trinity as a whole they express a particular characteristic of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on the lasting nature of love—“whoever abides in love remains in God and God in him” (ibid.)—he wondered: is it love or the Holy Spirit
which grants the abiding? This is the conclusion he reaches: “The Holy Spirit makes us remain in God and God in us; yet it is love that effects this. The Spirit therefore is God as love!” (De Trinitate, 15.17.31). It is a beautiful explanation: God shares himself as love in the Holy Spirit. What further understanding might we gain from this insight? Love is the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit! Ideas or voices which lack love—even if they seem sophisticated or knowledgeable—cannot be “of the Spirit.” Furthermore, love has a particular trait: far from being indulgent or fickle, it has a task or purpose to fulfill: to abide. By its nature love is enduring. Again, dear friends, we catch a further glimpse of how much the Holy Spirit offers our world: love which dispels uncertainty; love which overcomes the fear of betrayal; love which carries eternity within; the true love which draws us into a unity that abides!

The third insight—the Holy Spirit as gift—Augustine derived from meditating on a Gospel passage we all know and love: Christ’s conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. Here Jesus reveals himself as the giver of the living water (cf. Jn 4:10) which later is explained as the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn 7:39; 1 Cor 12:13). The Spirit is “God’s gift” (Jn 4:10)—the internal spring (cf. Jn 4:14), who truly satisfies our deepest thirst and leads us to the Father. From this observation Augustine concludes that God sharing himself with us as gift is the Holy Spirit (cf. De Trinitate, 15, 18, 32). Friends, again we catch a glimpse of the Trinity at work: the Holy Spirit is God eternally giving himself; like a never-ending spring he pours forth nothing less than himself. In view of this ceaseless gift, we come to see the limitations of all that perishes, the folly of the consumerist mindset. We begin to understand why the quest for novelty leaves us unsatisfied and wanting. Are we not looking for an eternal gift? The spring that will never run dry? With the Samaritan woman, let us exclaim: give me this water that I may thirst no more! (cf. Jn 4:15).

Dear young people, we have seen that it is the Holy Spirit who brings about the wonderful communion of believers in Jesus Christ. True to his nature as giver and gift alike, he is even now working through you. Inspired by the insights of Saint Augustine: let unifying love be your measure; abiding love your challenge; self-giving love your mission!
Tomorrow, that same gift of the Spirit will be solemnly conferred upon our confirmation candidates. I shall pray: “give them the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence… and fill them with the spirit of wonder and awe.” These gifts of the Spirit—each of which, as Saint Francis de Sales reminds us, is a way to participate in the one love of God—are neither prizes nor rewards. They are freely given (cf. 1 Cor 12:11). And they require only one response on the part of the receiver: I accept! Here we sense something of the deep mystery of being Christian. What constitutes our faith is not primarily what we do but what we receive. After all, many generous people who are not Christian may well achieve far more than we do. Friends, do you accept being drawn into God’s Trinitarian life? Do you accept being drawn into his communion of love?

The Spirit’s gifts working within us give direction and definition to our witness. Directed to unity, the gifts of the Spirit bind us more closely to the whole Body of Christ (cf. Lumen Gentium, 11), equipping us better to build up the Church in order to serve the world (cf. Eph 4:13). They call us to active and joyful participation in the life of the Church: in parishes and ecclesial movements, in religious education classes, in university chaplaincies and other catholic organizations. Yes, the Church must grow in unity, must be strengthened in holiness, must be rejuvenated, must be constantly renewed (cf. Lumen Gentium, 4). But according to whose standard? The Holy Spirit’s! Turn to him, dear young people, and you will find the true meaning of renewal.

Tonight, gathered under the beauty of the night sky, our hearts and minds are filled with gratitude to God for the great gift of our Trinitarian faith. We recall our parents and grandparents who walked alongside us when we, as children, were taking our first steps in our pilgrim journey of faith. Now many years later, you have gathered as young adults with the Successor of Peter. I am filled with deep joy to be with you. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit: he is the artisan of God’s works (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 741). Let his gifts shape you! Just as the Church travels the same journey with all humanity, so too you are called to exercise the Spirit’s gifts amidst the ups and downs of your daily life. Let your faith mature through your studies, work, sport, music and art. Let it be sustained by
prayer and nurtured by the sacraments, and thus be a source of inspiration and help to those around you. In the end, life is not about accumulation. It is much more than success. To be truly alive is to be transformed from within, open to the energy of God’s love. In accepting the power of the Holy Spirit you too can transform your families, communities and nations. Set free the gifts! Let wisdom, courage, awe and reverence be the marks of greatness!

And now, as we move towards adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in stillness and expectation, I echo to you the words spoken by Blessed Mary MacKillop when she was just twenty six years old: “Believe in the whisperings of God to your heart!” Believe in him! Believe in the power of the Spirit of Love!

At the end of the vigil, the Holy Father greeted the young people in Italian, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese

My dear Italian young people, a special greeting to all of you. Guard the flame that the Holy Spirit has enkindled in your hearts so that it does not go out, but burns ever more brightly and spreads light and warmth to all those you meet on your path, especially those who have lost faith and hope. May the Blessed Virgin Mary watch over you tonight and every day of your life.

Dear French-speaking young people, you have come to pray to the Holy Spirit this evening. May his silent presence in your heart help you to come to understand God’s plan for you. May he accompany you in your daily life and lead you to a deeper knowledge of God and of your neighbor. He is the one who, in the intimacy of your being, draws you toward the one Divine Truth and makes you live truly as brothers and sisters.

My dear young people from German-speaking countries, I greet you cordially. The Holy Spirit, ambassador of God’s love wants to live in your hearts. Leave space for him by listening to the word of God, by prayer, and by solidarity with the poor and those who are suffering. Bring to others the spirit of peace and reconciliation. May God, from whom all good comes, bring to fulfillment every good work that you do in his honor.

My dear young Spanish-speaking friends, may the Holy Spirit guide your steps in following Jesus in today’s world, which awaits from us
Christians a word of encouragement and the witness of a life that invites
them to look confidently towards the future. I commend you in my prayers
so that you respond generously to what our Lord is asking of you and what
all mankind is longing for. May God bless you.

My dear Portuguese-speaking friends, receive the Holy Spirit in order
to be the Church. Being the Church means being all united as one body
which receives its vital force from the Risen Jesus. This gift is greater than
our hearts, for it flows forth from the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. It
will enable you to live united to one another, to live in communion.
Therefore, my dear young people, take up within you the power of Jesus’
life. Let him enter into your hearts. Let yourselves be molded by the Holy
Spirit.

Homily at the inauguration of the Twelfth
Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of
Bishops, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the
Walls, Rome (October 5, 2008)

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The First Reading, taken from the Book of Isaiah, as well as the
passage from the Gospel according to Matthew, have presented to our
liturgical assembly an evocative allegorical image of Sacred Scripture: the
image of the vineyard which we have heard mentioned on the preceding
Sundays. The initial passage of the Gospel account refers to the "canticle of
the vineyard" which we find in Isaiah. This is a canticle set in the autumnal
context of the grape harvest: a miniature masterpiece of Hebrew poetry
which must have been very familiar to those listening to Jesus and from
which, as from other references by the prophets (cf. Hos 10: 1; Jer 2: 21; Ez
17: 3-10; 19: 10-14; Ps 79: 9-17), it was easy to understand that the
vineyard symbolized Israel. God bestowed the same care upon his vineyard,
upon the People he had chosen, that a faithful husband lavishes upon his wife (cf. Ez16: 1-14; Eph 5: 25-33).

Therefore the image of the vineyard, together with that of the wedding feast, describes the divine project of salvation and is presented as a moving allegory of God's Covenant with his People. In the Gospel, Jesus takes up the canticle of Isaiah but adapts it to his listeners and to the new period in salvation history. The emphasis is not so much on the vineyard as on the workers in it, from whom the landowner's "servants" ask for rent on his behalf. However, the servants are abused and even murdered. How is it possible not to think of the vicissitudes of the Chosen People and of the destiny reserved for the prophets sent by God? In the end, the owner of the vineyard makes a final attempt: he sends his own son, convinced that at least they will listen to him. Instead the opposite happens: the laborers in the vineyard murder him precisely because he is the landowner's son, that is, his heir, convinced that this will enable them to take possession of the vineyard more easily. We are therefore witnessing a leap in quality with regard to the accusation of the violation of social justice as it emerges from Isaiah's canticle. Here we clearly see that contempt for the master's order becomes contempt for the master: it is not mere disobedience to a divine precept, it is a true and proper rejection of God: the mystery of the Cross appears.

What the Gospel passage reports challenges our way of thinking and acting. It does not only speak of Christ's "hour", of the mystery of the Cross at that moment, but also of the presence of the Cross in all epochs. It challenges in a special way the people who have received the Gospel proclamation. If we look at history, we are often obliged to register the coldness and rebellion of inconsistent Christians. As a result of this, although God never failed to keep his promise of salvation, he often had to resort to punishment. In this context it comes naturally to think of the first proclamation of the Gospel from which sprang Christian communities that initially flourished but then disappeared and today are remembered only in history books. Might not the same thing happen in our time? Nations once rich in faith and vocations are now losing their identity under the harmful and destructive influence of a certain modern culture. There are some who, having decided that "God is dead", declare themselves to be "god",
considering themselves the only architect of their own destiny, the absolute owner of the world. By ridding himself of God and not expecting salvation from him, man believes he can do as he pleases and that he can make himself the sole judge of himself and his actions. However, when man eliminates God from his horizon, declares God "dead", is he really happy? Does he really become freer? When men proclaim themselves the absolute proprietors of themselves and the sole masters of creation, can they truly build a society where freedom, justice and peace prevail? Does it not happen instead - as the daily news amply illustrates - that arbitrary power, selfish interests, injustice and exploitation and violence in all its forms are extended? In the end, man reaches the point of finding himself lonelier and society is more divided and bewildered.

Yet there is a promise in Jesus' words: the vineyard will not be destroyed. While the unfaithful laborers abandon their destiny, the owner of the vineyard does not lose interest in his vineyard and entrusts it to other faithful servants. This means that, although in certain regions faith is dwindling to the point of dying out, there will always be other peoples ready to accept it. For this very reason, while Jesus cites Psalm 118[117], "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (v. 22), he gives the assurance that his death will not mean God's defeat. After being killed, he will not remain in the tomb, on the contrary, precisely what seems to be a total defeat will mark the beginning of a definitive victory. His painful Passion and death on the Cross will be followed by the glory of his Resurrection. The vineyard, therefore, will continue to produce grapes and will be rented by the owner of the vineyard: "to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons" (Mt 21: 41).

The image of the vineyard with its moral, doctrinal and spiritual implications was to recur in the discourse at the Last Supper when, taking his leave of the Apostles, the Lord said: "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15: 1-2). Thus, starting from the Paschal event, the history of salvation was to reach a decisive turning point and those "other tenants" were to play the lead as chosen shoots grafted on Christ, the true vine, and yield abundant fruits of eternal life (cf. Collect). We too are among these
"tenants", grafted on Christ who desired to become the "true vine" himself. Let us pray the Lord that in the Eucharist he will give us his Blood, himself, that he will help us to "bear fruit" for eternal life and for our time.

The comforting message that we gather from these biblical texts is the certainty that evil and death do not have the last word but that it is Christ who wins in the end. Always! The Church never tires of proclaiming this Good News, as is also happening today, in this Basilica, dedicated to the Apostle to the Gentiles who was the first to spread the Gospel in vast regions of Asia Minor and Europe. We shall meaningfully renew this proclamation at the 12th General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops whose theme is "The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church". I would like to greet here with cordial affection all of you, venerable Synod Fathers, and all those who are taking part in this meeting as experts, auditors and special guests. I am pleased also to welcome the Fraternal Delegates of other Churches and Ecclesiastical Communities. I extend to the Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops and his collaborators the expression of gratitude of us all for the hard work they have carried out in the past months, together with my good wishes for the efforts that await them in the coming weeks.

When God speaks, he always asks for a response. His saving action demands human cooperation; his love must be reciprocated. Dear brothers and sisters, may what the biblical text recounts about the vineyard never occur: "[he] looked for it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes" (Is 5: 2). The Word of God alone can profoundly change man's heart so it is important that individual believers and communities enter into ever increasing intimacy with his Word. The Synodal Assembly will focus attention on this fundamental truth for the life and mission of the Church. To draw nourishment from the Word of God is her first and fundamental task. In fact, if the Gospel proclamation is her raison d'ètre and mission, it is indispensable that the Church know and live what she proclaims, so that her preaching may be credible despite the weaknesses and poverty of the people of whom she is comprised. We know, furthermore, that the proclamation of the Word, at the school of Christ, has the Kingdom of God as its content (cf. Mk 1: 14-15, but the Kingdom of God is the very person of Jesus who, with his words and actions, offers salvation to people
of every epoch. Interesting in this regard is St Jerome's reflection: "Whoever does not know Scripture does not know the power and wisdom of God, then ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ" (Prologue of the commentary on Isaiah: n. 1, CCL 73, 1).

In this Pauline Year we hear the cry of the Apostle to the Gentiles resounding with special urgency: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9: 16); a cry that becomes for every Christian a pressing invitation to serve Christ. "The harvest is plentiful" (Mt 9: 37) the Divine Teacher still repeats today: so many still do not know him and are awaiting the first proclamation of his Gospel; others, although they received a Christian formation, have become less enthusiastic and retain only a superficial contact with God's Word; yet others have drifted away from the practice of the faith and need a new evangelization. Then there are plenty of people of right understanding who ask themselves essential questions about the meaning of life and death, questions to which only Christ can give satisfactory answers. It is, therefore, becoming indispensable for Christians on every continent to be ready to reply to those who ask them to account for the hope that is in them (cf. 1 Pet 3: 15), joyfully proclaiming the Word of God and living the Gospel without compromises.

Venerable and dear Brothers, may the Lord help us to question ourselves together, in the coming weeks of the Synod's work, on how to make the Gospel proclamation increasingly effective in our time. We all know how necessary it is to make the Word of God the centre of our lives, to welcome Christ as our one Redeemer, as the Kingdom of God in person, to ensure that his light may enlighten every context of humanity: from the family to the school, to culture, to work, to free time and to the other sectors of society and of our life. In taking part in the Eucharistic celebration we are always aware of the close connection that exists between the proclamation of the Word of God and the Eucharistic sacrifice: it is the Mystery itself that is offered for our contemplation. This is why "the Church", as the Second Vatican Council highlights, "has always venerated the divine Scriptures as she venerated the Body of the Lord, in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy to partake of the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ" (Dei Verbum, n. 21). The Council rightly concludes:
"Just as from constant attendance at the Eucharistic mystery the life of the Church draws increase, so a new impulse of spiritual life may be expected from increased veneration of the Word of God, which "stands for ever" (Dei Verbum, n. 26).

May the Lord grant that we approach with faith the twofold banquet of the Body and Blood of Christ. May Mary Most Holy, who "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19) obtain this for us. May she teach us to listen to the Scriptures and meditate upon them in an inner process of maturation that never separates the mind from the heart. May the Saints come to our aid, and in particular the Apostle Paul, whom during this year we are increasingly discovering as an undaunted witness and herald of God's Word. Amen!

Homily on the 150th Anniversary of the Apparitions at Lourdes, France (September 14, 2008)

Dear Cardinals,
Dear Bishop Perrier,
Dear Brothers in the episcopate and the priesthood,
Dear pilgrims, brothers and sisters,

"Go and tell the priests that people should come here in procession, and that a chapel should be built here." This is the message Bernadette received from the "beautiful lady" in the apparition of 2 March 1858. For 150 years, pilgrims have never ceased to come to the grotto of Massabielle to hear the message of conversion and hope which is addressed to them. And we have done the same; here we are this morning at the feet of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin, eager to learn from her alongside little Bernadette.

I would like to thank especially Bishop Jacques Perrier of Tarbes and Lourdes for the warm welcome he has given me, and for the kind words he has addressed to me. I greet the Cardinals, the Bishops, the priests, the
deacons, the men and women religious, and all of you, dear Lourdes pilgrims, especially the sick. You have come in large numbers to make this Jubilee pilgrimage with me and to entrust your families, your relatives and friends, and all your intentions to Our Lady. My thanks go also to the civil and military Authorities who are here with us at this Eucharistic celebration.

“What a great thing it is to possess the Cross! He who possesses it possesses a treasure” (Saint Andrew of Crete, Homily X on the Exaltation of the Cross, PG 97, 1020). On this day when the Church’s liturgy celebrates the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Gospel you have just heard reminds us of the meaning of this great mystery: God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that men might be saved (cf. Jn 3:16). The Son of God became vulnerable, assuming the condition of a slave, obedient even to death, death on a cross (cf. Phil 2:8). By his Cross we are saved. The instrument of torture which, on Good Friday, manifested God’s judgment on the world, has become a source of life, pardon, mercy, a sign of reconciliation and peace. “In order to be healed from sin, gaze upon Christ crucified!” said Saint Augustine (Treatise on Saint John, XII, 11). By raising our eyes towards the Crucified one, we adore him who came to take upon himself the sin of the world and to give us eternal life. And the Church invites us proudly to lift up this glorious Cross so that the world can see the full extent of the love of the Crucified one for mankind, for every man and woman. She invites us to give thanks to God because from a tree which brought death, life has burst out anew. On this wood Jesus reveals to us his sovereign majesty, he reveals to us that he is exalted in glory. Yes, “Come, let us adore him!” In our midst is he who loved us even to giving his life for us, he who invites every human being to draw near to him with trust.

This is the great mystery that Mary also entrusts to us this morning, inviting us to turn towards her Son. In fact, it is significant that, during the first apparition to Bernadette, Mary begins the encounter with the sign of the Cross. More than a simple sign, it is an initiation into the mysteries of the faith that Bernadette receives from Mary. The sign of the Cross is a kind of synthesis of our faith, for it tells how much God loves us; it tells us that there is a love in this world that is stronger than death, stronger than
our weaknesses and sins. The power of love is stronger than the evil which threatens us. It is this mystery of the universality of God's love for men that Mary came to reveal here, in Lourdes. She invites all people of good will, all those who suffer in heart or body, to raise their eyes towards the Cross of Jesus, so as to discover there the source of life, the source of salvation.

The Church has received the mission of showing all people this loving face of God, manifested in Jesus Christ. Are we able to understand that in the Crucified One of Golgotha, our dignity as children of God, tarnished by sin, is restored to us? Let us turn our gaze towards Christ. It is he who will make us free to love as he loves us, and to build a reconciled world. For on this Cross, Jesus took upon himself the weight of all the sufferings and injustices of our humanity. He bore the humiliation and the discrimination, the torture suffered in many parts of the world by so many of our brothers and sisters for love of Christ. We entrust all this to Mary, mother of Jesus and our mother, present at the foot of the Cross.

In order to welcome into our lives this glorious Cross, the celebration of the Jubilee of Our Lady's apparitions in Lourdes urges us to embark upon a journey of faith and conversion. Today, Mary comes to meet us, so as to show us the way towards a renewal of life for our communities and for each one of us. By welcoming her Son, whom she presents to us, we are plunged into a living stream in which the faith can rediscover new vigor, in which the Church can be strengthened so as to proclaim the mystery of Christ ever more boldly. Jesus, born of Mary, is the Son of God, the sole Saviour of all people, living and acting in his Church and in the world. The Church is sent everywhere in the world to proclaim this unique message and to invite people to receive it through an authentic conversion of heart. This mission, entrusted by Jesus to his disciples, receives here, on the occasion of this Jubilee, a breath of new life. After the example of the great evangelizers from your country, may the missionary spirit which animated so many men and women from France over the centuries, continue to be your pride and your commitment!

When we follow the Jubilee Way in the footsteps of Bernadette, we are reminded of the heart of the message of Lourdes. Bernadette is the eldest daughter of a very poor family, with neither knowledge nor power, and in poor health. Mary chose her to transmit her message of conversion, prayer
and penance, which fully accord with words of Jesus: “What you have hidden from the wise and understanding, you have revealed to babes” (Mt 11:25). On their spiritual journey, Christians too are called to render fruitful the grace of their Baptism, to nourish themselves with the Eucharist, to draw strength from prayer so as to bear witness and to express solidarity with all their fellow human beings (cf. Homage to the Virgin Mary, Piazza di Spagna, 8 December 2007). It is therefore a genuine catechesis that is being proposed to us in this way, under Mary’s gaze. Let us allow her to instruct us too, and to guide us along the path that leads to the Kingdom of her Son!

In the course of her catechesis, the “beautiful lady” reveals her name to Bernadette: “I am the Immaculate Conception”. Mary thereby discloses the extraordinary grace that she has received from God, that of having been conceived without sin, for “he has looked on his servant in her lowliness” (cf. Lk 1:48). Mary is the woman from this earth who gave herself totally to God, and who received the privilege of giving human life to his eternal Son. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me” (Lk 1:38). She is beauty transfigured, the image of the new humanity. By presenting herself in this way, in utter dependence upon God, Mary expresses in reality an attitude of total freedom, based upon the full recognition of her true dignity. This privilege concerns us too, for it discloses to us our own dignity as men and women, admittedly marked by sin, but saved in hope, a hope which allows us to face our daily life. This is the path which Mary opens up for man. To give oneself fully to God is to find the path of true freedom. For by turning towards God, man becomes himself. He redisCOVERs his original vocation as a person created in his image and likeness.

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the primary purpose of the shrine at Lourdes is to be a place of encounter with God in prayer and a place of service to our brothers and sisters, notably through the welcome given to the sick, the poor and all who suffer. In this place, Mary comes to us as a mother, always open to the needs of her children. Through the light which streams from her face, God’s mercy is made manifest. Let us allow ourselves to be touched by her gaze, which tells us that we are all loved by God and never abandoned by him! Mary comes to remind us that prayer
which is humble and intense, trusting and persevering, must have a central place in our Christian lives. Prayer is indispensable if we are to receive Christ’s power. “People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone” (Deus Caritas Est, 36). To allow oneself to become absorbed by activity runs the risk of depriving prayer of its specifically Christian character and its true efficacy. The prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Bernadette and to Lourdes pilgrims, concentrates within itself the depths of the Gospel message. It introduces us to contemplation of the face of Christ. From this prayer of the humble, we can draw an abundance of graces.

The presence of young people at Lourdes is also an important element. Dear friends, gathered this morning around the World Youth Day Cross: when Mary received the angel’s visit, she was a young girl from Nazareth leading the simple and courageous life typical of the women of her village. And if God’s gaze focused particularly upon her, trusting in her, Mary wants to tell you once more that not one of you is indifferent in God’s eyes. He directs his loving gaze upon each one of you and he calls you to a life that is happy and full of meaning. Do not allow yourselves to be discouraged by difficulties! Mary was disturbed by the message of the angel who came to tell her that she would become the Mother of the Saviour. She was conscious of her frailty in the face of God’s omnipotence. Nevertheless, she said “yes”, without hesitating. And thanks to her yes, salvation came into the world, thereby changing the history of mankind. For your part, dear young people, do not be afraid to say yes to the Lord’s summons when he invites you to walk in his footsteps. Respond generously to the Lord! Only he can fulfill the deepest aspirations of your heart. You have come to Lourdes in great numbers for attentive and generous service to the sick and to the other pilgrims, setting out in this way to follow Christ the servant. Serving our brothers and sisters opens our hearts and makes us available. In the silence of prayer, be prepared to confide in Mary, who spoke to Bernadette in a spirit of respect and trust towards her. May Mary help those who are called to marriage to discover the beauty of a genuine and profound love, lived as a reciprocal and faithful gift! To those among you whom he calls to follow him in the priesthood or the religious life, I would like to reiterate all the joy that is to be had through giving one’s life totally for the service of God and others. May Christian families and communities
be places where solid vocations can come to birth and grow, for the service of the Church and the world!

Mary’s message is a message of hope for all men and women of our day, whatever their country of origin. I like to invoke Mary as the star of hope (Spe Salvi, 50). On the paths of our lives, so often shrouded in darkness, she is a beacon of hope who enlightens us and gives direction to our journey. Through her “yes”, through the generous gift of herself, she has opened up to God the gates of our world and our history. And she invites us to live like her in invincible hope, refusing to believe those who claim that we are trapped in the fatal power of destiny. She accompanies us with her maternal presence amid the events of our personal lives, our family lives, and our national lives. Happy are those men and women who place their trust in him who, at the very moment when he was offering his life for our salvation, gave us his Mother to be our own!

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in this land of France, the Mother of the Lord is venerated in countless shrines which thereby manifest the faith handed down from generation to generation. Celebrated in her Assumption, she is your country’s beloved patroness. May she always be honored fervently in each of your families, in your religious communities and in your parishes! May Mary watch over all the inhabitants of your beautiful country and over the pilgrims who have come in such numbers from other countries to celebrate this Jubilee! May she be for all people the Mother who surrounds her children in their joys and their trials! Holy Mary, Mother of God, our Mother, teach us to believe, to hope and to love with you. Show us the way towards the kingdom of your Son Jesus! Star of the sea, shine upon us and lead us on our way! (cf. Spe Salvi, 50). Amen.
Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the Congress fittingly organized on the 10th anniversary of the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. I first thank Archbishop Rino Fisichella for his cordial words introducing today's meeting. I am glad that the study days of your Congress involve the effective collaboration of the Lateran University, the Pontifical Academy for Sciences and the World Conference of Catholic University Philosophy Institutions. Collaboration of this kind is always desirable, especially when one is called to account for one's faith in the face of ever more complex challenges that confront believers in the contemporary world.

Ten years after its publication, an attentive look at the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* enables one to perceive admiringly its lasting topicality; it reveals the farsighted depth of my unforgettable Predecessor. In fact, the Encyclical is characterized by its great openness to reason, especially in a period in which its weakness was theorized. John Paul II, on the other hand, underlines the importance of combining faith and reason in their reciprocal relationship, yet while also respecting the sphere of autonomy of each. With this Magisterium, the Church has voiced an emerging need within the contemporary cultural context. She has chosen to defend the power of reason and its ability to attain the truth, presenting faith once again as a special form of knowledge, thanks to which we are opened to the truth of Revelation (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, n. 13). We read in the Encyclical that we must trust in the abilities of human reason and not set ourselves goals that are too modest: "It is faith which stirs reason to move beyond all isolation and willingly to run risks so that it may attain whatever is beautiful, good and true" (n. 56). Moreover, it is in the passing of time that the achievement of reason's goals, motivated by the passion for truth, are manifest. Who could deny the contribution that the great philosophical systems have made to the development of human self-awareness and the progress of various cultures? What is more, these cultures become fruitful when they are opened to the truth, enabling all those who participate in them to reach goals that make social life ever more human. The quest for
the truth bears most fruit when it is sustained by love for the truth. Augustine wrote: "What one holds with the mind is held by knowing it, but no good may be known perfectly unless one loves perfectly" (De diversis quaestionibus, 35, 2).

Yet we cannot deny that a shift has occurred from predominantly speculative thought to that which is primarily experimental. Research has above all involved the observation of nature in the attempt to discover its secrets. The desire to know nature then became the desire to reproduce it. This transformation was far from painless; the evolution of concepts damaged the relationship between fides and ratio, resulting in each taking its own separate path. Scientific and technological breakthroughs, which fides is increasingly challenged to face, have modified the age-old concept of ratio; in a certain way they have marginalized the reason that was seeking the ultimate truth of things in order to make room for a reason content with discovering the contingent truths of the laws of nature. Scientific research undoubtedly has its positive value. The discovery of and increase in the mathematical, physical, chemical and applied sciences are the product of reason and express the intelligence with which man succeeds in penetrating the depth of creation. Faith, for its part, does not fear scientific progress and the developments to which scientific achievements lead when they are aimed towards the human being, his well-being and the progress of humanity as a whole. As the anonymous author of the Letter to Diognetus recalled: "The tree of knowledge does not kill, but disobedience kills. For there cannot be life without knowledge any more than there can be sound knowledge without genuine life, and so the two trees were planted close together" (xii, 2, 4).

Nonetheless, it happens that scientists do not always direct their research to these aims. Easy earnings or, even worse, the arrogance of replacing the Creator, at times play a decisive role. This is a form of the hybris of reason, which can acquire characteristics that are dangerous to humanity itself. Science, moreover, is unable to work out ethical principles; it can only accept them and recognize them as necessary to eradicate its potential pathologies. In this context, philosophy and theology become indispensable aids which must be placed alongside science in order to prevent it from proceeding on its own down a twisting path, full of
unexpected accidents and not without risks. This does not mean restricting scientific research or preventing technology from producing the means for development; rather, it consists in maintaining vigilance about the sense of responsibility that reason possesses in regards to science, so that it stays on track in its service to the human being.

Augustine's lesson is still meaningful even in today's context: "What does someone who can use reason well attain other than the truth?" the holy Bishop of Hippo asks. "The truth is not obtained by itself with reasoning but it is what those who use reason seek.... It confesses that what the truth is not you, for it does not seek itself; you, on the other hand, have not attained it by passing from one place to another, but by seeking it with the disposition of your mind" (De vera religione, 39, 72). In other words, wherever the search for the truth comes from, it remains as a given that is both offered and recognizable as already present in nature. The intelligibility of creation, in fact, is not the result of the scientist's effort, but a condition offered to him to enable him to discover the truth that is present within it. "These things are not made by the process of reasoning, but discovered", Augustine continues in his reflection. "Therefore they abide in themselves even before they are discovered, and once they are discovered they renew us" (ibid., 39, 73). In brief, reason must fully run its course, strong in its autonomy and its rich intellectual tradition.

Reason also understands and discovers that, in addition to what it has already attained and achieved, there exists a truth that it will never be able to discover based solely on itself, but only receive as a gift freely given. The truth of Revelation does not superimpose the truth achieved by reason; rather, it purifies and exalts reason, thereby enabling it to broaden its horizons to enter into a field of research as unfathomably expansive as mystery itself. The truth revealed, when "the time had fully come" (Gal 4: 4), assumed the Face of a person, Jesus of Nazareth, who brought the ultimate and definitive answer to the question of human meaning. The truth of Christ, since it affects every person in search of joy, happiness and meaning, far exceeds any other truth that reason can discover. It surrounds mystery, so that fides and ratio might find the real possibility of a common path.
The Synod of Bishops on the theme: "The Word of God in the life and mission of the Church", is taking place in these days. How can we fail to see the providential coincidence of this event with your Congress? Passion for the truth impels us to re-enter into our interior selves to grasp the profound meaning of our lives. True philosophy must take every person by the hand and bring them to discover how fundamental it is to their dignity to know the truth of Revelation. Before this demand for meaning, which gives no respite until it flows into Jesus Christ, the Word of God reveals his character as a definitive response: one Word of revelation that becomes life and that asks to be welcomed as an inexhaustible source of truth.

As I hope that each one of you will increasingly feel within you this passion for the truth and will do everything in your power to satisfy its demands, I would like to assure you that I am following your commitment with appreciation and pleasure, accompanying your research with my prayers. To confirm these sentiments, I willingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you who are present here and to your loved ones.

Meeting with the world of culture in the College of the Bernardins (September 14, 2008)

Your Eminence,

Madam Minister of Culture,

Mr. Mayor,

Mr. Chancellor of the French Institute,

Dear Friends!

I thank you, Your Eminence, for your kind words. We are gathered in a historic place, built by the spiritual sons of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, and which Your venerable predecessor, the late Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, desired to be a center of dialogue between Christian Wisdom and
the cultural, intellectual, and artistic currents of contemporary society. In particular, I greet the Minister of Culture, who is here representing the Government, together with Mr Giscard d'Estaing and Mr Jacques Chirac. I likewise greet all the Ministers present, the Representatives of UNESCO, the Mayor of Paris, and all other Authorities in attendance. I do not want to forget my colleagues from the French Institute, who are well aware of my regard for them. I thank the Prince of Broglie for his cordial words. We shall see each other again tomorrow morning. I thank the delegates of the French Islamic community for having accepted the invitation to participate in this meeting: I convey to them by best wishes for the holy season of Ramadan already underway. Of course, I extend warm greetings to the entire, multifaceted world of culture, which you, dear guests, so worthily represent.

I would like to speak with you this evening of the origins of western theology and the roots of European culture. I began by recalling that the place in which we are gathered is in a certain way emblematic. It is in fact a place tied to monastic culture, insofar as young monks came to live here in order to learn to understand their vocation more deeply and to be more faithful to their mission. We are in a place that is associated with the culture of monasticism. Does this still have something to say to us today, or are we merely encountering the world of the past? In order to answer this question, we must consider for a moment the nature of Western monasticism itself. What was it about? From the perspective of monasticism's historical influence, we could say that, amid the great cultural upheaval resulting from migrations of peoples and the emerging new political configurations, the monasteries were the places where the treasures of ancient culture survived, and where at the same time a new culture slowly took shape out of the old. But how did it happen? What motivated men to come together to these places? What did they want? How did they live?

First and foremost, it must be frankly admitted straight away that it was not their intention to create a culture nor even to preserve a culture from the past. Their motivation was much more basic. Their goal was: *quaerere Deum*. Amid the confusion of the times, in which nothing seemed permanent, they wanted to do the essential — to make an effort to find
what was perennially valid and lasting, life itself. They were searching for God. They wanted to go from the inessential to the essential, to the only truly important and reliable thing there is. It is sometimes said that they were “eschatologically” oriented. But this is not to be understood in a temporal sense, as if they were looking ahead to the end of the world or to their own death, but in an existential sense: they were seeking the definitive behind the provisional. *Quaerere Deum*: because they were Christians, this was not an expedition into a trackless wilderness, a search leading them into total darkness. God himself had provided signposts, indeed he had marked out a path which was theirs to find and to follow. This path was his word, which had been disclosed to men in the books of the sacred Scriptures. Thus, by inner necessity, the search for God demands a culture of the word or — as Jean Leclercq put it: eschatology and grammar are intimately connected with one another in Western monasticism (cf. *L’amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*). The longing for God, the *désir de Dieu*, includes *amour des lettres*, love of the word, exploration of all its dimensions. Because in the biblical word God comes towards us and we towards him, we must learn to penetrate the secret of language, to understand it in its construction and in the manner of its expression. Thus it is through the search for God that the secular sciences take on their importance, sciences which show us the path towards language. Because the search for God required the culture of the word, it was appropriate that the monastery should have a library, pointing out pathways to the word. It was also appropriate to have a school, in which these pathways could be opened up. Benedict calls the monastery a *dominici servitii schola*. The monastery serves *eruditio*, the formation and education of man — a formation whose ultimate aim is that man should learn how to serve God. But it also includes the formation of reason — education — through which man learns to perceive, in the midst of words, the Word itself.

Yet in order to have a full vision of the culture of the word, which essentially pertains to the search for God, we must take a further step. The Word which opens the path of that search, and is to be identified with this path, is a shared word. True, it pierces every individual to the heart (cf. *Acts* 2:37). Gregory the Great describes this a sharp stabbing pain, which tears open our sleeping soul and awakens us, making us attentive to the essential reality, to God (cf. Leclercq, p. 35). But in the process, it also makes us
attentive to one another. The word does not lead to a purely individual path of mystical immersion, but to the pilgrim fellowship of faith. And so this word must not only be pondered, but also correctly read. As in the rabbinic schools, so too with the monks, reading by the individual is at the same time a corporate activity. “But if legere and lectio are used without an explanatory note, then they designate for the most part an activity which, like singing and writing, engages the whole body and the whole spirit”, says Jean Leclercq on the subject (ibid., 21).

And once again, a further step is needed. We ourselves are brought into conversation with God by the word of God. The God who speaks in the Bible teaches us how to speak with him ourselves. Particularly in the book of Psalms, he gives us the words with which we can address him, with which we can bring our life, with all its high points and low points, into conversation with him, so that life itself thereby becomes a movement towards him. The psalms also contain frequent instructions about how they should be sung and accompanied by instruments. For prayer that issues from the word of God, speech is not enough: music is required. Two chants from the Christian liturgy come from biblical texts in which they are placed on the lips of angels: the Gloria, which is sung by the angels at the birth of Jesus, and the Sanctus, which according to Isaiah 6 is the cry of the seraphim who stand directly before God. Christian worship is therefore an invitation to sing with the angels, and thus to lead the word to its highest destination. Once again, Jean Leclercq says on this subject: “The monks had to find melodies which translate into music the acceptance by redeemed man of the mysteries that he celebrates. The few surviving capitula from Cluny thus show the Christological symbols of the individual modes” (cf. ibid. p. 229).

For Benedict, the words of the Psalm: coram angelis psallam Tibi, Domine — in the presence of the angels, I will sing your praise (cf. 138:1) — are the decisive rule governing the prayer and chant of the monks. What this expresses is the awareness that in communal prayer one is singing in the presence of the entire heavenly court, and is thereby measured according to the very highest standards: that one is praying and singing in such a way as to harmonize with the music of the noble spirits who were considered the originators of the harmony of the cosmos, the
music of the spheres. From this perspective one can understand the seriousness of a remark by Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, who used an expression from the Platonic tradition handed down by Augustine, to pass judgment on the poor singing of monks, which for him was evidently very far from being a mishap of only minor importance. He describes the confusion resulting from a poorly executed chant as a falling into the “zone of dissimilarity” — the *regio dissimilitudinis*. Augustine had borrowed this phrase from Platonic philosophy, in order to designate his condition prior to conversion (cf. *Confessions*, VII, 10.16): man, who is created in God’s likeness, falls in his godforsakenness into the “zone of dissimilarity” — into a remoteness from God, in which he no longer reflects him, and so has become dissimilar not only to God, but to himself, to what being human truly is. Bernard is certainly putting it strongly when he uses this phrase, which indicates man’s falling away from himself, to describe bad singing by monks. But it shows how seriously he viewed the matter. It shows that the culture of singing is also the culture of being, and that the monks have to pray and sing in a manner commensurate with the grandeur of the word handed down to them, with its claim on true beauty. This intrinsic requirement of speaking with God and singing of him with words he himself has given, is what gave rise to the great tradition of Western music. It was not a form of private “creativity”, in which the individual leaves a memorial to himself and makes self-representation his essential criterion. Rather it is about vigilantly recognizing with the “ears of the heart” the inner laws of the music of creation, the archetypes of music that the Creator built into his world and into men, and thus discovering music that is worthy of God, and at the same time truly worthy of man, music whose worthiness resounds in purity.

In order to understand to some degree the culture of the word, which developed deep within Western monasticism from the search for God, we need to touch at least briefly on the particular character of the book, or rather books, in which the monks encountered this word. The Bible, considered from a purely historical and literary perspective, is not simply a book, but a collection of literary texts which were redacted over the course of more than a thousand years, and in which the inner unity of the individual books is not immediately apparent. On the contrary, there are visible tensions between them. This is already the case within the Bible of
Israel, which we Christians call the Old Testament. It is only rectified when we as Christians link the New Testament writings as, so to speak, a hermeneutical key with the Bible of Israel, and so understand the latter as the journey towards Christ. With good reason, the New Testament generally designates the Bible not as “the Scripture” but as “the Scriptures”, which, when taken together, are naturally then regarded as the one word of God to us. But the use of this plural makes it quite clear that the word of God only comes to us through the human word and through human words, that God only speaks to us through the humanity of human agents, through their words and their history. This means again that the divine element in the word and in the words is not self-evident. To say this in a modern way: the unity of the biblical books and the divine character of their words cannot be grasped by purely historical methods. The historical element is seen in the multiplicity and the humanity. From this perspective one can understand the formulation of a medieval couplet that at first sight appears rather disconcerting: *littera gesta docet — quid credas allegoria …* (cf. Augustine of Dacia, *Rotulus pugiliaris*, I). The letter indicates the facts; what you have to believe is indicated by allegory, that is to say, by Christological and pneumatological exegesis.

We may put it even more simply: Scripture requires exegesis, and it requires the context of the community in which it came to birth and in which it is lived. This is where its unity is to be found, and here too its unifying meaning is opened up. To put it yet another way: there are dimensions of meaning in the word and in words which only come to light within the living community of this history-generating word. Through the growing realization of the different layers of meaning, the word is not devalued, but in fact appears in its full grandeur and dignity. Therefore the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* can rightly say that Christianity does not simply represent a religion of the book in the classical sense (cf. par. 108). It perceives in the words the Word, the Logos itself, which spreads its mystery through this multiplicity and the reality of a human history. This particular structure of the Bible issues a constantly new challenge to every generation. It excludes by its nature everything that today is known as fundamentalism. In effect, the word of God can never simply be equated with the letter of the text. To attain to it involves a transcending and a
process of understanding, led by the inner movement of the whole and hence it also has to become a process of living. Only within the dynamic unity of the whole are the many books one book. The Word of God and his action in the world are revealed only in the word and history of human beings.

The whole drama of this topic is illuminated in the writings of Saint Paul. What is meant by the transcending of the letter and understanding it solely from the perspective of the whole, he forcefully expressed as follows: “The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). And he continues: “Where the Spirit is … there is freedom (cf. 2 Cor 3:17). But one can only understand the greatness and breadth of this vision of the biblical word if one listens closely to Paul and then discovers that this liberating Spirit has a name, and hence that freedom has an inner criterion: “The Lord is the Spirit. Where the Spirit is … there is freedom” (2 Cor 3:17). The liberating Spirit is not simply the exegete’s own idea, the exegete’s own vision. The Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the Lord who shows us the way. With the word of Spirit and of freedom, a further horizon opens up, but at the same time a clear limit is placed upon arbitrariness and subjectivity, which unequivocally binds both the individual and the community and brings about a new, higher obligation than that of the letter: namely, the obligation of insight and love. This tension between obligation and freedom, which extends far beyond the literary problem of scriptural exegesis, has also determined the thinking and acting of monasticism and has deeply marked Western culture. This tension presents itself anew as a challenge for our own generation as we face two poles: on the one hand, subjective arbitrariness, and on the other, fundamentalist fanaticism. It would be a disaster if today’s European culture could only conceive freedom as absence of obligation, which would inevitably play into the hands of fanaticism and arbitrariness. Absence of obligation and arbitrariness do not signify freedom, but its destruction.

Thus far in our consideration of the “school of God’s service”, as Benedict describes monasticism, we have examined only its orientation towards the word — towards the “ora”. Indeed, this is the starting point that sets the direction for the entire monastic life. But our consideration would remain incomplete if we did not also at least briefly glance at the
second component of monasticism, indicated by the “labora”. In the Greek world, manual labor was considered something for slaves. Only the wise man, the one who is truly free, devotes himself to the things of the spirit; he views manual labor as somehow beneath him, and leaves it to people who are not suited to this higher existence in the world of the spirit. The Jewish tradition was quite different: all the great rabbis practiced at the same time some form of handcraft. Paul, who as a Rabbi and then as a preacher of the Gospel to the Gentile world was also a tent-maker and earned his living with the work of his own hands, is no exception here, but stands within the common tradition of the rabbinate. Monasticism took up this tradition; manual work is a constitutive element of Christian monasticism. In his *Regula*, Saint Benedict does not speak specifically about schools, although in practice, he presupposes teaching and learning, as we have seen. However, in one chapter of his Rule, he does speak explicitly about work (cf. Chap. 48). And so does Augustine, who dedicated a book of his own to monastic work. Christians, who thus continued in the tradition previously established by Judaism, must have felt further vindicated by Jesus’ saying in Saint John’s Gospel, in defense of his activity on the Sabbath: “My Father is working still, and I am working” (5:17). The Graeco-Roman world did not have a creator God; according to its vision, the highest divinity could not, as it were, dirty his hands in the business of creating matter. The “making” of the world was the work of the Demiurge, a lower deity. The Christian God is different: he, the one, real and only God, is also the Creator. God is working; he continues working in and on human history. In Christ, he enters personally into the laborious work of history. “My Father is working still, and I am working.” God himself is the Creator of the world, and creation is not yet finished. God works, *ergázetai!* Thus human work was now seen as a special form of human resemblance to God, as a way in which man can and may share in God’s activity as creator of the world. Monasticism involves not only a culture of the word, but also a culture of work, without which the emergence of Europe, its ethos and its influence on the world would be unthinkable. Naturally, this ethos had to include the idea that human work and shaping of history is understood as sharing in the work of the Creator, and must be evaluated in those terms. Where such evaluation is lacking,
where man arrogates to himself the status of god-like creator, his shaping of the world can quickly turn into destruction of the world.

We set out from the premise that the basic attitude of monks in the face of the collapse of the old order and its certainties was *quaerere Deum* — setting out in search of God. We could describe this as the truly philosophical attitude: looking beyond the penultimate, and setting out in search of the ultimate and the true. By becoming a monk, a man set out on a broad and noble path, but he had already found the direction he needed: the word of the Bible, in which he heard God himself speaking. Now he had to try to understand him, so as to be able to approach him. So the monastic journey is indeed a journey into the inner world of the received word, even if an infinite distance is involved. Within the monks’ seeking there is already contained, in some respects, a finding. Therefore, if such seeking is to be possible at all, there has to be an initial spur, which not only arouses the will to seek, but also makes it possible to believe that the way is concealed within this word, or rather: that in this word, God himself has set out towards men, and hence men can come to God through it. To put it another way: there must be proclamation, which speaks to man and so creates conviction, which in turn can become life. If a way is to be opened up into the heart of the biblical word as God’s word, this word must first of all be proclaimed outwardly. The classic formulation of the Christian faith’s intrinsic need to make itself communicable to others, is a phrase from the First Letter of Peter, which in medieval theology was regarded as the biblical basis for the work of theologians: “Always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason (the logos) for the hope that you all have” (3:15). (The Logos, the reason for hope must become *apo-logía*; it must become a response). In fact, Christians of the nascent Church did not regard their missionary proclamation as propaganda, designed to enlarge their particular group, but as an inner necessity, consequent upon the nature of their faith: the God in whom they believed was the God of all people, the one, true God, who had revealed himself in the history of Israel and ultimately in his Son, thereby supplying the answer which was of concern to everyone and for which all people, in their innermost hearts, are waiting. The universality of God, and of reason open towards him, is what gave them the motivation—indeed, the obligation—to proclaim the message. They saw their faith as belonging,
not to cultural custom that differs from one people to another, but to the
domain of truth, which concerns all people equally.

The fundamental structure of Christian proclamation “outwards” —
towards searching and questioning mankind — is seen in Saint Paul’s
address at the Areopagus. We should remember that the Areopagus was
not a form of academy at which the most illustrious minds would meet for
discussion of lofty matters, but a court of justice, which was competent in
matters of religion and ought to have opposed the import of foreign
religions. This is exactly what Paul is reproached for: “he seems to be a
preacher of foreign divinities” (Acts 17:18). To this, Paul responds: I have
found an altar of yours with this inscription: ‘to an unknown god’. What
therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you (17:23). Paul is
not proclaiming unknown gods. He is proclaiming him whom men do not
know and yet do know — the unknown-known; the one they are seeking,
whom ultimately they know already, and who yet remains the unknown
and unrecognizable. The deepest layer of human thinking and feeling
somehow knows that he must exist, that at the beginning of all things,
there must be not irrationality, but creative Reason — not blind chance,
but freedom. Yet even though all men somehow know this, as Paul
expressly says in the Letter to the Romans (1:21), this knowledge remains
unreal: a God who is merely imagined and invented is not God at all. If he
does not reveal himself, we cannot gain access to him. The novelty of
Christian proclamation is that it can now say to all peoples: he has revealed
himself. He personally. And now the way to him is open. The novelty of
Christian proclamation does not consist in a thought, but in a deed: God
has revealed himself. Yet this is no blind deed, but one which is itself
Logos — the presence of eternal reason in our flesh. Verbum caro factum est
(Jn 1:14): just so, amid what is made (factum) there is now Logos, Logos is
among us. Creation (factum) is rational. Naturally, the humility of reason is
always needed, in order to accept it: man’s humility, which responds to
God’s humility.

Our present situation differs in many respects from the one that Paul
encountered in Athens, yet despite the difference, the two situations also
have much in common. Our cities are no longer filled with altars and with
images of multiple deities. God has truly become for many the great
unknown. But just as in the past, when behind the many images of God the question concerning the unknown God was hidden and present, so too the present absence of God is silently besieged by the question concerning him. *Quaerere Deum* — to seek God and to let oneself be found by him, that is today no less necessary than in former times. A purely positivistic culture which tried to drive the question concerning God into the subjective realm, as being unscientific, would be the capitulation of reason, the renunciation of its highest possibilities, and hence a disaster for humanity, with very grave consequences. What gave Europe’s culture its foundation — the search for God and the readiness to listen to him — remains today the basis of any genuine culture.

---

**Homily at the closing of the 23rd World Youth Day, Sydney, Australia (July 20, 2008)**

Dear Friends,

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (*Acts* 1:8). We have seen this promise fulfilled! On the day of Pentecost, as we heard in the first reading, the Risen Lord, seated at the right hand of the Father, sent the Spirit upon the disciples gathered in the Upper Room. In the power of that Spirit, Peter and the Apostles went forth to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In every age, and in every language, the Church throughout the world continues to proclaim the marvels of God and to call all nations and peoples to faith, hope and new life in Christ.

In these days I too have come, as the Successor of Saint Peter, to this magnificent land of Australia. I have come to confirm you, my young brothers and sisters, in your faith and to encourage you to open your hearts to the power of Christ’s Spirit and the richness of his gifts. I pray that this great assembly, which unites young people “from every nation under heaven” (cf. *Acts* 2:5), will be a new Upper Room. May the fire of God’s love descend to fill your hearts, unite you ever more fully to the Lord and
his Church, and send you forth, a new generation of apostles, to bring the world to Christ!

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you”. These words of the Risen Lord have a special meaning for those young people who will be confirmed, sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, at today’s Mass. But they are also addressed to each of us — to all those who have received the Spirit’s gift of reconciliation and new life at Baptism, who have welcomed him into their hearts as their helper and guide at Confirmation, and who daily grow in his gifts of grace through the Holy Eucharist. At each Mass, in fact, the Holy Spirit descends anew, invoked by the solemn prayer of the Church, not only to transform our gifts of bread and wine into the Lord’s body and blood, but also to transform our lives, to make us, in his power, “one body, one spirit in Christ”.

But what is this “power” of the Holy Spirit? It is the power of God’s life! It is the power of the same Spirit who hovered over the waters at the dawn of creation and who, in the fullness of time, raised Jesus from the dead. It is the power which points us, and our world, towards the coming of the Kingdom of God. In today’s Gospel, Jesus proclaims that a new age has begun, in which the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all humanity (cf. Lk 4:21). He himself, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin May, came among us to bring us that Spirit. As the source of our new life in Christ, the Holy Spirit is also, in a very real way, the soul of the Church, the love which binds us to the Lord and one another, and the light which opens our eyes to see all around us the wonders of God’s grace.

Here in Australia, this “great south land of the Holy Spirit”, all of us have had an unforgettable experience of the Spirit’s presence and power in the beauty of nature. Our eyes have been opened to see the world around us as it truly is: “charged”, as the poet says, “with the grandeur of God”, filled with the glory of his creative love. Here too, in this great assembly of young Christians from all over the world, we have had a vivid experience of the Spirit’s presence and power in the life of the Church. We have seen the Church for what she truly is: the Body of Christ, a living community of love, embracing people of every race, nation and tongue, of every time and place, in the unity born of our faith in the Risen Lord.
The power of the Spirit never ceases to fill the Church with life! Through the grace of the Church’s sacraments, that power also flows deep within us, like an underground river which nourishes our spirit and draws us ever nearer to the source of our true life, which is Christ. Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who died a martyr in Rome at the beginning of the second century, has left us a splendid description of the Spirit’s power dwelling within us. He spoke of the Spirit as a fountain of living water springing up within his heart and whispering: “Come, come to the Father” (cf. Ad Rom., 6:1-9).

Yet this power, the grace of the Spirit, is not something we can merit or achieve, but only receive as pure gift. God’s love can only unleash its power when it is allowed to change us from within. We have to let it break through the hard crust of our indifference, our spiritual weariness, our blind conformity to the spirit of this age. Only then can we let it ignite our imagination and shape our deepest desires. That is why prayer is so important: daily prayer, private prayer in the quiet of our hearts and before the Blessed Sacrament, and liturgical prayer in the heart of the Church. Prayer is pure receptivity to God’s grace, love in action, communion with the Spirit who dwells within us, leading us, through Jesus, in the Church, to our heavenly Father. In the power of his Spirit, Jesus is always present in our hearts, quietly waiting for us to be still with him, to hear his voice, to abide in his love, and to receive “power from on high”, enabling us to be salt and light for our world.

At his Ascension, the Risen Lord told his disciples: “You will be my witnesses … to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Here, in Australia, let us thank the Lord for the gift of faith, which has come down to us like a treasure passed on from generation to generation in the communion of the Church. Here, in Oceania, let us give thanks in a special way for all those heroic missionaries, dedicated priests and religious, Christian parents and grandparents, teachers and catechists who built up the Church in these lands — witnesses like Blessed Mary MacKillop, Saint Peter Chanel, Blessed Peter To Rot, and so many others! The power of the Spirit, revealed in their lives, is still at work in the good they left behind, in the society which they shaped and which is being handed on to you.

Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. What will you leave
to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the “power” which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?

The power of the Holy Spirit does not only enlighten and console us. It also points us to the future, to the coming of God’s Kingdom. What a magnificent vision of a humanity redeemed and renewed we see in the new age promised by today’s Gospel! Saint Luke tells us that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all God’s promises, the Messiah who fully possesses the Holy Spirit in order to bestow that gift upon all mankind. The outpouring of Christ’s Spirit upon humanity is a pledge of hope and deliverance from everything that impoverishes us. It gives the blind new sight; it sets the downtrodden free, and it creates unity in and through diversity (cf. Lk 4:18-19; Is 61:1-2). This power can create a new world: it can “renew the face of the earth” (cf. Ps 104:30)!

Empowered by the Spirit, and drawing upon faith’s rich vision, a new generation of Christians is being called to help build a world in which God’s gift of life is welcomed, respected and cherished—not rejected, feared as a threat and destroyed. A new age in which love is not greedy or self-seeking, but pure, faithful and genuinely free, open to others, respectful of their dignity, seeking their good, radiating joy and beauty. A new age in which hope liberates us from the shallowness, apathy and self-absorption which deaden our souls and poison our relationships. Dear young friends, the Lord is asking you to be prophets of this new age, messengers of his love, drawing people to the Father and building a future of hope for all humanity.

The world needs this renewal! In so many of our societies, side by side with material prosperity, a spiritual desert is spreading: an interior emptiness, an unnamed fear, a quiet sense of despair. How many of our contemporaries have built broken and empty cisterns (cf. Jer 2:13) in a desperate search for meaning—the ultimate meaning that only love can give? This is the great and liberating gift which the Gospel brings: it
reveals our dignity as men and women created in the image and likeness of God. It reveals humanity’s sublime calling, which is to find fulfillment in love. It discloses the truth about man and the truth about life.

The Church also needs this renewal! She needs your faith, your idealism and your generosity, so that she can always be young in the Spirit (cf. Lumen Gentium, 4)! In today’s second reading, the Apostle Paul reminds us that each and every Christian has received a gift meant for building up the Body of Christ. The Church especially needs the gifts of young people, all young people. She needs to grow in the power of the Spirit who even now gives joy to your youth and inspires you to serve the Lord with gladness. Open your hearts to that power! I address this plea in a special way to those of you whom the Lord is calling to the priesthood and the consecrated life. Do not be afraid to say “yes” to Jesus, to find your joy in doing his will, giving yourself completely to the pursuit of holiness, and using all your talents in the service of others!

In a few moments, we will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation. The Holy Spirit will descend upon the confirmands; they will be “sealed” with the gift of the Spirit and sent forth to be Christ’s witnesses. What does it mean to receive the “seal” of the Holy Spirit? It means being indelibly marked, inalterably changed, a new creation. For those who have received this gift, nothing can ever be the same! Being “baptized” in the one Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:13) means being set on fire with the love of God. Being “given to drink” of the Spirit means being refreshed by the beauty of the Lord’s plan for us and for the world, and becoming in turn a source of spiritual refreshment for others. Being “sealed with the Spirit” means not being afraid to stand up for Christ, letting the truth of the Gospel permeate the way we see, think and act, as we work for the triumph of the civilization of love.

As we pray for the confirmands, let us ask that the power of the Holy Spirit will revive the grace of our own Confirmation. May he pour out his gifts in abundance on all present, on this city of Sydney, on this land of Australia and on all its people! May each of us be renewed in the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of right judgement and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence, the spirit of wonder and awe in God’s presence!
Through the loving intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, may this Twenty-third World Youth Day be experienced as a new Upper Room, from which all of us, burning with the fire and love of the Holy Spirit, go forth to proclaim the Risen Christ and to draw every heart to him! Amen.

After his homily, the Holy Father greeted the young people in Italian, French, German, Spanish and Portuguese.

I cordially greet you young people who speak Italian, and I extend my affectionate greetings to all those of Italian origin who live in Australia. At the end of this extraordinary experience of the Church’s vitality, which has made us experience a new Pentecost, return to your homes strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit. Be witnesses to the Risen Christ, who is the hope of young people and of the whole human family.

My dear French-speaking young people, the Holy Spirit is the fount of the message of Jesus Christ and of his saving action. He speaks to the heart in a language that everyone can understand. The varied gifts of the Holy Spirit show us how rich are God’s graces. May you open yourselves to his breath. Allow him to act in you and in your surroundings. Thus you will live in God and will give witness that Christ is the Savior the world is waiting for.

My dear German-speaking young people, I greet you too with affection. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of communion and the fount of understanding and communication. Speak to others of your hopes and your ideals; and speak about God and with God. Happy is the person who lives with love for God and neighbor. May the Spirit of God guide you along paths of peace.

My dear Spanish-speaking young people, in Christ are fulfilled all of the promises of true salvation for humanity. He has for each of you a task of love in which you will find the meaning and fulfillment of your life, and he looks for each of you to make the gifts that he has given you bear fruit, being his witnesses by your word and example. Don’t disappoint him.

My dear Portuguese-speaking young people, my dear friends in Christ, you already know that Jesus has not left you alone. He said: “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever,
even the Spirit of truth... you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you” (Jn 14:16-17). It is true. A tongue of the fire of Pentecost has descended upon you: it is your seal as Christians. But don't keep it only for yourself, for “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). Carry this holy fire to all corners of the earth. No one nor anything can put it out, because it has come down from heaven. It is your strength, my dear young friends. Therefore, live by the Spirit and for the Spirit.

Address at the meeting with State Officials in the Elysee Palace, Paris France (September 12, 2008)

Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Standing here on French soil for the first time since Providence called me to the See of Peter, I am moved and honored by the warm reception which you have extended to me. I am particularly grateful to you, Mr. President, for the cordial invitation to visit your country and for the courteous words of welcome which you have just offered me. The visit which Your Excellency paid to me in the Vatican nine months ago is still fresh in my memory. Through you I extend my greetings to all the men and women who live in this country, which boasts a history of a thousand years, a present marked by a wealth of activity, and a future of promise. I wish them to know that France is often at the heart of the Pope's prayers; he cannot forget all that she has contributed to the Church in the course of twenty centuries! The principal reason for my visit is the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary at Lourdes. It is my desire to join the multitude of countless pilgrims from the whole world who during this year are converging on the Marian shrine, filled with faith and love. It is this faith and this love that I will celebrate here in your land
during these four days of grace which have been granted to me.

My pilgrimage to Lourdes has included a stop in Paris. Your capital city is familiar to me, and I know it rather well. I have stayed here often and over the years, because of my studies and in my former roles, have developed good personal and intellectual friendships. I return with joy, glad to have this occasion to pay tribute to the impressive heritage of culture and faith that has shaped your country’s outstanding history, and has nurtured great servants of the Nation and the Church, whose teaching and example have naturally reached far beyond the geographical borders of your nation, leaving their mark on the course of world history. During your visit to Rome, Mr. President, you called to mind that the roots of France — like those of Europe — are Christian. History itself offers sufficient proof of this: from its origins, your country received the Gospel message. Even though documentary evidence is sometimes lacking, the existence of Christian communities in Gaul is attested from a very early period: it is moving to recall that the city of Lyons already had a Bishop in the mid-second century, and that Saint Irenaeus, the author of Adversus Haereses, gave eloquent witness there to the vigor of Christian thought. Saint Irenaeus came from Smyrna to preach faith in the Risen Christ. This Bishop of Lyons spoke Greek as his mother tongue. Could there be a more beautiful sign of the universal nature and destination of the Christian message? The Church, established at an early stage in your country, played a civilizing role to which I am pleased to pay tribute on this occasion. You yourself made reference to it during your address at the Lateran Palace last December, and again today. The transmission of the culture of antiquity through monks, professors and copyists, the formation of hearts and spirits in love of the poor, the assistance given to the most deprived by the foundation of numerous religious congregations, the contribution of Christians to the establishment of the institutions of Gaul, and later France, all of this is too well known for me to dwell on it. The thousands of chapels, churches, abbeys and cathedrals that grace the heart of your towns or the tranquility of your countryside speak clearly of how your fathers in faith wished to honor him who had given them life and who sustains us in existence.
Many people, here in France as elsewhere, have reflected on the relations between Church and State. Indeed, Christ had already offered the basic principle for a just solution to the problem of relations between the political sphere and the religious sphere when, in answer to a question, he said: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12:17). The Church in France currently benefits from a “regime of freedom”. Past suspicion has been gradually transformed into a serene and positive dialogue that continues to grow stronger. A new instrument of dialogue has been in place since 2002, and I have much confidence in its work, given the mutual good will. We know that there are still some areas open to dialogue which we will have to pursue and redevelop step by step with determination and patience. You yourself, Mr. President, have used the fine expression “laïcité positive” to characterize this more open understanding. At this moment in history when cultures continue to cross paths more frequently, I am firmly convinced that a new reflection on the true meaning and importance of laïcité is now necessary. In fact, it is fundamental, on the one hand, to insist on the distinction between the political realm and that of religion in order to preserve both the religious freedom of citizens and the responsibility of the State towards them; and, on the other hand, to become more aware of the irreplaceable role of religion for the formation of consciences and the contribution which it can bring to — among other things — the creation of a basic ethical consensus in society.

The Pope, as witness of a God who loves and saves, strives to be a sower of charity and hope. All of human society needs hope. This hope is all the more necessary in today’s world which offers few spiritual aspirations and few material certainties. My greatest concern is for young people. Some of them are struggling to find the right direction, or are suffering from a loss of connection with their families. Still others are experiencing the limits of religious communitarianism. Sometimes on the margins and often left to themselves, they are vulnerable and must come to terms on their own with a reality that often overwhelms them. It is necessary to offer them a sound educational environment and to encourage them to respect and assist others if they are to develop serenely towards the age of responsibility. The Church can offer her own specific contribution in this
area. I am also concerned by the social situation in the Western world, marked sadly by a surreptitious widening of the distance between rich and poor. I am certain that just solutions can be found that go beyond the necessary immediate assistance and address the heart of the problems, so as to protect the weak and promote their dignity. The Church, through her many institutions and works, together with many other associations in your country, often attempts to deal with immediate needs, but it is the State as such which must enact laws in order to eradicate unjust structures. From a broader perspective, Mr President, I am also concerned about the state of our planet. With great generosity, God has entrusted to us the world that he created. We must learn to respect and protect it more. It seems to me that the time has come for more constructive proposals so as to guarantee the good of future generations.

Your country’s Presidency of the European Union gives France the opportunity to bear witness — in accord with her noble tradition — to human rights and to their promotion for the good of individuals and society. When Europeans see and experience personally that the inalienable rights of the human person from conception to natural death — rights to free education, to family life, to work, and naturally those concerned with religion — when Europeans see that these rights, which form an inseparable unity, are promoted and respected, then they will understand fully the greatness of the enterprise that is the European Union, and will become active artisans of the same. The responsibility entrusted to you, Mr. President, is not easy. These are uncertain times, and it is an arduous task to find the right path among the meanderings of day-to-day social, economic, national and international affairs. In particular, as we face the danger of a resurgence of old suspicions, tensions, and conflicts among nations — which we are troubled to be witnessing today — France, which historically has been sensitive to reconciliation between peoples, is called to help Europe build up peace within her boarders and throughout the world. In this regard, it is important to promote a unity that neither can nor desires to become a uniformity, but rather is able to guarantee respect for national differences and different cultural traditions, which amount to an enrichment of the European symphony, remembering at the same time that “national identity itself can only be achieved in openness towards other peoples and through solidarity with them” (Ecclesia in Europa, 112). I
express my confidence that your country will contribute increasingly to the progress of this age towards serenity, harmony and peace.

Mr. President, dear friends, I wish to express once again my gratitude for this gathering. Be assured of my fervent prayers for your beautiful country, that God may grant her peace and prosperity, freedom and unity, equality and fraternity. I entrust these prayers to the maternal intercession of the Virgin Mary, principal patron of France. May God bless France and all her people!

First general audience dedicated to St. Paul for the Pauline Year, Rome (July 2, 2008)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like to begin a new cycle of Catecheses focusing on the great Apostle St Paul. As you know, this year is dedicated to him, from the liturgical Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul on 29 June 2008 to the same Feast day in 2009. The Apostle Paul, an outstanding and almost inimitable yet stimulating figure, stands before us as an example of total dedication to the Lord and to his Church, as well as of great openness to humanity and its cultures.

It is right, therefore, that we reserve a special place for him in not only our veneration but also in our effort to understand what he has to say to us as well, Christians of today. In this first meeting let us pause to consider the environment in which St Paul lived and worked. A theme such as this would seem to bring us far from our time, given that we must identify with the world of 2,000 years ago. Yet this is only apparently and, in any case, only partly true for we can see that various aspects of today's social and cultural context are not very different from what they were then.

A primary and fundamental fact to bear in mind is the relationship between the milieu in which Paul was born and raised and the global context to which he later belonged. He came from a very precise and circumscribed culture, indisputably a minority, which is that of the People
of Israel and its tradition. In the ancient world and especially in the Roman Empire, as scholars in the subject teach us, Jews must have accounted for about 10 percent of the total population; later, here in Rome, towards the middle of the first century, this percentage was even lower, amounting to three percent of the city's inhabitants at most. Their beliefs and way of life, is still the case today, distinguished them clearly from the surrounding environment; and this could have two results: either derision, that could lead to intolerance, or admiration which was expressed in various forms of sympathy, as in the case of the "God-fearing" or "proselytes", pagans who became members of the Synagogue and who shared the faith in the God of Israel.

As concrete examples of this dual attitude we can mention on the one hand the cutting opinion of an orator such as Cicero who despised their religion and even the city of Jerusalem (cf. *Pro Flacco*, 66-69) and, on the other, the attitude of Nero's wife, Poppea, who is remembered by Flavius Josephus as a "sympathizer" of the Jews (cf. *Antichità giudaiche* 20, 195, 252); *Vita* 16), not to mention that Julius Caesar had already officially recognized specific rights of the Jews which have been recorded by the above-mentioned Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (cf. ibid., 14,200-216). It is certain that the number of Jews, as, moreover, is still the case today, was far greater outside the land of Israel, that is, in the Diaspora, than in the territory that others called Palestine.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Paul himself was the object of the dual contradictory assessment that I mentioned. One thing is certain: the particularism of the Judaic culture and religion easily found room in an institution as far-reaching as the Roman Empire. Those who would adhere with faith to the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, Jew or Gentile, were in the more difficult and troubled position, to the extent to which they were to distinguish themselves from both Judaism and the prevalent paganism.

In any case, two factors were in Paul's favor. The first was the Greek, or rather Hellenistic, culture which after Alexander the Great had become a common heritage, at least of the Eastern Mediterranean and of the Middle East, and had even absorbed many elements of peoples traditionally considered barbarian. One writer of the time says in this regard that Alexander "ordered that all should consider the entire oecumene as their
homeland... and that a distinction should no longer be made between Greek and barbarian" (Plutarch, *De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute*, 6, 8). The second factor was the political and administrative structure of the Roman Empire which guaranteed peace and stability from Britain as far as southern Egypt, unifying a territory of previously unheard of dimensions. It was possible to move with sufficient freedom and safety in this space, making use, among other things, of an extraordinary network of roads and finding at every point of arrival basic cultural characteristics which, without affecting local values, nonetheless represented a common fabric of *unification super partes*, so that the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Paul himself, praised the Emperor Augustus for "composing in harmony all the savage peoples, making himself the guardian of peace" (*Legatio ad Caïum*, 146-147).

There is no doubt that the universalist vision characteristic of St Paul's personality, at least of the Christian Paul after the event on the road to Damascus, owes its basic impact to faith in Jesus Christ, since the figure of the Risen One was by this time situated beyond any particularistic narrowness. Indeed, for the Apostle "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal* 3: 28). Yet, even the historical and cultural situation of his time and milieu could not but have had an influence on his decisions and his work. Some have defined Paul as "a man of three cultures", taking into account his Jewish background, his Greek tongue and his prerogative as a "civis romanus* [Roman citizen], as the name of Latin origin suggests.

Particularly the Stoic philosophy dominant in Paul's time which influenced Christianity, even if only marginally, should be recalled. Concerning this, we cannot gloss over certain names of Stoic philosophers such as those of its founders, Zeno and Cleanthes, and then those closer to Paul in time such as Seneca, Musonius and Epictetus: in them the loftiest values of humanity and wisdom are found which were naturally to be absorbed by Christianity.

As one student of the subject splendidly wrote, "Stoicism... announced a new ideal, which imposed upon man obligations to his peers, but at the same time set him free from all physical and national ties, and made of him a purely spiritual being" (M. Pohlenz, *La Stoa*, I, Florence, 2, 1978, pp.
One thinks, for example, of the doctrine of the universe understood as a single great harmonious body and consequently of the doctrine of equality among all people without social distinctions, of the equivalence, at least in principle, of men and women, and then of the ideal of frugality, of the just measure and self-control to avoid all excesses. When Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil 4: 8), he was only taking up a purely humanistic concept proper to that philosophical wisdom.

In St Paul's time a crisis of traditional religion was taking place, at least in its mythological and even civil aspects. After Lucretius had already ruled polemically a century earlier that "religion has led to many misdeeds" (De rerum natura, 1, 101, On the Nature of Things), a philosopher such as Seneca, going far beyond any external ritualism, taught that "God is close to you, he is with you, he is within you" (Epistulae morales to Lucilius, 41, 1). Similarly, when Paul addresses an audience of Epicurean philosophers and Stoics in the Areopagus of Athens, he literally says: "God does not live in shrines made by man,... for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17: 24, 28). In saying this he certainly re-echoes the Judaic faith in a God who cannot be represented in anthropomorphic terms and even places himself on a religious wavelength that his listeners knew well.

We must also take into account the fact that many pagan cults dispensed with the official temples of the town and made use of private places that favored the initiation of their followers. It is therefore not surprising that Christian gatherings (ekklesiai) as Paul's Letters attest, also took place in private homes. At that time, moreover, there were not yet any public buildings. Therefore Christian assemblies must have appeared to Paul's contemporaries as a simple variation of their most intimate religious practice. Yet the differences between pagan cults and Christian worship are not negligible and regard the participants' awareness of their identity as well as the participation in common of men and women, the celebration of the "Lord's Supper", and the reading of the Scriptures.

In conclusion, from this brief over-view of the cultural context of the first century of the Christian era, it is clear that it is impossible to
understand St Paul properly without placing him against both the Judaic and pagan background of his time. Thus he grows in historical and spiritual stature, revealing both sharing and originality in comparison with the surrounding environment. However, this applies likewise to Christianity in general, of which the Apostle Paul, precisely, is a paradigm of the highest order from whom we all, always, still have much to learn. And this is the goal of the Pauline Year: to learn from St Paul, to learn faith, to learn Christ, and finally to learn the way of upright living.

The Roman Curia

Instruction Dignitas Personae on Some Questions of Bioethics, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (September 8, 2008)

Introduction

1. The dignity of a person must be recognized in every human being from conception to natural death. This fundamental principle expresses a great “yes” to human life and must be at the center of ethical reflection on biomedical research, which has an ever greater importance in today’s world. The Church’s Magisterium has frequently intervened to clarify and resolve moral questions in this area. The Instruction Donum Vitae was particularly significant. And now, twenty years after its publication, it is appropriate to bring it up to date.

The teaching of Donum Vitae remains completely valid, both with regard to the principles on which it is based and the moral evaluations which it expresses. However, new biomedical technologies which have been introduced in the critical area of human life and the family have given
rise to further questions, in particular in the field of research on human embryos, the use of stem cells for therapeutic purposes, as well as in other areas of experimental medicine. These new questions require answers. The pace of scientific developments in this area and the publicity they have received have raised expectations and concerns in large sectors of public opinion. Legislative assemblies have been asked to make decisions on these questions in order to regulate them by law; at times, wider popular consultation has also taken place.

These developments have led the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to prepare a new doctrinal Instruction which addresses some recent questions in the light of the criteria expressed in the Instruction Donum Vitae and which also examines some issues that were treated earlier, but are in need of additional clarification.

2. In undertaking this study, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has benefited from the analysis of the Pontifical Academy for Life and has consulted numerous experts with regard to the scientific aspects of these questions, in order to address them with the principles of Christian anthropology. The Encyclicals Veritatis Splendor[2] and Evangelium vitae[3] of John Paul II, as well as other interventions of the Magisterium, offer clear indications with regard to both the method and the content of the examination of the problems under consideration.

In the current multifaceted philosophical and scientific context, a considerable number of scientists and philosophers, in the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath, see in medical science a service to human fragility aimed at the cure of disease, the relief of suffering and the equitable extension of necessary care to all people. At the same time, however, there are also persons in the world of philosophy and science who view advances in biomedical technology from an essentially eugenic perspective.

3. In presenting principles and moral evaluations regarding biomedical research on human life, the Catholic Church draws upon the light both of reason and of faith and seeks to set forth an integral vision of man and his vocation, capable of incorporating everything that is good in human activity, as well as in various cultural and religious traditions which not infrequently demonstrate a great reverence for life.
The Magisterium also seeks to offer a word of support and encouragement for the perspective on culture which considers science an invaluable service to the integral good of the life and dignity of every human being. The Church therefore views scientific research with hope and desires that many Christians will dedicate themselves to the progress of biomedicine and will bear witness to their faith in this field. She hopes moreover that the results of such research may also be made available in areas of the world that are poor and afflicted by disease, so that those who are most in need will receive humanitarian assistance. Finally, the Church seeks to draw near to every human being who is suffering, whether in body or in spirit, in order to bring not only comfort, but also light and hope. These give meaning to moments of sickness and to the experience of death, which indeed are part of human life and are present in the story of every person, opening that story to the mystery of the Resurrection. Truly, the gaze of the Church is full of trust because “Life will triumph: this is a sure hope for us. Yes, life will triumph because truth, goodness, joy and true progress are on the side of life. God, who loves life and gives it generously, is on the side of life.”

The present Instruction is addressed to the Catholic faithful and to all who seek the truth. It has three parts: the first recalls some anthropological, theological and ethical elements of fundamental importance; the second addresses new problems regarding procreation; the third examines new procedures involving the manipulation of embryos and the human genetic patrimony.

First Part:

Anthropological, Theological and Ethical Aspects of Human Life and Procreation

4. In recent decades, medical science has made significant strides in understanding human life in its initial stages. Human biological structures and the process of human generation are better known. These developments are certainly positive and worthy of support when they serve to overcome or correct pathologies and succeed in re-establishing the normal functioning of human procreation. On the other hand, they are negative and cannot be utilized when they involve the destruction of
human beings or when they employ means which contradict the dignity of
the person or when they are used for purposes contrary to the integral good
of man.

The body of a human being, from the very first stages of its existence,
can never be reduced merely to a group of cells. The embryonic human
body develops progressively according to a well-defined program with its
proper finality, as is apparent in the birth of every baby.

It is appropriate to recall the fundamental ethical criterion expressed in
the Instruction *Donum Vitae* in order to evaluate all moral questions which
relate to procedures involving the human embryo: “Thus the fruit of human
generation, from the first moment of its existence, that is to say, from the
moment the zygote has formed, demands the unconditional respect that is
morally due to the human being in his bodily and spiritual totality. The
human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of
conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person
must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of
every innocent human being to life.”[6]

5. This ethical principle, which reason is capable of recognizing as true
and in conformity with the natural moral law, should be the basis for all
legislation in this area.[7] In fact, it presupposes a truth of an ontological
character, as *Donum Vitae* demonstrated from solid scientific evidence,
regarding the continuity in development of a human being.

*If Donum Vitae*, in order to avoid a statement of an explicitly
philosophical nature, did not define the embryo as a person, it nonetheless
did indicate that there is an intrinsic connection between the ontological
dimension and the specific value of every human life. Although the
presence of the spiritual soul cannot be observed experimentally, the
conclusions of science regarding the human embryo give “a valuable
indication for discerning by the use of reason a personal presence at the
moment of the first appearance of a human life: how could a human
individual not be a human person?”[8] Indeed, the reality of the human
being for the entire span of life, both before and after birth, does not allow
us to posit either a change in nature or a gradation in moral value, since it
possesses full anthropological and ethical status. The human embryo has, therefore, from the very beginning, the dignity proper to a person.

6. Respect for that dignity is owed to every human being because each one carries in an indelible way his own dignity and value. The origin of human life has its authentic context in marriage and in the family, where it is generated through an act which expresses the reciprocal love between a man and a woman. Procreation which is truly responsible vis-à-vis the child to be born “must be the fruit of marriage.”[9]

Marriage, present in all times and in all cultures, “is in reality something wisely and providently instituted by God the Creator with a view to carrying out his loving plan in human beings. Thus, husband and wife, through the reciprocal gift of themselves to the other — something which is proper and exclusive to them — bring about that communion of persons by which they perfect each other, so as to cooperate with God in the procreation and raising of new lives.”[10] In the fruitfulness of married love, man and woman “make it clear that at the origin of their spousal life there is a genuine ‘yes’, which is pronounced and truly lived in reciprocity, remaining ever open to life... Natural law, which is at the root of the recognition of true equality between persons and peoples, deserves to be recognized as the source that inspires the relationship between the spouses in their responsibility for begetting new children. The transmission of life is inscribed in nature and its laws stand as an unwritten norm to which all must refer.”[11]

7. It is the Church’s conviction that what is human is not only received and respected by faith, but is also purified, elevated and perfected. God, after having created man in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26), described his creature as “very good” (Gen 1:31), so as to be assumed later in the Son (cf. Jn 1:14). In the mystery of the Incarnation, the Son of God confirmed the dignity of the body and soul which constitute the human being. Christ did not disdain human bodiliness, but instead fully disclosed its meaning and value: “In reality, it is only in the mystery of the incarnate Word that the mystery of man truly becomes clear.”[12]

By becoming one of us, the Son makes it possible for us to become “sons of God” (Jn 1:12), “sharers in the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). This new
dimension does not conflict with the dignity of the creature which everyone can recognize by the use of reason, but elevates it into a wider horizon of life which is proper to God, giving us the ability to reflect more profoundly on human life and on the acts by which it is brought into existence.\[13\]

The respect for the individual human being, which reason requires, is further enhanced and strengthened in the light of these truths of faith: thus, we see that there is no contradiction between the affirmation of the dignity and the affirmation of the sacredness of human life. “The different ways in which God, acting in history, cares for the world and for mankind are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they support each other and intersect. They have their origin and goal in the eternal, wise and loving counsel whereby God predestines men and women ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son’ (Rom 8:29).”\[14\]

8. By taking the interrelationship of these two dimensions, the human and the divine, as the starting point, one understands better why it is that man has unassailable value: he possesses an eternal vocation and is called to share in the trinitarian love of the living God.

This value belongs to all without distinction. By virtue of the simple fact of existing, every human being must be fully respected. The introduction of discrimination with regard to human dignity based on biological, psychological, or educational development, or based on health-related criteria, must be excluded. At every stage of his existence, man, created in the image and likeness of God, reflects “the face of his Only-begotten Son… This boundless and almost incomprehensible love of God for the human being reveals the degree to which the human person deserves to be loved in himself, independently of any other consideration — intelligence, beauty, health, youth, integrity, and so forth. In short, human life is always a good, for it ‘is a manifestation of God in the world, a sign of his presence, a trace of his glory’ (Evangelium Vitae, 34).”\[15\]

9. These two dimensions of life, the natural and the supernatural, allow us to understand better the sense in which the acts that permit a new human being to come into existence, in which a man and a woman give themselves to each other, are a reflection of trinitarian love. “God, who is love and life, has inscribed in man and woman the vocation to share in a
special way in his mystery of personal communion and in his work as Creator and Father.”[16]

Christian marriage is rooted “in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need. But in Christ the Lord, God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony: the Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus”[17]

10. The Church, by expressing an ethical judgment on some developments of recent medical research concerning man and his beginnings, does not intervene in the area proper to medical science itself, but rather calls everyone to ethical and social responsibility for their actions. She reminds them that the ethical value of biomedical science is gauged in reference to both the unconditional respect owed to every human being at every moment of his or her existence, and the defense of the specific character of the personal act which transmits life. The intervention of the Magisterium falls within its mission of contributing to the formation of conscience, by authentically teaching the truth which is Christ and at the same time by declaring and confirming authoritatively the principles of the moral order which spring from human nature itself.[18]

Second Part:

New Problems Concerning Procreation

11. In light of the principles recalled above, certain questions regarding procreation which have emerged and have become more clear in the years since the publication of Donum Vitae can now be examined.

Techniques for assisting fertility

12. With regard to the treatment of infertility, new medical techniques must respect three fundamental goods: a) the right to life and to physical
integrity of every human being from conception to natural death; b) the unity of marriage, which means reciprocal respect for the right within marriage to become a father or mother only together with the other spouse;[19] c) the specifically human values of sexuality which require “that the procreation of a human person be brought about as the fruit of the conjugal act specific to the love between spouses.”[20] Techniques which assist procreation “are not to be rejected on the grounds that they are artificial. As such, they bear witness to the possibilities of the art of medicine. But they must be given a moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the human person, who is called to realize his vocation from God to the gift of love and the gift of life.”[21]

In light of this principle, all techniques of heterologous artificial fertilization,[22] as well as those techniques of homologous artificial fertilization[23] which substitute for the conjugal act, are to be excluded. On the other hand, techniques which act as an aid to the conjugal act and its fertility are permitted. The Instruction Donum Vitae states: “The doctor is at the service of persons and of human procreation. He does not have the authority to dispose of them or to decide their fate. A medical intervention respects the dignity of persons when it seeks to assist the conjugal act either in order to facilitate its performance or in order to enable it to achieve its objective once it has been normally performed.”[24] And, with regard to homologous artificial insemination, it states: “Homologous artificial insemination within marriage cannot be admitted except for those cases in which the technical means is not a substitute for the conjugal act, but serves to facilitate and to help so that the act attains its natural purpose.”[25]

13. Certainly, techniques aimed at removing obstacles to natural fertilization, as for example, hormonal treatments for infertility, surgery for endometriosis, unblocking of fallopian tubes or their surgical repair, are licit. All these techniques may be considered authentic treatments because, once the problem causing the infertility has been resolved, the married couple is able to engage in conjugal acts resulting in procreation, without the physician’s action directly interfering in that act itself. None of these treatments replaces the conjugal act, which alone is worthy of truly responsible procreation.
In order to come to the aid of the many infertile couples who want to have children, adoption should be encouraged, promoted and facilitated by appropriate legislation so that the many children who lack parents may receive a home that will contribute to their human development. In addition, research and investment directed at the prevention of sterility deserve encouragement.

**In vitro fertilization and the deliberate destruction of embryos**

14. The fact that the process of in vitro fertilization very frequently involves the deliberate destruction of embryos was already noted in the Instruction *Donum Vitae.*[^26] There were some who maintained that this was due to techniques which were still somewhat imperfect. Subsequent experience has shown, however, that all techniques of in vitro fertilization proceed as if the human embryo were simply a mass of cells to be used, selected and discarded.

It is true that approximately a third of women who have recourse to artificial procreation succeed in having a baby. It should be recognized, however, that given the proportion between the total number of embryos produced and those eventually born, the number of embryos sacrificed is extremely high.[^27] These losses are accepted by the practitioners of in vitro fertilization as the price to be paid for positive results. In reality, it is deeply disturbing that research in this area aims principally at obtaining better results in terms of the percentage of babies born to women who begin the process, but does not manifest a concrete interest in the right to life of each individual embryo.

15. It is often objected that the loss of embryos is, in the majority of cases, unintentional or that it happens truly against the will of the parents and physicians. They say that it is a question of risks which are not all that different from those in natural procreation; to seek to generate new life without running any risks would in practice mean doing nothing to transmit it. It is true that not all the losses of embryos in the process of in vitro fertilization have the same relationship to the will of those involved in the procedure. But it is also true that in many cases the abandonment, destruction and loss of embryos are foreseen and willed.
Embryos produced in vitro which have defects are directly discarded. Cases are becoming ever more prevalent in which couples who have no fertility problems are using artificial means of procreation in order to engage in genetic selection of their offspring. In many countries, it is now common to stimulate ovulation so as to obtain a large number of oocytes which are then fertilized. Of these, some are transferred into the woman’s uterus, while the others are frozen for future use. The reason for multiple transfer is to increase the probability that at least one embryo will implant in the uterus. In this technique, therefore, the number of embryos transferred is greater than the single child desired, in the expectation that some embryos will be lost and multiple pregnancy may not occur. In this way, the practice of multiple embryo transfer implies a purely utilitarian treatment of embryos. One is struck by the fact that, in any other area of medicine, ordinary professional ethics and the healthcare authorities themselves would never allow a medical procedure which involved such a high number of failures and fatalities. In fact, techniques of in vitro fertilization are accepted based on the presupposition that the individual embryo is not deserving of full respect in the presence of the competing desire for offspring which must be satisfied.

This sad reality, which often goes unmentioned, is truly deplorable: the “various techniques of artificial reproduction, which would seem to be at the service of life and which are frequently used with this intention, actually open the door to new threats against life.”[28]

16. The Church moreover holds that it is ethically unacceptable to dissociate procreation from the integrally personal context of the conjugal act:[29] human procreation is a personal act of a husband and wife, which is not capable of substitution. The blithe acceptance of the enormous number of abortions involved in the process of in vitro fertilization vividly illustrates how the replacement of the conjugal act by a technical procedure — in addition to being in contradiction with the respect that is due to procreation as something that cannot be reduced to mere reproduction — leads to a weakening of the respect owed to every human being. Recognition of such respect is, on the other hand, promoted by the intimacy of husband and wife nourished by married love.

The Church recognizes the legitimacy of the desire for a child and
understands the suffering of couples struggling with problems of fertility. Such a desire, however, should not override the dignity of every human life to the point of absolute supremacy. The desire for a child cannot justify the “production” of offspring, just as the desire not to have a child cannot justify the abandonment or destruction of a child once he or she has been conceived.

In reality, it seems that some researchers, lacking any ethical point of reference and aware of the possibilities inherent in technological progress, surrender to the logic of purely subjective desires and to economic pressures which are so strong in this area. In the face of this manipulation of the human being in his or her embryonic state, it needs to be repeated that “God’s love does not differentiate between the newly conceived infant still in his or her mother’s womb and the child or young person, or the adult and the elderly person. God does not distinguish between them because he sees an impression of his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26) in each one... Therefore, the Magisterium of the Church has constantly proclaimed the sacred and inviolable character of every human life from its conception until its natural end.”

**Intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI)**

17. Among the recent techniques of artificial fertilization which have gradually assumed a particular importance is intracytoplasmic sperm injection. This technique is used with increasing frequency given its effectiveness in overcoming various forms of male infertility.

Just as in general with in vitro fertilization, of which it is a variety, ICSI is intrinsically illicit: it causes a complete separation between procreation and the conjugal act. Indeed ICSI takes place “outside the bodies of the couple through actions of third parties whose competence and technical activity determine the success of the procedure. Such fertilization entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. Such a relationship of domination is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that must be common to parents and children. Conception in vitro is the result of the technical action which presides over fertilization. Such fertilization is neither in fact achieved nor
positively willed as the expression and fruit of a specific act of the conjugal union.”[34]

**Freezing embryos**

18. One of the methods for improving the chances of success in techniques of in vitro fertilization is the multiplication of attempts. In order to avoid repeatedly taking oocytes from the woman’s body, the process involves a single intervention in which multiple oocytes are taken, followed by cryopreservation of a considerable number of the embryos conceived in vitro.[35] In this way, should the initial attempt at achieving pregnancy not succeed, the procedure can be repeated or additional pregnancies attempted at a later date. In some cases, even the embryos used in the first transfer are frozen because the hormonal ovarian stimulation used to obtain the oocytes has certain effects which lead physicians to wait until the woman’s physiological conditions have returned to normal before attempting to transfer an embryo into her womb.

Cryopreservation is incompatible with the respect owed to human embryos; it presupposes their production in vitro; it exposes them to the serious risk of death or physical harm, since a high percentage does not survive the process of freezing and thawing; it deprives them at least temporarily of maternal reception and gestation; it places them in a situation in which they are susceptible to further offense and manipulation.[36]

The majority of embryos that are not used remain “orphans”. Their parents do not ask for them and at times all trace of the parents is lost. This is why there are thousands upon thousands of frozen embryos in almost all countries where in vitro fertilization takes place.

19. With regard to the large number of frozen embryos already in existence the question becomes: what to do with them? Some of those who pose this question do not grasp its ethical nature, motivated as they are by laws in some countries that require cryopreservation centers to empty their storage tanks periodically. Others, however, are aware that a grave injustice has been perpetrated and wonder how best to respond to the duty of resolving it.

Proposals to use these embryos for research or for the treatment of
disease are obviously unacceptable because they treat the embryos as mere “biological material” and result in their destruction. The proposal to thaw such embryos without reactivating them and use them for research, as if they were normal cadavers, is also unacceptable.\[37\]

The proposal that these embryos could be put at the disposal of infertile couples as a treatment for infertility is not ethically acceptable for the same reasons which make artificial heterologous procreation illicit as well as any form of surrogate motherhood;\[38\] this practice would also lead to other problems of a medical, psychological and legal nature.

It has also been proposed, solely in order to allow human beings to be born who are otherwise condemned to destruction, that there could be a form of “prenatal adoption”. This proposal, praiseworthy with regard to the intention of respecting and defending human life, presents however various problems not dissimilar to those mentioned above.

All things considered, it needs to be recognized that the thousands of abandoned embryos represent a situation of injustice which in fact cannot be resolved. Therefore John Paul II made an “appeal to the conscience of the world’s scientific authorities and in particular to doctors, that the production of human embryos be halted, taking into account that there seems to be no morally licit solution regarding the human destiny of the thousands and thousands of ‘frozen’ embryos which are and remain the subjects of essential rights and should therefore be protected by law as human persons.”\[39\]

The freezing of oocytes

20. In order avoid the serious ethical problems posed by the freezing of embryos, the freezing of oocytes has also been advanced in the area of techniques of in vitro fertilization.\[40\] Once a sufficient number of oocytes has been obtained for a series of attempts at artificial procreation, only those which are to be transferred into the mother’s body are fertilized while the others are frozen for future fertilization and transfer should the initial attempts not succeed.

In this regard it needs to be stated that cryopreservation of oocytes for the purpose of being used in artificial procreation is to be considered morally unacceptable.
The reduction of embryos

21. Some techniques used in artificial procreation, above all the transfer of multiple embryos into the mother's womb, have caused a significant increase in the frequency of multiple pregnancy. This situation gives rise in turn to the practice of so-called embryo reduction, a procedure in which embryos or fetuses in the womb are directly exterminated. The decision to eliminate human lives, given that it was a human life that was desired in the first place, represents a contradiction that can often lead to suffering and feelings of guilt lasting for years.

From the ethical point of view, embryo reduction is an intentional selective abortion. It is in fact the deliberate and direct elimination of one or more innocent human beings in the initial phase of their existence and as such it always constitutes a grave moral disorder.[41]

The ethical justifications proposed for embryo reduction are often based on analogies with natural disasters or emergency situations in which, despite the best intentions of all involved, it is not possible to save everyone. Such analogies cannot in any way be the basis for an action which is directly abortive. At other times, moral principles are invoked, such as those of the lesser evil or double effect, which are likewise inapplicable in this case. It is never permitted to do something which is intrinsically illicit, not even in view of a good result: the end does not justify the means.

Preimplantation diagnosis

22. Preimplantation diagnosis is a form of prenatal diagnosis connected with techniques of artificial fertilization in which embryos formed in vitro undergo genetic diagnosis before being transferred into a woman's womb. Such diagnosis is done in order to ensure that only embryos free from defects or having the desired sex or other particular qualities are transferred.

Unlike other forms of prenatal diagnosis, in which the diagnostic phase is clearly separated from any possible later elimination and which provide therefore a period in which a couple would be free to accept a child with medical problems, in this case, the diagnosis before implantation is immediately followed by the elimination of an embryo suspected of having
genetic or chromosomal defects, or not having the sex desired, or having other qualities that are not wanted. Preimplantation diagnosis — connected as it is with artificial fertilization, which is itself always intrinsically illicit — is directed toward the qualitative selection and consequent destruction of embryos, which constitutes an act of abortion. Preimplantation diagnosis is therefore the expression of a eugenic mentality that “accepts selective abortion in order to prevent the birth of children affected by various types of anomalies. Such an attitude is shameful and utterly reprehensible, since it presumes to measure the value of a human life only within the parameters of ‘normality’ and physical well-being, thus opening the way to legitimizing infanticide and euthanasia as well.”[42]

By treating the human embryo as mere “laboratory material”, the concept itself of human dignity is also subjected to alteration and discrimination. Dignity belongs equally to every single human being, irrespective of his parents’ desires, his social condition, educational formation or level of physical development. If at other times in history, while the concept and requirements of human dignity were accepted in general, discrimination was practiced on the basis of race, religion or social condition, today there is a no less serious and unjust form of discrimination which leads to the non-recognition of the ethical and legal status of human beings suffering from serious diseases or disabilities. It is forgotten that sick and disabled people are not some separate category of humanity; in fact, sickness and disability are part of the human condition and affect every individual, even when there is no direct experience of it. Such discrimination is immoral and must therefore be considered legally unacceptable, just as there is a duty to eliminate cultural, economic and social barriers which undermine the full recognition and protection of disabled or ill people.

New forms of interception and contragestation

23. Alongside methods of preventing pregnancy which are, properly speaking, contraceptive, that is, which prevent conception following from a sexual act, there are other technical means which act after fertilization, when the embryo is already constituted, either before or after implantation in the uterine wall. Such methods are interceptive if they interfere with the
embryo before implantation and contragestative if they cause the elimination of the embryo once implanted.

In order to promote wider use of interceptive methods,[43] it is sometimes stated that the way in which they function is not sufficiently understood. It is true that there is not always complete knowledge of the way that different pharmaceuticals operate, but scientific studies indicate that the effect of inhibiting implantation is certainly present, even if this does not mean that such interceptives cause an abortion every time they are used, also because conception does not occur after every act of sexual intercourse. It must be noted, however, that anyone who seeks to prevent the implantation of an embryo which may possibly have been conceived and who therefore either requests or prescribes such a pharmaceutical, generally intends abortion.

When there is a delay in menstruation, a contragestative is used,[44] usually one or two weeks after the non-occurrence of the monthly period. The stated aim is to re-establish menstruation, but what takes place in reality is the abortion of an embryo which has just implanted.

As is known, abortion is “the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth.”[45] Therefore, the use of means of interception and contragestation fall within the sin of abortion and are gravely immoral. Furthermore, when there is certainty that an abortion has resulted, there are serious penalties in canon law.[46]

Third Part:

New Treatments which Involve the Manipulation of the Embryo or the Human Genetic Patrimony

24. Knowledge acquired in recent years has opened new perspectives for both regenerative medicine and for the treatment of genetically based diseases. In particular, research on embryonic stem cells and its possible future uses have prompted great interest, even though up to now such research has not produced effective results, as distinct from research on adult stem cells. Because some maintain that the possible medical advances which might result from research on embryonic stem cells could justify various forms of manipulation and destruction of human embryos, a whole
range of questions has emerged in the area of gene therapy, from cloning to the use of stem cells, which call for attentive moral discernment.

**Gene therapy**

25. Gene therapy commonly refers to techniques of genetic engineering applied to human beings for therapeutic purposes, that is to say, with the aim of curing genetically based diseases, although recently gene therapy has been attempted for diseases which are not inherited, for cancer in particular.

In theory, it is possible to use gene therapy on two levels: somatic cell gene therapy and germ line cell therapy. Somatic cell gene therapy seeks to eliminate or reduce genetic defects on the level of somatic cells, that is, cells other than the reproductive cells, but which make up the tissue and organs of the body. It involves procedures aimed at certain individual cells with effects that are limited to a single person. Germ line cell therapy aims instead at correcting genetic defects present in germ line cells with the purpose of transmitting the therapeutic effects to the offspring of the individual. Such methods of gene therapy, whether somatic or germ line cell therapy, can be undertaken on a fetus before his or her birth as gene therapy in the uterus or after birth on a child or adult.

26. For a moral evaluation the following distinctions need to be kept in mind. Procedures used on somatic cells for strictly therapeutic purposes are in principle morally licit. Such actions seek to restore the normal genetic configuration of the patient or to counter damage caused by genetic anomalies or those related to other pathologies. Given that gene therapy can involve significant risks for the patient, the ethical principle must be observed according to which, in order to proceed to a therapeutic intervention, it is necessary to establish beforehand that the person being treated will not be exposed to risks to his health or physical integrity which are excessive or disproportionate to the gravity of the pathology for which a cure is sought. The informed consent of the patient or his legitimate representative is also required.

The moral evaluation of germ line cell therapy is different. Whatever genetic modifications are effected on the germ cells of a person will be transmitted to any potential offspring. Because the risks connected to any
genetic manipulation are considerable and as yet not fully controllable, in the present state of research, it is not morally permissible to act in a way that may cause possible harm to the resulting progeny. In the hypothesis of gene therapy on the embryo, it needs to be added that this only takes place in the context of in vitro fertilization and thus runs up against all the ethical objections to such procedures. For these reasons, therefore, it must be stated that, in its current state, germ line cell therapy in all its forms is morally illicit.

27. The question of using genetic engineering for purposes other than medical treatment also calls for consideration. Some have imagined the possibility of using techniques of genetic engineering to introduce alterations with the presumed aim of improving and strengthening the gene pool. Some of these proposals exhibit a certain dissatisfaction or even rejection of the value of the human being as a finite creature and person. Apart from technical difficulties and the real and potential risks involved, such manipulation would promote a eugenic mentality and would lead to indirect social stigma with regard to people who lack certain qualities, while privileging qualities that happen to be appreciated by a certain culture or society; such qualities do not constitute what is specifically human. This would be in contrast with the fundamental truth of the equality of all human beings which is expressed in the principle of justice, the violation of which, in the long run, would harm peaceful coexistence among individuals. Furthermore, one wonders who would be able to establish which modifications were to be held as positive and which not, or what limits should be placed on individual requests for improvement since it would be materially impossible to fulfill the wishes of every single person. Any conceivable response to these questions would, however, derive from arbitrary and questionable criteria. All of this leads to the conclusion that the prospect of such an intervention would end sooner or later by harming the common good, by favoring the will of some over the freedom of others. Finally it must also be noted that in the attempt to create a new type of human being one can recognize an ideological element in which man tries to take the place of his Creator.

In stating the ethical negativity of these kinds of interventions which imply an unjust domination of man over man, the Church also recalls the
need to return to an attitude of care for people and of education in accepting human life in its concrete historical finite nature.

Human cloning

28. Human cloning refers to the asexual or agametic reproduction of the entire human organism in order to produce one or more “copies” which, from a genetic perspective, are substantially identical to the single original.\[47\]

Cloning is proposed for two basic purposes: reproduction, that is, in order to obtain the birth of a baby, and medical therapy or research. In theory, reproductive cloning would be able to satisfy certain specific desires, for example, control over human evolution, selection of human beings with superior qualities, pre-selection of the sex of a child to be born, production of a child who is the “copy” of another, or production of a child for a couple whose infertility cannot be treated in another way. Therapeutic cloning, on the other hand, has been proposed as a way of producing embryonic stem cells with a predetermined genetic patrimony in order to overcome the problem of immune system rejection; this is therefore linked to the issue of the use of stem cells.

Attempts at cloning have given rise to genuine concern throughout the entire world. Various national and international organizations have expressed negative judgments on human cloning and it has been prohibited in the great majority of nations.

Human cloning is intrinsically illicit in that, by taking the ethical negativity of techniques of artificial fertilization to their extreme, it seeks to give rise to a new human being without a connection to the act of reciprocal self-giving between the spouses and, more radically, without any link to sexuality. This leads to manipulation and abuses gravely injurious to human dignity.\[48\]

29. If cloning were to be done for reproduction, this would impose on the resulting individual a predetermined genetic identity, subjecting him — as has been stated — to a form of biological slavery, from which it would be difficult to free himself. The fact that someone would arrogate to himself the right to determine arbitrarily the genetic characteristics of another person represents a grave offense to the dignity of that person as well as to
the fundamental equality of all people.

The originality of every person is a consequence of the particular relationship that exists between God and a human being from the first moment of his existence and carries with it the obligation to respect the singularity and integrity of each person, even on the biological and genetic levels. In the encounter with another person, we meet a human being who owes his existence and his proper characteristics to the love of God, and only the love of husband and wife constitutes a mediation of that love in conformity with the plan of the Creator and heavenly Father.

30. From the ethical point of view, so-called therapeutic cloning is even more serious. To create embryos with the intention of destroying them, even with the intention of helping the sick, is completely incompatible with human dignity, because it makes the existence of a human being at the embryonic stage nothing more than a means to be used and destroyed. It is gravely immoral to sacrifice a human life for therapeutic ends.

The ethical objections raised in many quarters to therapeutic cloning and to the use of human embryos formed in vitro have led some researchers to propose new techniques which are presented as capable of producing stem cells of an embryonic type without implying the destruction of true human embryos. These proposals have been met with questions of both a scientific and an ethical nature regarding above all the ontological status of the “product” obtained in this way. Until these doubts have been clarified, the statement of the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* needs to be kept in mind: “what is at stake is so important that, from the standpoint of moral obligation, the mere probability that a human person is involved would suffice to justify an absolutely clear prohibition of any intervention aimed at killing a human embryo.”

The therapeutic use of stem cells

31. Stem cells are undifferentiated cells with two basic characteristics: a) the prolonged capability of multiplying themselves while maintaining the undifferentiated state; b) the capability of producing transitory progenitor cells from which fully differentiated cells descend, for example, nerve cells, muscle cells and blood cells.

Once it was experimentally verified that when stem cells are
transplanted into damaged tissue they tend to promote cell growth and the regeneration of the tissue, new prospects opened for regenerative medicine, which have been the subject of great interest among researchers throughout the world.

Among the sources for human stem cells which have been identified thus far are: the embryo in the first stages of its existence, the fetus, blood from the umbilical cord and various tissues from adult humans (bone marrow, umbilical cord, brain, mesenchyme from various organs, etc.) and amniotic fluid. At the outset, studies focused on embryonic stem cells, because it was believed that only these had significant capabilities of multiplication and differentiation. Numerous studies, however, show that adult stem cells also have a certain versatility. Even if these cells do not seem to have the same capacity for renewal or the same plasticity as stem cells taken from embryos, advanced scientific studies and experimentation indicate that these cells give more positive results than embryonic stem cells. Therapeutic protocols in force today provide for the use of adult stem cells and many lines of research have been launched, opening new and promising possibilities.

32. With regard to the ethical evaluation, it is necessary to consider the methods of obtaining stem cells as well as the risks connected with their clinical and experimental use.

In these methods, the origin of the stem cells must be taken into consideration. Methods which do not cause serious harm to the subject from whom the stem cells are taken are to be considered licit. This is generally the case when tissues are taken from: a) an adult organism; b) the blood of the umbilical cord at the time of birth; c) fetuses who have died of natural causes. The obtaining of stem cells from a living human embryo, on the other hand, invariably causes the death of the embryo and is consequently gravely illicit: “research, in such cases, irrespective of efficacious therapeutic results, is not truly at the service of humanity. In fact, this research advances through the suppression of human lives that are equal in dignity to the lives of other human individuals and to the lives of the researchers themselves. History itself has condemned such a science in the past and will condemn it in the future, not only because it lacks the light of God but also because it lacks humanity.”[51]
The use of embryonic stem cells or differentiated cells derived from them — even when these are provided by other researchers through the destruction of embryos or when such cells are commercially available — presents serious problems from the standpoint of cooperation in evil and scandal.\[52]\[52]\[52]

There are no moral objections to the clinical use of stem cells that have been obtained licitly; however, the common criteria of medical ethics need to be respected. Such use should be characterized by scientific rigor and prudence, by reducing to the bare minimum any risks to the patient and by facilitating the interchange of information among clinicians and full disclosure to the public at large.

Research initiatives involving the use of adult stem cells, since they do not present ethical problems, should be encouraged and supported.\[53]\[53]\[53]\[53]\[53]\[53]

**Attempts at hybridization**

33. Recently animal oocytes have been used for reprogramming the nuclei of human somatic cells — this is generally called hybrid cloning — in order to extract embryonic stem cells from the resulting embryos without having to use human oocytes.

From the ethical standpoint, such procedures represent an offense against the dignity of human beings on account of the admixture of human and animal genetic elements capable of disrupting the specific identity of man. The possible use of the stem cells, taken from these embryos, may also involve additional health risks, as yet unknown, due to the presence of animal genetic material in their cytoplasm. To consciously expose a human being to such risks is morally and ethically unacceptable.

**The use of human “biological material” of illicit origin**

34. For scientific research and for the production of vaccines or other products, cell lines are at times used which are the result of an illicit intervention against the life or physical integrity of a human being. The connection to the unjust act may be either mediate or immediate, since it is generally a question of cells which reproduce easily and abundantly. This “material” is sometimes made available commercially or distributed freely to research centers by governmental agencies having this function under the
law. All of this gives rise to various ethical problems with regard to cooperation in evil and with regard to scandal. It is fitting therefore to formulate general principles on the basis of which people of good conscience can evaluate and resolve situations in which they may possibly be involved on account of their professional activity.

It needs to be remembered above all that the category of abortion “is to be applied also to the recent forms of intervention on human embryos which, although carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, inevitably involve the killing of those embryos. This is the case with experimentation on embryos, which is becoming increasingly widespread in the field of biomedical research and is legally permitted in some countries... [T]he use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person.”[54] These forms of experimentation always constitute a grave moral disorder.[55]

35. A different situation is created when researchers use “biological material” of illicit origin which has been produced apart from their research center or which has been obtained commercially. The Instruction Donum Vitae formulated the general principle which must be observed in these cases: “The corpses of human embryos and fetuses, whether they have been deliberately aborted or not, must be respected just as the remains of other human beings. In particular, they cannot be subjected to mutilation or to autopsies if their death has not yet been verified and without the consent of the parents or of the mother. Furthermore, the moral requirements must be safeguarded that there be no complicity in deliberate abortion and that the risk of scandal be avoided.”[56]

In this regard, the criterion of independence as it has been formulated by some ethics committees is not sufficient. According to this criterion, the use of “biological material” of illicit origin would be ethically permissible provided there is a clear separation between those who, on the one hand, produce, freeze and cause the death of embryos and, on the other, the researchers involved in scientific experimentation. The criterion of independence is not sufficient to avoid a contradiction in the attitude of the person who says that he does not approve of the injustice perpetrated by
others, but at the same time accepts for his own work the “biological material” which the others have obtained by means of that injustice. When the illicit action is endorsed by the laws which regulate healthcare and scientific research, it is necessary to distance oneself from the evil aspects of that system in order not to give the impression of a certain toleration or tacit acceptance of actions which are gravely unjust. Any appearance of acceptance would in fact contribute to the growing indifference to, if not the approval of, such actions in certain medical and political circles.

At times, the objection is raised that the above-mentioned considerations would mean that people of good conscience involved in research would have the duty to oppose actively all the illicit actions that take place in the field of medicine, thus excessively broadening their ethical responsibility. In reality, the duty to avoid cooperation in evil and scandal relates to their ordinary professional activities, which they must pursue in a just manner and by means of which they must give witness to the value of life by their opposition to gravely unjust laws. Therefore, it needs to be stated that there is a duty to refuse to use such “biological material” even when there is no close connection between the researcher and the actions of those who performed the artificial fertilization or the abortion, or when there was no prior agreement with the centers in which the artificial fertilization took place. This duty springs from the necessity to remove oneself, within the area of one’s own research, from a gravely unjust legal situation and to affirm with clarity the value of human life. Therefore, the above-mentioned criterion of independence is necessary, but may be ethically insufficient.

Of course, within this general picture there exist differing degrees of responsibility. Grave reasons may be morally proportionate to justify the use of such “biological material”. Thus, for example, danger to the health of children could permit parents to use a vaccine which was developed using cell lines of illicit origin, while keeping in mind that everyone has the duty to make known their disagreement and to ask that their healthcare system make other types of vaccines available. Moreover, in organizations where cell lines of illicit origin are being utilized, the responsibility of those who make the decision to use them is not the same as that of those who have no voice in such a decision.
In the context of the urgent need to mobilize consciences in favor of life, people in the field of healthcare need to be reminded that “their responsibility today is greatly increased. Its deepest inspiration and strongest support lie in the intrinsic and undeniable ethical dimension of the health-care profession, something already recognized by the ancient and still relevant Hippocratic Oath, which requires every doctor to commit himself to absolute respect for human life and its sacredness.”^[58]

**Conclusion**

36. There are those who say that the moral teaching of the Church contains too many prohibitions. In reality, however, her teaching is based on the recognition and promotion of all the gifts which the Creator has bestowed on man: such as life, knowledge, freedom and love. Particular appreciation is due not only to man’s intellectual activities, but also to those which are practical, like work and technological activities. By these, in fact, he participates in the creative power of God and is called to transform creation by ordering its many resources toward the dignity and well-being of all human beings and of the human person in his entirety. In this way, man acts as the steward of the value and intrinsic beauty of creation.

Human history shows, however, how man has abused and can continue to abuse the power and capabilities which God has entrusted to him, giving rise to various forms of unjust discrimination and oppression of the weakest and most defenseless: the daily attacks on human life; the existence of large regions of poverty where people are dying from hunger and disease, excluded from the intellectual and practical resources available in abundance in many countries; technological and industrial development which is creating the real risk of a collapse of the ecosystem; the use of scientific research in the areas of physics, chemistry and biology for purposes of waging war; the many conflicts which still divide peoples and cultures; these sadly are only some of the most obvious signs of how man can make bad use of his abilities and become his own worst enemy by losing the awareness of his lofty and specific vocation to collaborate in the creative work of God.

At the same time, human history has also shown real progress in the understanding and recognition of the value and dignity of every person as
the foundation of the rights and ethical imperatives by which human society has been, and continues to be structured. Precisely in the name of promoting human dignity, therefore, practices and forms of behavior harmful to that dignity have been prohibited. Thus, for example, there are legal and political — and not just ethical — prohibitions of racism, slavery, unjust discrimination and marginalization of women, children, and ill and disabled people. Such prohibitions bear witness to the inalienable value and intrinsic dignity of every human being and are a sign of genuine progress in human history. In other words, the legitimacy of every prohibition is based on the need to protect an authentic moral good.

37. If initially human and social progress was characterized primarily by industrial development and the production of consumer goods, today it is distinguished by developments in information technologies, research in genetics, medicine and biotechnologies for human benefit, which are areas of great importance for the future of humanity, but in which there are also evident and unacceptable abuses. “Just as a century ago it was the working classes which were oppressed in their fundamental rights, and the Church courageously came to their defense by proclaiming the sacrosanct rights of the worker as person, so now, when another category of persons is being oppressed in the fundamental right to life, the Church feels in duty bound to speak out with the same courage on behalf of those who have no voice. Hers is always the evangelical cry in defense of the world’s poor, those who are threatened and despised and whose human rights are violated.”[59]

In virtue of the Church’s doctrinal and pastoral mission, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has felt obliged to reiterate both the dignity and the fundamental and inalienable rights of every human being, including those in the initial stages of their existence, and to state explicitly the need for protection and respect which this dignity requires of everyone.

The fulfillment of this duty implies courageous opposition to all those practices which result in grave and unjust discrimination against unborn human beings, who have the dignity of a person, created like others in the image of God. Behind every “no” in the difficult task of discerning between good and evil, there shines a great “yes” to the recognition of the dignity
and inalienable value of every single and unique human being called into existence.

The Christian faithful will commit themselves to the energetic promotion of a new culture of life by receiving the contents of this Instruction with the religious assent of their spirit, knowing that God always gives the grace necessary to observe his commandments and that, in every human being, above all in the least among us, one meets Christ himself (cf. Mt 25:40). In addition, all persons of good will, in particular physicians and researchers open to dialogue and desirous of knowing what is true, will understand and agree with these principles and judgments, which seek to safeguard the vulnerable condition of human beings in the first stages of life and to promote a more human civilization.

The Sovereign Pontiff Benedict XVI, in the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect on 20 June 2008, approved the present Instruction, adopted in the Ordinary Session of this Congregation, and ordered its publication.

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 8 September 2008, Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

+ William Card. Levada

Prefect

+ Luis F. Ladaria, S.I.

Titular Archbishop of Thibica

Secretary


[4] John Paul II, Address to the participants in the Seventh Assembly of
the Pontifical Academy of Life (3 March 2001), 3: AAS 93 (2001), 446.


[7] Human rights, as Pope Benedict XVI has recalled, and in particular
the right to life of every human being "are based on the natural law
inscribed on human hearts and presents in different cultures and
civilizations. Removing human rights from this context would mean
restricting their range and yielding to a relativistic conception, according to
which the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary and their
universality would be denied in the name of different cultural, political,
social, and even religious outlooks. The great variety of viewpoints must
not be allowed to obscure the fact that not only as rights are universal, but
so too is the human person, the subject of those rights" (Address to the
General Assembly of the United Nations [18 April 2008]: AAS 100
[2008], 334).

[8] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction Donum

[9] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction Donum

60 (1968), 485-486.

Congress organized by the Pontifical Lateran University on the 40th
Anniversary of the Encyclical Humanae Vitae, 10 May 2008: L’Osservatore


[22] The term heterologous artificial fertilization or procreation refers to “techniques used to obtain a human conception artificially by the use of gametes coming from at least one donor other than the spouses who are joined in marriage” (Instruction *Donum Vitae*, II: AAS 80 [1988], 86).

[23] The term homologous artificial fertilization or procreation refers to “the technique used to obtain a human conception using the gametes of the two spouses joined in marriage” (Instruction *Donum Vitae*, II: AAS 80 [1988], 86).


Currently the number of embryos sacrificed, even in the most technically advanced centers of artificial fertilization, hovers above 80%.


An increasing number of persons, even those who are unmarried, are having recourse to techniques of artificial reproduction in order to have a child. These actions weaken the institution of marriage and cause babies to be born in environments which are not conducive to their full human development.


Intracytoplasmic sperm injection is similar in almost every respect to other forms of in vitro fertilization with the difference that in this procedure fertilization in the test tube does not take place on its own, but rather by means of the injection into the oocyte of a single sperm, selected earlier, or by the injection of immature germ cells taken from the man.

There is ongoing discussion among specialists regarding the health risks which this method may pose for children conceived in this way.


Cryopreservation of embryos refers to freezing them at extremely low temperatures, allowing long term storage.

Cf. numbers 34-35 below.


Cryopreservation of oocytes is also indicated in other medical contexts which are not under consideration here. The term oocyte refers to the female germ cell (gametocyte) not penetrated by the spermatozoa.


The interceptive methods which are best known are the IUD (intrauterine device) and the so-called “morning-after pills”.

The principal means of contragestation are RU-486 (Mifepristone), synthetic prostaglandins or Methotrexate.


Cf. CIC, can. 1398 and CCEO, can. 1450 § 2; cf. also CIC, can. 1323-1324. The Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law declared that the canonical concept of abortion is “the killing of the fetus in whatever way or at whatever time from the moment of conception” (Response of 23 May 1988: AAS 80 [1988], 1818).

In the current state of knowledge, the techniques which have been proposed for accomplishing human cloning are two: artificial embryo twinning and cell nuclear transfer. Artificial embryo twinning consists in the artificial separation of individual cells or groups of cells from the embryo in the earliest stage of development. These are then transferred into the uterus in order to obtain identical embryos in an artificial manner. Cell
nuclear transfer, or cloning properly speaking, consists in introducing a nucleus taken from an embryonic or somatic cell into an denucleated oocyte. This is followed by stimulation of the oocyte so that it begins to develop as an embryo.


[49] The new techniques of this kind are, for example, the use of human parthenogenesis, altered nuclear transfer (ANT) and oocyte assisted reprogramming (OAR).


[52] Cf. numbers 34-35 below.


[57] Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae*, 73: AAS 87 (1995), 486: “Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection”. The right of conscientious objection, as an
expression of the right to freedom of conscience, should be protected by law.


Decree of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments approving the texts of the Mass of St. Josemaría Escrivá in Estonian and Tagalog (August 11, 2008)

CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Prot. N. 424/08/L

SANCTAE CRUCIS ET OPERIS DEI

*Instante Excellentissimo ac Reverendissimo Domino Xaverio Echevarría, Prelato Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei, litteris die 29 martii 2008 datis, vigore facultatum huic Congregationi a Summo Pontifice BENEDICTO XVI tributarum, textum estoniensem et tagalog Missae in honorem sancti Iosephmariae Escrivá de Balaguer, presbyteri, prout in adiectis exstat exemplaribus, perlibenter approbamus seu et confirmamus.*

In textu imprimendo mentio fiat de approbatione seu confirmatione ab Apostolica Sede concessa. Eiusdem insuper textus impressi duo exemplaria ad hanc Congregationem transmittantur.

Contrariis quibuslibet minime obstantibus.

Ex aedibus Congregationis de Cultu Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum, die 11
augusti 2008.
+ Albertus Malcolmus Ranjith

Archiepiscopus a Secretis

+ Franciscus B. Trần Van kha

Officio Praepositus
PRELATE

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

Appointments

Decree appointing Rev. Ludwig Juza Regional Vicar of Austria

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia

Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Ludovicum Juza, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Quasi-Regione Austriæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexīs.

Dum enixas preces effundimus ut Deus tibi in huiusmodi munere ad suam

 gloriam et Ecclesiae bonum propitius adsit, Nostram benedictionem in Domino

tibi libentissime impertimus.

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatiæ, die 3 mense octobri anno 2008.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Prælatus Operis Dei

Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart

Curiæ Prælatitiae Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 31

Decree appointing Rev. Víctor Martínez Martín Regional Vicar of Australia

Nos Dr. D. XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Dei et Apostolicæ Sedis gratia
Prælatus

D E C R E T U M

Præsentibus his litteris te, Rev.dum D.num D.rem Victorem Martínez Martín, nominamus atque constituimus Vicarium Nostrum pro Quasi-Regione Australiæ et Novæ Zelandiæ, cum omnibus et singulis iuribus et obligationibus huic officio adnexīs.

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

Datum Romæ, ex Ædibus Curiæ Prælatitiæ, die 3 mense novembri anno 2008.

+ XAVERIUS ECHEVARRÍA

Prælatus Operis Dei

Rev.mus D. Dr. Ernestus Burkhart

Curiæ Prælatitiæ Cancellarius

Reg. Gen. R. lib. VI pag. 32

Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral Trips

_Asturias, July 4 to 6_

The Prelate of Opus Dei was in Asturias from July 4 to 6 at the invitation of Archbishop Carlos Osoro of Oviedo, on the occasion of the Jubilee Year of the Cross of the Angels and the Cross of Victory. The visit began on Friday, the 4th, at the shrine of Our Lady of Covadonga. On
Saturday, the 5th, the Prelate celebrated Holy Mass with the Archbishop in the Cathedral of Oviedo and, at the end, prayed before the Holy Shroud and the two jubilee crosses.

That day and the following one, Bishop Echevarría had two pastoral get-togethers with many people. He encouraged them to pray for Pope Benedict XVI, who was about to leave for Australia to preside at the World Youth Day.

Southeast Asia and Oceania from July 12 to August 5.

New Delhi (India), from July 12 to 14. On Saturday, July 12, the Prelate arrived in New Delhi. That same morning he visited the Cathedral, where he prayed before the Blessed Sacrament exposed in the monstrance, and greeted various church officials. Over the two following days he received many people. On Monday, the 14th, he left for Hong Kong.

Hong Kong and Macao (China), from July 14 to 18. During the three days that he was in Hong Kong and Macao, the Prelate met on various occasions with faithful of Opus Dei, Cooperators, friends and many other people who participate in the activities of apostolate and formation offered by the Prelature, including in continental China and Taiwan. On the 15th he visited Cardinal Joseph Zen, Archbishop of Hong Kong. And on the 16th, in Macao, he went to pray at a church dedicated to Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, whose memorial the Church commemorates on that day.

Australia and New Zealand, from July 18 to 27. The first three days the Prelate spent in Australia coincided with the final days of the Pope’s stay in Sydney, and centered on the activities organized for World Youth Day. When the World Youth Day concluded, Bishop Echevarría had a series of meetings with faithful of the Prelature and people who participate in the apostolic activities of Opus Dei. On Tuesday, the 22nd, he made a trip to Melbourne, where he met with Archbishop Dennis Hart. He also blessed a statue of St. Josemaría which had been installed in the church of St. Mary Star of the Sea. On the following morning he left for Auckland, New Zealand. On the 25th he returned to Sydney where he met with Cardinal
George Pell. On July 26 he had a get-together with some three thousand people in The Dome, a large hall close to the Olympic Park. On the following morning he left for the Philippines.

Manila, July 27 to August 1. The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Manila on the evening of July 27. On the following day he greeted the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Edward Joseph Adams, and received various groups of people. Over the next several days he had get-togethers with faithful of the Prelature and many other people in the SMX Convention Center, in the Aguinaldo Theater, and at the University of Asia and the Pacific.

Singapore and Malaysia, from August 1 to 3. In Singapore he had various meetings with small groups of young people and families. On Saturday the 2nd, in the morning, the Prelate visited Archbishop Nichola Chia, and early in the afternoon he had a larger catechetical get-together in the Orchid Country Club, on the outskirts of the city. On Sunday the 3rd, he traveled to Johor Bahru, in the southern part of Malaysia, to dedicate the altar of the oratory of Bukit Tiram House, a new center of Opus Dei.

Bombay, from August 3 to 5. From Singapore, the Prelate traveled to Bombay, arriving on the night of August 3. On the following day he visited the Shrine of Our Lady of the Mount and received various groups of persons who take part in the Prelature’s formational activities in Bombay.

Germany, August 9 to September 6

Starting on August 9, Bishop Echevarría spent some days of rest and study in Solingen, Germany. On August 23, he made a brief trip to Zonnewende, a center for formational activities of Opus Dei in the Netherlands to spend a few hours with faithful of the Prelature who were participating in various courses of formation. On the 28th he also visited some members of the Work in the Schweidt Residence of Cologne. In that same city, on August 30, he was received by Cardinal Joachim Meisner, the Archbishop of Cologne. During those days he was able to make a pilgrimage to the Marian shrine of Maria Rast, near Kreuzweingarten. He also prayed before the tombs of Cardinals Frings and Höfner in the crypt.
of Cologne Cathedral. On Wednesday, September 3, he traveled to Berlin where he spent several days meeting with numerous people. On September 5 he was again in Cologne where he received various groups of people and went to pray before the Black Madonna in the Kupfergasse.

---

*Sarragosa and Torreciudad, Spain, September 20 and 21*

On Saturday, September 20, at midday, the Prelate arrived at Sarragosa’s airport. After visiting our Lady of the Pillar, he was driven to the Shrine of Torreciudad, where he undertook a pilgrimage to the old shrine, following in the footsteps of St. Josemaría, who visited our Lady as a pilgrim in 1970. He also held various meetings with groups of young people and adults. He returned to Rome on Sunday, the 21st, from Barcelona.

---

*Paris, October 10 to 12*

Bishop Echevarría arrived in Paris on Friday, October 10. On the next day, in the morning, he went to the Church on the Rue du Bac, to pray before the image of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and to place at her feet the needs of the Church and of Opus Dei. In the afternoon he had meetings with various groups of people. On Sunday October 12, he met with faithful of the Prelature.

---

*Pamplona, Spain, from the 23rd to the 27th of November*

The Prelate of Opus Dei arrived in Pamplona on Sunday, November 23, to accompany all the students, teachers and employees at the University of Navarre, following the terrorist attack they had suffered a few days earlier.
Ordination of Deacons

On November 22, thirty faithful of the Opus Dei Prelature received the diaconate from Bishop Javier Echevarría. The ceremony took place in the Basilica of San Eugenio, Rome.[1] The new deacons were from 12 different countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, El Salvador, Honduras, Italy, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Mexico, Portugal, and Spain.

[1] See homily on page 278.

Pastoral Letters

Letter of December 2008

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

We have come to the end of the Marian Year in the Work, during which we have given thanks to God, through our Lady’s intercession, for the twenty-five years of Opus Dei as a personal prelature. I am sure, through God’s goodness, that we have all grown in our affection and devotion to our Mother, which necessarily leads us to a more intimate and personal, a more loving dialogue with her Son, Jesus.

Now we are preparing for the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception: a new opportunity to place even more firmly, in the depths of our soul, the Marian piety that is a characteristic of Catholics and a very important part of the spiritual heritage our Founder left us. We know how St. Josemaría never held himself up as an example of anything. The only Model, he used to tell us, is Jesus Christ. And, nevertheless, he didn't think it out of place to say: “If I want you to imitate me in anything, it’s in the
love I have for our Lady.” That’s how great his filial affection was for our Mother! Let us ask through his intercession that, in these days of preparation for the great feast of December 8, each of us may grow steadily in our Marian piety and apostolic zeal. Let us also encourage others so that, through a more trusting conversation with our Lady, they may enter on the path of interior life, or make progress along that path.

Yesterday was the beginning of Advent, the liturgical time especially appropriate for fostering theological hope. This virtue leads us to aspire with all of our strength to the eternal happiness God has promised to those who fulfill his will. As the Pope wrote one year ago, “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.”

So let us begin this liturgical time by reinforcing our desire to reach heaven. Let us never make the goods here below our end; everything we may achieve here has to help us to traverse the path that leads to heaven. The final end of our life is a single one: possessing and rejoicing in God for all eternity. There we find the definitive goal we must aspire to attain day by day; and therefore we have to put everything—absolutely everything, without keeping anything back—at the service of the kingdom of God.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up the meaning of these weeks in the following words: “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient awaiting of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his Second Coming.”

This is a time for preparing for Christmas, and for fostering hope in the coming of our Redeemer that will take place at the end of time, to judge the living and the dead and to fully establish his kingdom, so that God may be all in all.

The first part of Advent, until December 16, is centered on our Lord’s final coming. The liturgy at Mass, especially on Sundays, presents us with passages from the Old and New Testaments aimed at preparing us for that encounter. After December 17, the content of the readings changes, to
prepare us more immediately for the spiritual coming of Jesus at Christmas time. These two realities are intimately united, and should guide our prayer during the month of December. How eager are we to be with God, already here on earth? Do we seek his Face in all that we do? Does the certainty that he has come and will come for everyone prevent us from losing our peace?

The consideration of the last things—the final realities that will take place at the end of time, and before that, for each of us, on the day of our death—should not be a source of fear or anxiety. There is nothing further from the Church’s intention in setting forth these truths to us. Rather, they are meant to be a call to our sense of personal responsibility, so that we undertake with greater constancy the work of our own sanctification and our apostolic work.

A few weeks ago, taking up the doctrine of St. Paul on the last things, Benedict XVI invited Catholics to meditate on the three great certainties of our faith related to this theme. The first is “the certainty that Jesus is Risen and is with the Father and thus is with us forever. And no one is stronger than Christ…Therefore we are secure and free of fear.”[4]

How can we fear our Father God, who has shown us so many and such evident tokens of love, to the point of sending his Son into the world, to save us? Faith in the risen Christ is the best antidote against any fear. This is what happened when the Gospel was first preached, in a world dominated by a fatalistic fear of destiny, and it has to be renewed again today, in a world in which so many people are full of apprehension about the future, or act irresponsibly as though everything ended here on earth. “The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? (Ps 26:1),” St. Josemaría asked himself with words from the Psalmist. And he answered: “No one. If we approach our heavenly Father in this way, we will have no grounds for fearing anyone or anything.”[5] Therefore, “a son of God fears neither life nor death, because his spiritual life is founded on a sense of divine filiation. And he says to himself: God is my Father and he is the Author of all good; he is all Goodness.”[6]

Secondly, the Pope continues, going more deeply into the reasons for Christian optimism, “the certainty that Christ is with me, that in Christ
the future world has already begun, also gives the certainty of hope. The future is not a darkness in which no one can find their way. It is not like this.”[7] For anyone who believes in Christ and lives in Christ, the future is always bright, a sure path, because the risen Christ, the Good Shepherd, has opened for us the path to life eternal and walks with us, protects us and encourages us with the affection of a mother and a father. Each of us can make our own, with full truth, those inspired words: The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.[8]

The third certainty that sustains Christians is this: “the Judge who returns both as Judge and Savior has left us the duty to live in this world in accordance with his way of living. He has entrusted his talents to us. Our third conviction, therefore, is responsibility before Christ for the world, for our brethren and at the same time also the certainty of his mercy. Both these things are important.”[9]

This sense of responsibility is a response to our Lord’s advice: negotiamini, dum venio,[10] trade till I come— words that St. Josemaría often meditated on, with the certainty that God is always beside us, and with the responsibility of knowing that he has entrusted his inheritance to us. We have to make good use of our time so that—with God’s grace—we come to merit eternal happiness one day. Let us savor these other words from St. Josemaría: “What a shame it would be to have as one’s occupation in life that of killing time which is a God-given treasure! No excuse could justify such behavior…How sad not to turn to good account and obtain a real profit from the few or many talents that God has given to each man so that he may dedicate himself to the task of serving other souls and the whole of society!

“When a Christian kills time on this earth, he is putting himself in danger of ‘killing Heaven’ for himself, that is, if through selfishness, he backs out of things and hides away and doesn’t care. A person who loves God not only hands over to the service of Christ, what he has and what he is in life. He gives his very self.”[11]
In the light of these invitations we can ask ourselves: Do I feel the responsibility of making the talents entrusted to me bear fruit—personal qualities, jobs that I have, opportunities to do good that come up during the day—in order to firmly establish Christ’s kingdom in my own soul and in the environment around me? How do I help others to behave in the same way, by my example and my words? Am I doing whatever is in my power to ensure that civil legislation and society respect God’s Law?

The second part of Advent, as I reminded you above, aims to prepare us more immediately for Christmas. During these days, following our Father’s advice, we can accompany our Lady and St. Joseph on their journey to Bethlehem. In our times of personal prayer, and throughout the day, let us place ourselves very near them, trying to provide them with some service, making reparation for those who, also now, don’t want to accept the Son of God when he comes into this world. This is not merely imagination, but an effective way of stirring up our faith in the mystery of the Incarnation.

Christmas is a marvelous school for us; let us take advantage of the lessons Jesus gives us. As St. Josemaría wrote, when contemplating the naturalness of Christ’s birth: “He began by spending nine months in his Mother’s womb, like the rest of men, following the natural course of events. He knew that mankind needed him greatly. He was longing to come into the world to save all souls, but he took his time. He came in due course, just as every other child is born.”[12]

We can also learn from Christ’s simplicity: “Our Lord comes without any fanfare. No one knows about him. On earth only Mary and Joseph share in the divine adventure. And then the shepherds who received the message from the angels. And later on, the wise men from the East. They were the only witnesses of this transcendental event which unites heaven and earth, God and man.”[13]

Determined to imitate the Master, we can unite the divine and the human in our ordinary life. We can do so if we make the effort to put God at the center of our activity, striving to fulfill our duties in order to give him glory, and rectifying any motives that might hinder this. In the days before Christmas, let us not forget that Mary and Joseph continue calling to souls,
as they did at the doors of the houses in Bethlehem. “I am not at all stretching the truth,” St. Josemaría assures us, “when I tell you that Jesus is still looking for a resting-place in our heart. We have to ask him to forgive our personal blindness and ingratitude. We must ask him to give us the grace never to close the door of our soul on him again.”[14]

In the upcoming weeks, the liturgy echoes Jesus’ voice in recommending vigilance: Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.[15] As the Pope reminded all Christians: “Jesus, who came among us at Christmas and will return in glory at the end of time, does not tire of visiting us continuously in everyday events. He asks us to be alert to perceive his presence, his advent, and recommends that we watch and wait for him...Let us prepare ourselves to relive with faith the mystery of the Redeemer’s birth, which filled all creation with joy.”[16]

Last week I had the opportunity to spend a few days in Pamplona, to accompany your sisters and brothers in the extraordinary circumstances they have gone through. I was able to see, once again, the spirit that our Father infused in everyone, including those who work at the University of Navarra. A few weeks after the attack there, the deeply Christian attitude of the men and women who work there caused me to give thanks to God, because it was so palpably clear that Opus Dei is a sowing of peace and of joy.

I repeat my request for prayers for my intentions: first of all, for the Pope and those who assist him in governing the Church, for the bishops and priests, for all the members of the People of God. And so that the personal apostolic work of each of us never wavers. With Christ, assisted by our Lady and St. Joseph, let us “become all things to all men.”

During this month many anniversaries in the Work’s history take place. I can’t go into all of them, because it would take too long. But I ask that we may all love even more this “history of the mercies of God,” because our Lord has wanted them for each and every one of us. I would like them to be simply remembrances, but something that we live.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father
Letter of July 2008

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

As I begin my letter to you, once again my heart is filled with the need to give thanks to God for all his gifts to us. On June 26, we have again seen how devotion to St. Josemaría is spreading throughout the whole world. In many dozens of countries our Father has been commemorated on his feast
day, and Holy Mass has been celebrated in his honor in so many different cities. Thus the spirit of Opus Dei has reached more people and new surroundings, helping Christians to find and love God in the ordinary situations of their own lives.

In addition, precisely on that day we received a special caress from God: the conclusion of the investigative process for the cause of canonization of our beloved Don Álvaro, in the Tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome. When, in a few weeks, the sessions of the Tribunal of the Prelature are concluded, the corresponding documents will be presented to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. Later, after the recognition of the validity of the processes, a new stage will begin: the drawing up of the positio on the life and heroic virtues of the first successor of our Father. I ask that all of us may pray insistently for the happy conclusion of these efforts, which will help us to follow very closely in St. Josemaría’s footsteps, as Don Alvaro always did.

On the 28th, the vigil of the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, Benedict XVI inaugurated the Pauline Year, which he convoked to celebrate the two-thousandth anniversary of the Apostle’s birth. Following the Roman Pontiff’s indications, we will strive to get to know his life and teachings better, and to follow his example. I witnessed our Father’s immense joy when he contemplated St. Paul’s spirit of continual conversion, and this was how he personally wanted to seek Christ.

St. John Chrysostom, who deeply admired and had great devotion to the Apostle, wrote a panegyric extolling his virtues that can help us a lot. That Father and Doctor of the Church said: “they are not mistaken who call Paul’s soul a meadow of virtues and a spiritual paradise, for he was overflowing with grace and showed the wisdom of a soul worthy of grace. Indeed, from the moment he became a chosen instrument and was suitably purified, the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out abundantly upon him. From there marvelous rivers flowed forth for us—not just four, like the springs of paradise (cf. Gen 2:10-14), but many more. These rivers flow forth every day; they do not water the earth but the souls of men, spurring them to produce the fruit of virtue.”[1]
Today I invite you to consider Saul’s response to his vocation. He was a zealous Jew, a faithful observer of the Law of Moses. For this reason, as he himself recalls, I persecuted the Church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.[2] Nevertheless, on the way to Damascus, Christ Jesus made me his own.[3] The risen Lord appeared to him, calling him by his name, and he revealed his plan to him: to make of him a chosen instrument—as the Lord also revealed to Ananias—to bring his Name to the Gentiles.[4] Let me ask you: have you frequently considered how he has also sought out each one of us, how Christ Jesus seeks us out each day, asking us for a sincere conversion to holiness?

“While Luke recounts the facts in abundant detail,” the Holy Father comments, “Paul in his letters goes directly to the essentials and speaks not only of a vision (cf. 1 Cor 9:1), but of an illumination (cf. 2 Cor 4:6), and above all of a revelation and a vocation….In fact, he will explicitly define himself as “apostle by vocation” (cf. Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1) or “apostle by the will of God” (2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1), as though to emphasize that his conversion was not the result of a development of thought or reflection, but the fruit of divine intervention, an unforeseeable divine grace.”[5]

Let us often give thanks for our Christian vocation, and the specific way of living it in accord with the spirit of Opus Dei. And let us show our gratitude not only with words but also with deeds. Our daily reading and meditation on the Gospel will help us a lot, since there Jesus continues carrying out a personal dialogue with men and women, as he did with the people he met during his time here on earth.

“What is written there,” St. Josemaría tells us, “is something that you should not only know, but live. Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail by detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life.

“God has called us Catholics to follow him closely. In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life there.
“You too, like the Apostle, will learn to ask, full of love, ‘Lord, what would you have me do?’ And in your soul you will hear the conclusive answer, ‘The Will of God!’

“Take up the Gospel every day, then, and read it and live it as a definite rule. This is what the saints have done.”[6]

How much love and care do you put into the reading of the Gospel? How much are you learning from it? Do you realize that those words are the ones our Lord wants you to hear? Do you recommend to others this way of coming to know and converse with Jesus?

God’s will is made known in very different ways to each person. Besides the inspirations that he gives directly to souls, our Lord lets himself be known through liturgical celebrations, through hearing someone preach, through spiritual direction, through the normal circumstances in each one’s life. Other people’s good example, the duties of one’s state in life, the fulfillment of family, social and professional obligations, are also where God speaks to us each day, letting us know his will. Be convinced that through your condition as a Christian, through your situation as a woman or man of Opus Dei, the Master is telling you that you are a light meant to shine forth.[7]

St. Josemaría was once asked: how can we know what God wants from each of us? And this was his answer: “Why don’t you ask him. It’s not a lack of refinement. I assure you that he’ll answer you.” And he continued: “You have interior life, so at any moment you can place yourself in God’s presence: in a church, on the street, in your room, in class…. Wherever you want! Ask his pardon for your weaknesses and for mine, and then tell him, as St. Paul did: Lord, what do you want me to do? But I warn you that our Lord sometimes asks us for things that are difficult.”[8]

Naturally, this requires fostering in the depths of our heart the desire to listen to God’s voice, to not close our eyes to his light. St. Paul, on the road to Damascus, gave himself completely to Jesus’ call. “Who are you Lord?” he asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.” ... Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led
him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.[9]

It is the docility of Paul that especially stands out here. He lets himself be led by the hand to the city. Then, with a desire to purify himself, he devotes himself to prayer and mortification. Only then, after three days of intense prayer accompanied by generous fasting, does Jesus send Ananias to him. After restoring his sight, Ananias tells him: The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.[10]

Quid moraris? Why are you waiting to do what God wants of you? I am always moved when I read these words of Ananias to Paul, urging him to begin his mission immediately. Our Lord also addresses these words to us: why are you waiting to put yourself fully into the task I have entrusted you with? St. Josemaría wrote: “Christian faith and calling affect our whole existence, not just a part of it. Our relations with God necessarily demand giving ourselves, giving ourselves completely. The man of faith sees life, in all its dimensions, from a new perspective: that which is given us by God.”[11]

In the immense majority of cases, the Christian vocation leaves each one in their place—in their workplace, in their family—giving a new, deeper vision of the meaning of life here on earth. How simply and clearly our Founder explains this reality in Furrow! “You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is early afternoon. It’s cold. By your side, your younger sister—the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full—is peeling potatoes. To all appearances—you think—her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is!

“It’s true: before she only peeled potatoes. Now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes.”[12]

What joy we draw from the certainty that in any place, in any honorable work, we can serve God and mankind, we can sanctify ourselves, we can help carry out the Church’s mission! We have to teach this truth to
others—by putting it into practice! The Christian apostolate can be well summed up as helping people to come into contact with Christ, specifically, through our example and our words. Every man and woman is called to have, like St. Paul, a personal encounter with our Lord. And that depends in part on you and on me, because God’s grace is never lacking. It depends on whether we Christians take seriously our response to our vocation.

Pointing to St. Paul’s response to the divine invitation on the road to Damascus, Benedict XVI says that “from here we draw a very important lesson: what counts is to place Jesus Christ at the center of our lives, so that our identity is marked essentially by the encounter, by communion with Christ and with his word. In his light every other value is recovered and purified from possible dross.”[13]

Do we try to speak more intently with our Lord every day? Do we seek him out in the incidents of each day? Do we prepare ourselves for this by a life of prayer and exact and joyful fulfillment of our duties? Do we say many times with St. Paul: *quid faciam, Domine.*[14] Lord, what do you want me to do? Let us ask the Apostle to obtain for us from God the deep dispositions in our soul that are the necessary preparation for hearing God’s inspirations and putting them into practice. Let us savor those words of St. Josemaría: “How beautiful our Christian vocation is—to be sons of God! It brings joy and peace on earth which the world cannot give.”[15]

On July 7 we celebrate once more the anniversary of when Don Álvaro told our Lord: “Here I am!” He constantly renewed this response, filled with gratitude to our God, who never ceased to make his will known to him. Don Alvaro spoke to us a lot about fidelity: it was deep in his heart. Let us learn from him.

In a few days the Holy Father will leave for Sydney for the World Youth Day. Let us accompany him with our prayer and affection. I will be close to him physically because I too will be going to Australia during these days. I thank God for allowing me to be with my daughters and sons in that country and in New Zealand, and to greet many people who receive formation in the Prelature’s centers. I will take advantage of the trip to make brief stops in other places in Asia where the Work is carrying out stable apostolic work: India, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Singapore. As I
have reminded you on other occasions, I am counting on all of you to accompany me on this trip, united in prayer and intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father
+ Javier

Pamplona, July 1, 2008


Back to Contents
Rome, November 5, 2008

At the opening of the
Academic Year at the
Pontifical University of
The Holy Cross

Highly esteemed professors,
dear students, and non-teaching
personnel:

As we begin this year of academic activity at our university, the twenty-fifth since its foundation, we want to invoke the Paraclete so that our efforts in study and work, united to the Body and Blood of Christ, become an offering pleasing to the Most Holy Trinity.

As you perhaps already know, the postponement of our usual meeting was due to the Twelfth Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which has been studying, during the past few weeks, the topic: “The Word of God in the Church’s Life and Mission.” I had the good fortune of being able to participate in the meetings of the Synod. At the opening of the first General Session, on October 6, the Holy Father meditated with the Synod Fathers on some verses from Psalm 118, in which the people of God praise the divine Law. One of these verses reads: Your word, O Lord, is as stable as the heavens. And the Pope commented: “This refers to the solidity of the Word. It is firm; it is the true reality on which we must base our life... the Word of God is the foundation of everything, it is the true reality... The realist is the one who builds his life on this foundation, which is permanent.”

An example of life transformed and built upon the Word—which is a firm rock and bears Christ’s face—is certainly the life of the apostle St. Paul, who on the road to Damascus experienced the power of the saving Word, and who became its most courageous herald. Indeed, the Apostle to the Gentiles, who we venerate in a special way in this year dedicated to him, united himself to God’s loving conversation with mankind; he
welcomed the Word and transmitted it to others, after having made it part of his own daily life. Like St. Paul, we too, Christians of the twenty-first century, are called to speak with God: the Word that guides us, true and firm reality, encourages us to correspond with all our heart and all our exterior conduct. In this interior process the Holy Spirit illumines us and helps us to understand, in a certain measure, that the Word of God, listened to and meditated upon, should be put into practice in our daily life. That is why it is good to go frequently to the Paraclete, especially whenever we see that God is awaiting our response to his love.

In that same meditation to which I alluded earlier, the Holy Father pointed out that our human word, compared to the firmness of the divine Word, is “almost nothing, a mere breath. As soon as it is pronounced it disappears. It ‘seems’ to be nothing. But the human word has incredible power. Words create history, words form thoughts.” The human word, as an instrument to communicate with God and with others, has to manifest what man guards in his heart: his hopes and desires, his vision of reality and experience of life. Words are a reflection of man’s greatness, created as a being who can relate to others, as the image and likeness of God. The word, therefore, is a great gift of God. Through human words the Word of God is transmitted to men and women. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit enlightened him about the mystery kept secret for long ages but [which] is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations (Rom 16:25-26). With human words, we Christians strive to praise and give thanks to God for all his benefits and to bring, with naturalness, the happiness of the Gospel to other men and women. More specifically, in the Pontifical Universities we transmit Sacred Doctrine, and in our four faculties we study the Word revealed throughout history, the words that regulate the social life of the Church, the words of wisdom that explain our being and our acting, and the effectiveness of words in our communication. All in relation to the divine Word and to human words.

Therefore our fundamental task is that our language—in work, in family life, in social relations—finds its firmest foundation in the divine Word. The content, or the form and tone of our words is not unimportant, for they always have to serve the good and never evil. In this regard, St.
Josemaría taught: “Acquire the habit of speaking about everyone and about everything they do in a friendly manner, especially when you are speaking of those who labor in God’s service. Whenever that is not possible, keep quiet. Sharp or irritated comment may border on gossip or slander” (Furrow, no. 902).

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to reproduce in us the image of Christ, so that we learn to imitate Jesus in his conversation, which was always friendly towards everyone. May all of our conversations—my dear professors, students and non-teaching personnel—always serve to enrich and encourage, to console those who are suffering, to teach those who are ignorant, to correct affectionately those who are mistaken, to support the weak; and may they never lack in truth and charity.

May Mary Most Holy, who kept all these things, pondering them in her heart (Lk 2:19), help us to build the edifice of our life on the foundation of hearing and meditating on the Word, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit present in the Church, and to spend our life on earth doing good, imitating her beloved Son, Jesus.
Opus Dei.

I remind you that St. Josemaría, referring to his priest sons—and therefore also to you, who are preparing to receive this sacrament in six months—assured us that we are sons of his prayer and, while he lived on earth, of his mortification as well. Our gratitude to this holy priest, who loved us so much, has to be shown in firm resolutions of loyalty to Jesus Christ and to his Church.

The liturgical solemnity that we are celebrating today proclaims a key truth for all Christians: that Christ is the King of the Universe. St. John sets it before us in the book of Revelation, with words filled with poetry: I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True... He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God... On his robe... he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11-16).

At the present time, when so many people are trying to exclude Christ from the life of nations, it is a duty to proclaim—without fear or reticence—that Christ is King. “Against those who reduce religion to a set of negative statements, or are happy to settle for a watered-down Catholicism; against those who wish to see the Lord with his face against the wall, or to put him in a corner of their souls, we have to affirm, with our words and with our deeds, that we aspire to make Christ the King reign indeed over all hearts, theirs included.”[1]

Regnare Christum volumus, St. Josemaría repeated so many times. We want Christ to reign; and we want this because his reign is “eternal and universal: a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.”[2] Therefore we want to “work always and in everything with sacrifice, in order to put Christ at the summit of all human activities,”[3] because we know that he is the only way to fill hearts with joy and to restore harmony among peoples so that humanity can truly progress on the path of justice and solidarity. Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (Rev 22:13). Christians nourish the “certainty of hope,” as Benedict XVI recently emphasized. “The future is not a darkness in which no one can find their way.”[4] God's light and grace sustain our faith and our optimism.
Jesus is not a despotic king who imposes himself by force. He wants to reign in our lives while respecting our freedom. He is not an overbearing ruler who lives apart from us, who does not know the needs and aspirations of the women and men of our time. Christ is “a King with a heart of flesh, like yours. He begs us to give him a little love, as he silently shows us his wounds.”[5]

Jesus’ desire to serve us is so great that, as St. Josemaría daringly says, “in the madness of his love he ‘gives up’—you know what I mean—his magnificent palace in Heaven, which you cannot yet reach, and waits for you in the Tabernacle.”[6]

Thus, as the Founder of Opus Dei always taught, we are convinced that “if we let Christ reign in our soul... we will serve everyone. How I like that word: service!... I really wish we Christians knew how to serve, for only by serving can we know and love Christ and make him known and loved.”[7]

The true Christian wants to serve others. The words of today’s Gospel reaffirm the reality that that our Lord grants us an eternal reward for serving our neighbor: “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Mt 25:34-36). And when he is asked—Lord, when did we do this for you? —Christ answers: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

“Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me.... Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first.... Love is ‘divine’ because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28).”[8]

Any service performed for our neighbor, near or far, in the material or spiritual order, if it is carried out for love of God, is a service done to Jesus Christ himself, who has identified himself with his brothers and sisters—in
a special way with those most in need. And this service is worthy of recompense.

St. Josemaría, using a very graphic expression, spoke of the need to “make oneself a carpet where the others can step softly.” He applied this metaphor in a special way to sacred ministers, but not only to them, because all Christians, in virtue of their baptism, participate in different ways in the one priesthood of Christ. To avoid having these words understood in a weak sense, as a poetic phrase, the Founder of Opus Dei used to add: “When I preach that we have to make ourselves a carpet... I am not simply being poetic: it has to be a reality!

“It’s hard, as sanctity is hard; but it’s also easy, because, I insist, sanctity is within everyone’s reach.”[9]

In the light of these considerations, we can examine how we put into practice the spirit of service in our family, in our work environment, in our most ordinary social relationships. Let us ask ourselves: Can I consider myself to be a true servant of others? This diaconal ordination is one more invitation to be so effectively, for these brothers of ours are called to be, from now on, in a special way, servants of others through the preaching of the Word of God, participation in the service of the altar and the service of charity.

I now address the new deacons directly. To you, my sons, are applied in a special way the words of the prophet Ezekiel. Keep them always in mind: I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down.... I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice. (Ezek 34:15-16). Always remember that you are ministers of Christ, who wants to bring his flock to heaven, making use of you as instruments: now by the assistance you give to the bishop and the priests; later, with greater reason, when you receive ordination as priests.

Our prayers for you will not be lacking as you strive to carry out your tasks. It is the duty of the Christian people to pray for their sacred ministers—from the Pope and the Bishops, to the most recently ordained deacon—asking our Lord that he send many workers into his vineyard. Let
us unite ourselves also to the person and intentions of the Cardinal Vicar of His Holiness in Rome.

My brothers and sisters, do not neglect this duty. Especially you who are parents and relatives of the new deacons: pray and ask others to pray for them. This is the best way of thanking God for the gift he has given to your families, to the Prelature of Opus Dei and to the whole Church.

I ask Mary our Mother, St. Joseph her most chaste spouse, and St. Josemaría, our most beloved Father, that they guide these sons of theirs with a sure hand along the path of ministerial service that they have begun to walk today. Amen.

[1] St. Josemaría, Furrow, no. 608

Rome, November 30, 2008

First Sunday of Advent,
Parish of St. Josemaría

The opportunity to celebrate Holy Mass in this church dedicated to St. Josemaría fills me with joy. Today we also begin the liturgical period of Advent: a time of preparation for the coming of our Lord. It is an “intense time” in the life of the Church, and should be such also in the life of each
one of us. It is a time that demands a careful preparation, in order to take advantage of the innumerable graces it brings with it. Therefore we are invited to pray: All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven.[1]

The liturgy mentions two comings of Christ, quite distinct but related to one another: first, the one that took place two thousand years ago with the birth of the Son of God in Bethlehem, in a stable; second, the one that will take place on the world’s last day, when the same Jesus, crowned with majesty, will return to judge the living and the dead and to take possession of his kingdom and present it to God the Father.

The readings from today’s Mass speak to us above all about the second coming, but the key to reading and interpreting them is the first coming. Preparing for Christ’ birth is the best possible way to prepare ourselves for the moment when God will call us to himself. In the letter to the Romans, St. Paul warns us with a sense of urgency, as though sounding a trumpet: It is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.[2]

Yes, my sisters and brothers. It is the hour to awaken from the spiritual sleep that leads to tepidity, which we may have fallen into perhaps without noticing it. It is the hour to get up again, to make the decision to be true Catholics, one hundred percent Catholics: not only on Sunday, as though the rest of the week were of no importance to God, but every day, every hour, every minute, always. In this sense Advent is an “intense time,” because of the grace of conversion it brings with it, and also because of the greater personal commitment in the struggle which is demanded of us to be good children of God.

God comes to us in a visible way: this is the deep meaning of this liturgical time. We could not go to Jesus if he had not taken the initiative. He was born two thousand years ago of the Virgin Mary by the working of the Holy Spirit; and he wants to be born spiritually in our souls, not only at Christmas but every day. He comes to us especially every time that we receive him with our soul well-disposed in Holy Communion.
We need to prepare, then, for the coming of Jesus. How? St. Paul once again is our teacher here, and his voice has greater power in this year dedicated to him.[3] And so that there might be no doubt about what God expects of us, he adds: *Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.*[4]

Benedict XVI comments on these words: “It is time to convert, to throw off the lethargy of sin, to prepare ourselves confidently to welcome ‘the Lord who comes.’ It is for this reason that Advent is a season of prayer and watchful waiting.”[5]

When we await the arrival of an important guest, we prepare our house as well as possible. We carry out the needed repairs; the house is thoroughly cleaned, and perhaps some piece of furniture is replaced by a new one. The home to which Jesus wants to come is, first of all, our soul. It is also our family, our work, the group of people with whom we are in contact. Isn't there perhaps something that needs to be cleaned, to be improved? Now is the right moment to make sincere resolutions, so that the feast of Christmas is not just an opportunity for a family gathering (something that is very good) or, what is much worse, turned into an opportunity for unbridled consumerism. Rather, it should be a manifestation of the spiritual and transcendent meaning of Christ’s birth.

*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ,*[6] St. Paul continues in his letter to the Romans. And St. Josemaría Escrivá draws an immediate consequences from these words: “It is in the Sacrament of Penance that you and I put on Jesus Christ and his merits.”[7]

Each of us has to make our own personal resolutions for Advent. For some it will be a matter of going to the Sacrament of Penance, in order to rediscover God’s peace and the desire to begin a new and consistent Christian life. For others it may be a matter of greater continuity in their personal relationship with God, or of being more faithful to their plan of spiritual life.

Last year, in the homily he preached on the first Sunday of Advent, Benedict XVI exhorted us to listen to Jesus’ exhortation in the Gospel: *Take heed, watch and pray.*[8] And he added: “Let us... prepare ourselves to relive
with faith the mystery of the Redeemer’s birth, which filled all the world with joy; let us prepare ourselves to welcome the Lord in his constant coming to us in the events of life, in joy and in pain, in health and in sickness; let us prepare ourselves to meet him at his definitive coming. His nearness is always a source of peace, and if suffering, a legacy of human nature, sometimes becomes unbearable, with the Savior’s advent ‘suffering—without ceasing to be suffering—becomes, despite everything, a hymn of praise’ (Spe Salvi, no. 37).[9]

Before ending, I would like to recall some words of St. Josemaría which can help us to enter fully into this liturgical period: “Advent is here. What a marvelous time in which to renew your desire, your nostalgia, your real longing for Christ to come—for him to come every day to your soul in the Eucharist.”[10]

Let us pray also that our Lord will be well received in every home. And let us of course not neglect our duty to accompany, with Jesus who has come for everyone, those who are suffering. We cannot remain indifferent to others’ pain. Let us consider, for example, how we have prayed for the victims of violence in India, in the Congo, and in so many other parts of the world. Lord, we pray that your birth may also bring peace to all nations.

We begin today the novena to the Immaculate Conception. Let us always strive to show our Lady great honor, also during these days when we are preparing to celebrate her great feast and to follow her on the road to Bethlehem. Our Mother will take us by the hand and place us very close to Jesus. Amen.

Oviedo (Spain), July 5, 2008

In the Holy Year of the Cross,
Evening Mass of Sunday,
the Fourteenth Week of Ordinary
Time, in the Cathedral

My dear brothers and sisters:

I thank Archbishop Carlos Osoro for his invitation to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice in this Cathedral during the Year of the Cross in Asturias. Two very significant anniversaries are being commemorated this year: the granting of the Cross of the Angels and the Cross of Victory, preserved for centuries in the Holy Chamber of the Principality’s capital.

In this regard, I have a vivid memory of how St. Josemaría Escrivá loved and adored the Holy Cross, and how he insisted, in his preaching, that we have to venerate the Cross of our Lord and graft it into our lives, in order to proclaim to the world God’s infinite love for every man and woman. For on this holy Wood Jesus gave his life for us.

*Within your temple, we ponder your loving kindness, O God. As your name, so also your praise reaches to the ends of the earth; your right hand is filled with justice.*[1] The entrance antiphon from today’s Mass invites us to thank God for all the gifts we have received, while striving to help others to acknowledge him and give him glory. And what greater gift is there than the Redemption carried out by Christ on Calvary? The Church proclaims this every year at the beginning of the Paschal Triduum, when she reminds us: *We should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is our salvation, our life and our resurrection; through him we are saved and made free.*[2]
The Holy Cross is the sign and guarantee of victory in the struggle for holiness. To the north of Rome there is a site that recalls the apparition of the sign of the Cross, in the year 313 of the Christian era. It refers to an ancient tradition that Constantine, on the eve of a great battle, had a vision of the Cross with the following inscription: *in hoc signo vinces*, with this sign you will conquer! With that victory, the bloody persecutions against the Christians of the first centuries came to an end.

The crosses preserved in the Holy Chamber of Oviedo carry a similar memory. When convoking this Holy Year, his Excellency the Archbishop invited you: “Let us enter with gratitude into the roots of our past and reflect upon the significance of the Cross of the Angels and the Cross of Victory for the men and women who lived in this land during those centuries.”[3] This advice is quite timely today, despite quite different historical circumstances. We see something in common between those events of more than a thousand years ago and our epoch: the duty to defend the Christian faith.

Right from the beginning of his pontificate, Benedict XVI has spoken against the temptation of relativism, which can lead a person to view the Gospel as just one teaching among others, and Jesus Christ as simply one of many important figures in the complex history of mankind. But Christ is not merely a great sage or a great teacher; or a great revolutionary who changed the course of humanity with his teachings. As the Pope insisted: “Christianity did not bring a message of social revolution... Jesus was not engaged in a fight for political liberation... 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.”[4]

Christians are the great defenders of freedom, fighting against all forms of slavery and totalitarianism, both old and new. The power to keep this “holy rebelliousness” alive is found not in physical or moral violence (which we reject, following the teachings of the Gospel), but in faith, hope and love: the three theological virtues infused by God into our souls, true powers that act in history, although often people fail to recognize them.
On the wood of the Cross, Christ gained the definitive victory for us. Our Lord canceled the bond which stood against us nailing it to the cross, we read in the epistle to the Colossians. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them.\[5\] We have to unite ourselves to his triumph with a living faith, a sure hope, an ardent charity.

Let us apply this perennial teaching to our own circumstances: in our own family, in the city where we live, in our nation. Let us never lose hope, even though our personal or social situation might seem difficult. Let us nourish our hope in prayer and in the sacraments. What a magnificent opportunity is offered to us in this Holy Year of the Cross to receive with greater fruit the sacrament of penance, where our Lord forgives our sins, and to go with greater devotion to the Holy Eucharist, where he gives himself to us as food for our soul.

Each of you will naturally strive to bring forward specific initiatives in the sphere of the family, in your professional work and personal interests, always open to the needs of others, for the spirit of solidarity, concern for others, forms part of human nature and constitutes an essential component of the Christian message. Benedict XVI insists. “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.”\[6\]

With the faith and hope of God’s children, we can fight the battles of our Lord. First in our own soul, to allow Christ to reign in us; and then in the great battle of love and peace that we all have to carry out—each in our own way, in accord with our possibilities—so that civil society rediscover the Christian roots that were forged in the history of Spain, of Europe and of many other nations. Let us strive to speak with those we know, so that they in turn may speak to others; let us think of the apostolic example of the first Christians who little by little, with perseverance, converted the pagan world.

We have just begun a Pauline Year, on the occasion of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of St. Paul. The Apostle’s preaching
centered on Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.[7] Christ comes to meet us in the difficulties, great or small, that all of us confront in life. Let us as God for the grace to find in these adversities a way to share in Christ’s Cross. We have to ask humbly for this divine gift, as today’s Gospel reminds us: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.[8]

If we receive the Cross with love, if we discover there an opportunity to unite ourselves more closely to our Lord, we will find on the Cross the splendor of truth, rest from fatigue, joy on our way. And not only later, in eternal bliss, but also now, in our present life. As St. Josemaría said: “Far from discouraging us, the difficulties we meet have to spur us on to mature as Christians. This fight sanctifies us and gives effectiveness to our apostolic endeavors.”[9] Have no doubt: the Christian life is an apostolic life filled with joy.

Let us go to our Lady, popularly venerated in Asturias under the advocacion of la Santina. I know that St. Josemaría prayed more than a few times in Covadonga (because I heard him mention it). My memory also goes to Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, who went there on various occasions. On one of those visits he spoke to our Mother with filial trust, using some words that, before concluding, I invite you to make your own.

“We go to your intercession for the Holy Church, for the Pope, for pastors, for all the faithful; and we also ask you for the different countries of the world, especially for Spain, that there be peace, and that evil not enter into the hearts of people.”[10]

May Almighty God listen to us through the intercession of Our Lady of Covadonga. Amen.


Back to Contents

Addresses

Asturias (Spain), July 4, 2008

In the Holy Grotto of

Our Lady of Covadonga

I am very grateful to His Excellency the Archbishop for the opportunity to pray at the feet of this statue of our Lady, before whom St. Josemaría prayed with such devotion on various occasions.

Our Founder asked Holy Mary to make a reality in each of us what he so often, with his words and writings, pointed to as the deepest meaning of our life: to find Jesus, to follow him very closely, to converse with him, and to make him known.
If we want a shortcut that will bring us safely to our Lord, to the only way which is our Lord Jesus Christ (for he himself said that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life\textsuperscript{[1]}), let us have recourse to holy Mary. She is the person who had the great privilege, the great responsibility and the great good fortune of dealing most closely with our Lord. Be very Marian, and you will be much closer to Christ. We need to learn the lesson that, at every moment, she leads us to seek Christ. Also when for any reason we have lost him or not stayed as close to him as we should. She has all the gentleness of fidelity, all the decisiveness of dedication, all the joy that comes from fulfilling one’s duty.

Therefore placing ourselves in her hands is a sure path for drawing closer to Jesus, and for recognizing the need—without allowing any human respects—to make our whole life apostolic. In today’s world we Catholics have to be aware of the responsibility that we bear, because, without any greater merits than the goodness and mercy of Jesus, he has chosen us so he could count on us in this one true Church of his; therefore these are moments to live with consistency.

Yes, it is a moment to live with consistency and to preach by our life. This doesn’t mean doing anything strange. If we look at our daily response, we will see so many small points where we could be closer to Christ, live more closely to him. This Archdiocese is currently celebrating the Year of the Cross. Let us not fear the Cross. St. Josemaría, that great “traveling contemplative,” as the Holy See called him, in the decrees of beatification and canonization, has shown us a marvelous path: \textit{lux in cruce, requies in cruce, gaudium in cruce}, light, rest and joy in the cross.

The true light brings us the saving cross. At times it is hard, but it is so lovable to find oneself on Jesus’ throne. \textit{Requies in cruce}…. Here we can rest, laying aside the small and great concerns that we have. Sense our Lord’s goodness, place yourself in his wounds, and you will feel understood. And finally, \textit{gaudium in cruce}. May we always experience that to be with Christ is to be close to the cross, and to be close to the cross is to be with Christ, which is the infinite happiness that he wants to bring us, asking us to learn how to renounce our “I,” our ego. An “I” that, as St. Josemaría used to say, is the greatest friend that we have, and at the same time also our greatest
enemy. So let us strive to reject everything that separates us from God and to carry this God of ours with us.

I don’t want to end without asking you for something, and not only now, but constantly: that you accompany the Pope, that you love him with your whole soul, that you feel yourselves children of such a good common Father, and that you also accompany him on the trip he is about to undertake. He did not expect our Lord to place this burden on his shoulders. He has accepted it with full generosity, and this acceptance has led him to want to serve the souls who are awaiting him.

On this long, tiring trip that he is about to make, which requires a change of schedule with respect to Rome, he needs our affection and our prayer, and he needs our small sacrifices offered up for the Pope. I can tell you that he holds all of us in his soul, and looks for a generous response from each of us. He wants us to help him to carry the weight of the Church; remember what he said in his homily at the beginning of his Pontificate: my program is not to do my own will, but to do God’s will.[2]

For with Mary, with the saints in heaven and (I say this with all sincerity and also with necessity) with the intercession of St. Josemaría, we pray for the Church, for the Pope, for the bishops, for priests, for seminarians, and for the people of God. All of us here are the Church! No one here is more a part of the Church than the others. You too are the Church and have the responsibility of wanting to sanctify yourselves in order to sanctify, to sanctify yourselves in order to help, to sanctify yourselves in order to fill this world of ours with the God’s joy.

May God bless you. I am now going to spend some time in prayer.


At the closing of the sessions of the Tribunal of the Prelature on the Cause of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross

After the death of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, the existence of a clear and consistent reputation for holiness was immediately evident. From all parts of the world we received hundreds of personally signed accounts of spiritual and material favors received through his intercession. Many people from all over the world, including persons who do not belong to the Prelature, are thus convinced that Don Álvaro is in heaven, and point to his merits in their appeal to heaven to be heard in their personal needs.

The demonstration of a reputation for holiness: this is the first requirement for opening a Cause of Canonization. With full deliberation I decided, therefore, that his Cause should be opened. Once assured of this foundation, the Church has to decide if this reputation for sanctity is based on the reality (shown through legally certain evidence) of a life marked by the heroic exercise of the Christian virtues. In this case, the Church puts into operation the process needed to carry out a juridical, historical-critical, and theological investigation.

As you know, I asked our very dear Cardinal Ruini that he appoint a Tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome to hear my deposition and that of other witnesses, who lived particularly close to the Servant of God. The Tribunal of the Prelature was to carry out its own investigation in a parallel way, calling other witnesses to provide their testimony. The Tribunal of the Vicariate began its work on March 5, 2004, and that of the Prelature on March 20 of the same year.

In addition, in order to hear witnesses living far from Rome, the Tribunal of the Prelature asked other diocesan Tribunals to carry out their respective “investigative” proceedings. This was done during these years by the Tribunals of the dioceses of Madrid, Fatima-Leiria, Montreal, Pamplona, Quito, Sidney, Warsaw, and Washington, which are added today to the Tribunals of the present process.

After four years of work, the Tribunal of the Vicariate ended its sessions on the past June 26. Today, on August 7, 2008, we are definitively closing the sessions of the entire investigation on the life and virtues of the Servant of God Álvaro del Portillo.
The acts will be sent at once to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. There, after study of their conformity with law, a copy will be given to the Postulator, so that he can begin drawing up the *Positio super vita et virtutibus*, which at the proper time will be examined by the Theological Consultors of the Dicastery we have mentioned. Later, a judgment will be made by the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of the Congregation. Afterwards, if the result of the examination of the documents is positive, they will proceed to the proclamation of the heroic virtues of Bishop del Portillo.

If this occurs, and if there is also a favorable conclusion to the canonical investigation of a possibly miraculous event, chosen among those attributed to his intercession, his beatification will take place, with the previous approval of the Roman Pontiff.

I ask your prayers for the successful conclusion of this path.

I would like now to say something more. I feel myself urged by an imperative commitment, which I now assume *coram Deo*. I cannot forget Don Álvaro’s generous efforts throughout the various phases of St. Josemaría’s Cause of Canonization. In particular, he wanted the *Positio* to reflect not only our Founder’s heroic life, but also the depth, the internal harmony, the riches, and the newness of the spirit of Opus Dei. Thus he wanted to present to the Church a true and thorough portrait of this holy priest. Bishop del Portillo was moved by his filial love for St. Josemaría to pour his best efforts into this work.

I would like our affection for Don Álvaro to be no less. But, in addition to this affection, there is also another reason why we feel the duty that his Cause of Canonization proceed in a very rigorous way: the consideration of the role that he played in the history of Opus Dei. As St. Josemaría’s first successor, Don Álvaro provides all those who follow him down through the centuries with an incomparable example of faithfulness. He guarded in all its integrity, without alteration, the spirit that God entrusted to St. Josemaría.

This is precisely his essential characteristic: Don Álvaro was above all a faithful man. A faithful man, that is to say, a man of faith: faith in God, faith in the Church, faith in the supernatural origin of Opus Dei, and
therefore in the divine character of the undertaking God had asked him to take part in. From here stemmed his unshakable loyalty to the Founder, of whom he was for forty years the closest collaborator, and later, his first successor in the governing of Opus Dei.

You can therefore understand my joy at presiding here at the closing session of the canonical investigation of the life and virtues of our beloved Don Álvaro. I feel an immense debt to him, because by his conduct he taught all the faithful of the Prelature—priests and laity, women and men—that their path of fidelity to God and to the Church passes through faithfulness to the spirit of Opus Dei, which St. Josemaría transmitted to his children.

I would like to pause briefly to speak about today’s date. Today is the anniversary of a very significant event in the history of the Work. On August 7, 1931, while celebrating Holy Mass, at the moment of elevating the Sacred Host, St. Josemaría felt deep in his soul, “with an extraordinary force and clarity,” as he himself recalled, God's voice speaking to him through a verse from Scripture: “Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnia traham ad meipsum” (Jn 12:32). And he understood with new depth the essential content of the vocation to Opus Dei—the sanctification of work—and the impact of the pastoral reality that stemmed from it. Let us follow his account: “And I understood that it will be men and women of God who will lift the cross, with the teachings of Christ, to the summit of all human activities... And I saw our Lord triumph, drawing all things to himself” (Apuntes Intimos, August 7, 1931, no. 217).

Don Álvaro perfectly incarnated this spirit: first as a student, later as an engineer, and finally as a priest—for many years—and as Prelate, always offering his work to our Lord. When he was consecrated bishop, he chose for his coat of arms the motto: Regnare Christum volumus! We want Christ to reign! It is a summary of his path: he worked a lot and very well, always for the glory of God. It is thus that the faithful of the Prelature, with the human and supernatural quality of their activities in the world, contribute to the Church’s mission: sanctifying the world through their professional work, raising it up to God, saving souls.

In this task the saints are our guide. As St. Josemaría was, and
continues to be, so also was, and continues to be, Don Álvaro, his most faithful son. Without trying to anticipate the Church’s judgment, we have and foster the conviction that he is in heaven, and we entrust ourselves with all our heart to his intercession.

The Church is built up in the Eucharist and thanks to the Eucharist. Opus Dei, “a tiny part of the Church,” as St. Josemaría used to say, is included in this dynamic of grace. We have mentioned the sanctification of work, but it is God’s grace, in first place, and therefore in a special way the Eucharist, that furthers its growth. Here also Don Álvaro, following our Founder’s example, taught us to live as persons in love, making the Eucharist “the center and root of our interior life.”

May Don Álvaro, with his unforgettable smile, his unshakable interior peace, his firmness in doing the good, and his deep humility, help us to make Christ’s life shine forth in the world through an unwavering apostolate that brings souls the joy of finding Christ. Remember his teaching and example: make the truth lovable, he always recommended to us.

Mary, present when Christ was raised up on the Cross, will be at our side, if we truly commit ourselves—with our limitations—to serve Christ according to the spirit left to us by our Founder, and so faithfully incarnated by Don Álvaro.
but radically changed their lives. How can we fail to recall that a passage from the letter to the Romans (13:13-14) played a decisive role in the conversion of St. Augustine, as he himself tells us in the famous episode of the “tolle, lege” (cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 8, 12, 29-30)? I think that we, as shepherds, are called every day to put into practice the Bible and in particular the Gospel. We ourselves, and also our priests and the laity, need to foster a deep hunger to know Jesus Christ, living each of the Gospel scenes as though we were another person present there.

We see this reality in many of those who listened to Jesus. In the Eucharistic discourse at Capharnaum, for example, the intellectual content of Jesus’ words presents a challenge to the listeners’ lives. While many were scandalized and separated themselves from Christ, Peter was moved to profess: You have the words of eternal life (*Jn* 6:68). In an analogous way, the fact that the Word of God is directed not only to the intellect but also to the heart, is clear in the episode at Emmaus: Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures? (*Lk* 24:32).

The Bible asks for a response on the part of the believer: the response of prayer, as the Conciliar constitution *Dei Verbum* (no. 25) reminds us. Anyone who listens to the Word of God in an attitude of prayer (both in common, which reaches its highest expression in the liturgical celebration, as well as personally, in the intimacy of one’s heart) not only acquires an intellectual knowledge of the great events and persons in salvation history. He or she also strives to assimilate these teachings and events in order to apply them to his or her personal life, and to be ready to transmit them to others. We who are shepherds should frequently recommend in the sacrament of Confession that the faithful read the Gospels, teaching them to enter into the narrative and inviting the penitents to offer this same advice to their friends, colleagues and family members.

It is not enough to meditate on certain ideas or episodes that arouse our admiration for the truth, goodness or beauty that they reflect. All of us Christians need to strive, as did the saints, to bring these texts into our daily life, in order to transform it. Naturally this is true of the whole Bible, but especially of the New Testament, because it spurs us to act and to change our life.
Man, unlike other living beings, needs to know who he is in order to be able to be so fully. In other words, he has to find the meaning of his life, which illumines the multiple aspects of his activity. For this reason he is a being who listens. Men and women today are ever more aware of the need to listen to words of eternal life, that is to say, to the Word of God, which alone can give true meaning to our life. And they have to be not only hearers of the Word, but also to contemplate it and put it into practice.

I also think it’s important to put care into doing the readings at Mass very well, as the reading of something that is truly alive, without converting it into a kind of theatrical performance. The priest, the deacon, the lector have to “put themselves” into the text with the certitude that God is speaking to them and to the entire community.

Back to Contents

Articles and Interviews

Italy, November 29, 2008

*Interview granted to Il Tempo*

*Bishop Echevarría: On October 2, 1928, 80 years ago, Josemaría Escrivá founded Opus Dei. The Christian as a “traveling contemplative”: this seems to be the decisive factor, the charism that has permitted the Work to enter the third millennium with a vigorous step.*

On that day, some 80 years ago, St. Josemaría received an intellectual light about what would be from then on Opus Dei: a multitude of ordinary people, of all races, professions and social conditions, who struggle to live their Christianity fully. Faithful who want to turn ordinary realities into an opportunity for an encounter with God. A “contemplative in the midst of the world” is someone who, with God’s help, and despite his or her weaknesses, seeks to find Jesus in each moment of their life.
“Don’t let your life be sterile,” we read in the Founder’s book, The Way. “Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love. With your apostolic life, wipe out the slimy and filthy mark left by the impure sowers of hatred. And light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart.”

Jesus spent his life on earth totally dedicated to communicating the message of salvation through his example, his deeds, his untiring service to those around him, right up to his death on the Cross. This is the ideal that wins over every true Christian. As the Founder of Opus Dei used to say, for a person who is in love with Jesus, every moment is a marvelous opportunity to make life more pleasant for others.

The faithful of the Work are viewed by some as “elegantly dressed mystics.” In recent times, an international campaign of surprising violence has accused Opus Dei of being a “lay Catholic elite,” a “fanaticism that needs a radical reform,” etc. What has been the impact of those poisonous criticisms.

People often say (although I don’t believe it’s true) that half the world is dedicated to criticizing the other half. One shouldn’t give importance to falsehoods. One has to respond with charity and with the consistency of one’s own life. In many cases, the mistaken or slanderous information provides an opportunity to spread correct information. As is the case with all Christian realities, the Work cannot be understood except after a personal encounter with the light of the faith. When one enters into contact with the faithful of Opus Dei (diocesan priests and simple lay people), the suspicions, prejudices and mistaken views vanish. St. Josemaría prayed every day for these friends of his: that’s how he considered them.

How much Opus Dei is there in the future of the Catholic Church?

The future is in the hands of God, who promised the Church his presence and assistance. The Work will continue to strive, in union with the other members of the Church, to bring to everyone the message of salvation contained in the Gospel. It will do this by showing the world that holiness is what God expects of each of us “here and now.” I am happy to tell you that so many people all over the world are filled with joy when they discover this possibility: that of being saints in the world.

Does Josemaría Escrivá’s undertaking have repercussions for secular society?
Work, understood as the sum total of one’s daily activities, is the place where each person can encounter God. All honest tasks can be made holy; everything that is human can—or better, should—have a relationship with God. This intuition, proclaimed solemnly by the Second Vatican Council, is a silent revolution: a multitude of persons, made up of students, professionals, hard-working laborers, faithful husbands and wives, citizens committed to obtaining the good of everyone. This certainly has relevance for secular society, since Christian life helps to humanize society and improve it.

The waves of “moral and doctrinal relativism” seem quite threatening. You have your hand on the pulse of the situation through the priests of the Work, who work all over the world. What are you most concerned about?

Moral relativism is a sign of the interior unrest in those who have not yet found God. The greatest service that priests can provide is to bring souls to God, to help them take part in the immense good of the Eucharist and to find reconciliation with God through the Sacrament of Penance. What peace they find when they return to friendship with our Lord! The message of the Gospel shows that God wants our happiness. Among the many priorities, I would say the most urgent is the holiness of those who seek to lead others to Christ. They must be men and women of prayer and correct doctrine, leading a life of virtue and self-giving to all.

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross is now underway. And recently the Campus Bio-Medico was started. Education and biotechnology seem to be the new frontiers for Opus Dei.

The first frontier for Opus Dei’s work is personal apostolate. But St. Josemaría encouraged the faithful of the Work to begin educational and social assistance activities to help solve the specific problems of society. This is the aim of the Campus Bio-Medico: to be both a university and a hospital, where the professional competence of the doctors is accompanied by a great humanity. It is the same with Centro Elis, also in Rome, where they try to teach boys to be good professionals and men of principal. And the University of the Holy Cross gives formation to many priests, religious and lay people in theology, canon law, philosophy and institutional
communication. These works try to provide a small example of what society might be if it were imbued with Christian values.

We don’t hear you spoken of very much. Perhaps you have chosen to remain in the background, working quietly. Are there men and women who still knock at the door of Opus Dei, who want to embrace the ideal of life presented by St. Josemaría Escrivá?

Those who come to the Work do so because they are seeking God. Opus Dei has no other goal than to help ordinary faithful to raise the spiritual temperature in their lives, so that they grow in faith and in love for the Church.

John Paul II erected the Work as a “Prelature,” and Opus Dei reflected the ideal of the great Pope, who is now gone, of a Catholic Church in solidarity with all men and women, and an undisputed teacher of the truth. Is this atmosphere kept alive with Pope Benedict XVI?

The union of the faithful with the Roman Pontiff is an essential characteristic of the Church, and therefore of the Work. When St. Josemaría arrived in Rome, he spent a whole night in prayer while looking at the window of the Pope’s apartment. And he taught us, his children, to have a filial devotion towards the Pope. Benedict XVI, in full continuity with John Paul II, is an exemplary pastor. For all Catholics he is an example of authentic Christianity.

November 28 was the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Opus Dei as a Personal Prelature. How did you celebrate this anniversary?

It was an opportunity to rediscover a great truth that St. Josemaría expressed in this way: many great things depend—don’t forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants.

Argentina, October 2, 2008

"Opus Dei: 80 Years of Sowing Peace." An article published in the Diario Clarín on the 80th anniversary of the Foundation of Opus Dei
Eighty years have gone by since October 2, 1928, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels. On that day St. Josemaría—by divine inspiration, as Pope John Paul II declared in the papal document Ut Sit—founded Opus Dei. Pope Benedict XVI, when he was still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in a homily given at a Mass of thanksgiving for the beatification of Opus Dei’s founder, stated that “Josemaría Escrivá saw this call as addressed not to himself alone, but above all as a message to pass on to others: to encourage them to strive for sanctity, and to gather a community of brothers and sisters for Christ.” Well aware of this responsibility, “he journeyed untiringly through several continents, speaking to everyone to encourage them to be holy, to live the adventure of being Christians wherever their lives took them. Thus he became a great man of action, who lived by God’s will and called others to it.”

Speaking of the Christians of the first centuries, St. Josemaría said that the homes of those first brothers and sisters of ours in the faith “were centers for the spreading of the Gospel and its message. Families no different from other families of those times, but living with a new spirit, which spread to all those who were in contact with them. This is what the first Christians were, and this is what we have to be: sowers of peace and joy, the peace and joy that Jesus has brought to us” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 30). That is how, right from the beginning, he described the role of the Prelature’s faithful, in the heart of the Church: “to sow peace and joy” in all human activities in the middle of the world.

Benedict XVI has said that, for a believer, the word “peace” is one of the most beautiful names for God. He is a Father who wants understanding to be present among all his children. To say “peace be with you” is the same as wishing that God be with you, and with every man and woman.

Through its evangelizing mission, the Church contributes to an abundant sowing of peace. As St. Josemaría writes, “the Lord wants his children in all the honest pathways of this earth, sowing the seeds of understanding and forgiveness, of harmony, charity and peace” (The Forge, no. 373).
By making Christ known, we also carry out an abundant sowing of joy. The joy of God’s children doesn’t stem from favorable circumstances, nor is it merely a physiological joy. Like anyone else, a man or woman of faith experiences weariness and sickness, hardship and anxiety, doubts and setbacks. But they always know they are very much loved by God. They rely on him, as his son or daughter, and, with his help, recover their joy if they have lost it.

The human and the divine are interwoven in the work of Christian evangelization: concern for others, charity, respect for others’ freedom. St. Josemaría, during a large get-together in Argentina in 1974 (a year marked by tragic conflicts in that beloved South American nation), insisted: “you have to sow peace and joy on all sides. Don’t say a single word against anyone. Walk arm in arm with those who think differently than you do. Never mistreat anyone. Practice fraternal charity with all men and women, being sowers of peace and joy.”

Every anniversary is an opportunity to look towards the future. On the eightieth anniversary of Opus Dei’s founding, I ask God that this small portion of the Church that is the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, will always carry out at the heart of civil society the mission he entrusted to it in 1928: to bring about in souls a generous sowing of the Gospel’s peace and joy, which will also permeate the structures of society and make them more human.

Spain, August 14, 2008

Interview granted to Catalunya

Cristiana (interview by Samuel Gutiérrez)

How is the personal prelature of Opus Dei observing its 25th anniversary?

Along with our ordinary occupations, each of us is striving to thank God frequently for the many good things he has given us. Therefore, I have
asked that the Prelature of Opus Dei observe 2008 as a Marian Year of thanksgiving, to conclude on November 28. Clearly, this anniversary is also an opportunity for each of us to renew our personal effort to follow Christ more closely, in communion with the Pope and all the bishops.

*To put it in human terms, would it be correct to say that Opus Dei has “come of age”?

In light of the service it is called to render to the Church and souls over the course of time, we could say that it is still just beginning. Certainly not with respect to its mission, which is to remind people that all Christians are called to holiness in their ordinary lives. But it’s true that it is just beginning when we consider the scope and depth of the evangelizing task entrusted to it, since what has been accomplished so far is quite small in comparison with the expectations of so many people in the Church. For example, many bishops want us to begin working in their dioceses.

Moreover, all the faithful of the Prelature are faced with the daily challenge of making this message a reality in our own life, with the help of grace. From this point of view—which in my opinion is what matters most—Opus Dei will never be able to consider itself as having “come of age,” since it always stands in absolute need of God’s help, as a small child needs its parents.

*What did it mean for Opus Dei to be recognized in the Church’s law as a personal prelature 25 years ago? Why was this particular canonical form chosen rather than other forms that are more frequent in the lay movements?

After consulting with thousands of bishops and studying the question carefully, Pope John Paul II established Opus Dei as a personal prelature because this legal form gave full ecclesial recognition to its foundational charism. As is well known, on October 2, 1928, St. Josemaría saw that God was asking him to help foster throughout the world the universal call to holiness. He was being asked to help lay people become fully aware of their mission in the Church and the world, above all by sanctifying their work and the ordinary circumstances of their lives. The apostolic work arising from the seed that God had inspired, and that spread throughout many parts of the world, failed to find a suitable channel in the Church’s law until the Second Vatican Council provided for personal prelatures to serve
particular apostolic needs. This legal form perfectly expressed the fully secular and international nature of Opus Dei’s mission, bringing together in an organic way lay faithful—who continue to belong to their respective dioceses—and secular priests incardinated in the Prelature. It also makes clear how Opus Dei is in full communion with the diocesan bishops and how it fits within the various dioceses.

Thus it was an outcome the founder had long desired, and for which he had prayed so much and offered so many sacrifices, even that of not living to see the full ecclesial recognition by the Church’s supreme authority.

The faithful of Opus Dei, moreover, in striving to live up to their Christian commitments, just like other Christians, feel a special communion of prayer, intentions and affections with all the charisms in the Church, which are an expression of the People of God’s rich spiritual patrimony—both the older ones and the new ecclesial movements.

*How has the Prelature developed over these past 25 years? What have been its most important experiences?*

The definitive attainment of the proper legal form has helped make it easier for people to understand how Opus Dei carries out its mission in the service of the universal Church, as well as its place within the local Churches. Besides that, there have been many reasons to rejoice during these past 25 years—the founder’s canonization, for one. Another noteworthy event has been the passing of his first successor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, whose cause of beatification has been opened. Also during these years, the Prelature has extended its apostolate to new countries on every continent.

I would like to stress, however, that for the faithful of Opus Dei these are not the most important events. The most important ones are the events that fill their daily lives, even when seemingly of little significance humanly speaking. It is there that God is waiting for each one of us, and it is there that we can find him.

*How did the founder’s death impact the Prelature?*

God gave our founder the heart of a father, filled with great humanity. At first, his death caused us deep sorrow. But with Msgr. del Portillo’s
help, who invited us all to keep that “wound” in our soul open so that we would be faithful to the treasure we had received, we came to understand that the head and heart of this family of Opus Dei was now in heaven.

Throughout his life, St. Josemaría had sought never to make himself indispensable. He wanted to leave the spirit of Opus Dei “sculpted,” as he put it. Now it’s up to each of us who has received that spirit to correspond very faithfully to it and make it bear fruit day by day. I am very thankful that God gave me the opportunity to live for so many years with a saint like Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. I entrust myself completely to his powerful intercession, and I think that now he continues to watch over and help us with his fatherly and motherly affection, while telling us, as he so often did: “More, more, more!” We can always love more and do more for God and our neighbor. Despite our personal mistakes, we want to strive to finish each day closer to God than we began.

*What is Opus Dei’s secret in continuing to attract young people, especially in Europe, to this radical following of Christ, whether in matrimony, apostolic celibacy, or the priesthood?*

It’s the same secret as the Church’s—the unfailing attraction of our Lord Jesus Christ. All Christians have the obligation to make present, by our example and words, the beauty of Christ’s face and message without blemish, even when it seems we’re going against the current. In our experience, the real Christ is always attracting people.

To use one of St. Josemaría’s favorite expressions, Opus Dei is nothing but a great work of catechesis. It offers the means of Christian formation and personal spiritual guidance to its faithful and those who take part in its apostolic activities. Through the naturalness of their lives, the friendships they form, and their one-on-one conversations, they communicate the teachings of the Gospel to their family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

*Today, 25 years later, what are the most urgent challenges the Prelature faces?*

The fundamental challenge is the personal holiness of each of its members, and the extension of this desire for holiness to many other persons through the work of evangelization. This task, which is and always
will be pressing, is particularly urgent today, as the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, never fails to remind everyone who has faith.

And as I mentioned a moment ago, many bishops are calling the Prelature to begin apostolic activities in their dioceses. Just a year ago, Opus Dei’s first center opened in Moscow. Right now we are praying and working to make this a reality in Romania and Indonesia as well.

Another equally permanent challenge for the faithful of Opus Dei and for all Christians, especially lay people, is working alongside all men and women of good will to help shape a culture that respects the dignity of the human person.

*Can we speak of an Opus Dei charism? Is “sanctity in one’s work” still the pillar of its spirituality?*

Yes, and it always will be. Any honest work, any upright occupation, when it is well-done, finished out of love, can and must be the place where God is to be found, where we can serve others, and where we improve personally. God calls us not only when we pray but throughout the day. It would not be correct, then, to term some jobs or occupations “second-rate.” Any job or work can be an opportunity to draw close to God. And not only at work; for married people, for example, the loving fulfillment of their spousal and family duties is also a true path to sanctity, just as is the priesthood, and the loyal fulfillment of civic duties for all citizens.

In short, God calls everyone to holiness—not just some of us, but all of us. We all can and should live in intimacy with God, because we are all his children, and he expects love from all of us.

Then, closely united to that central message, comes unity of life, love for personal freedom, and the eagerness to sow peace and joy everywhere in society, without rejecting anyone.

*As Prelate of Opus Dei, how do you view the responsibility of heading one of the most lively and enthusiastic charisms in the Church today?*

Please pardon me if I protest a bit at how you phrased this question. In the Church today—as has always been the case—spiritual riches abound, signs that the Holy Spirit is accompanying and inspiring her. Opus Dei is one more proof of the perennial vitality of the Church, but we don’t wish to
be “at the head of the class.” Personally, I can tell you that I am well aware of the disproportion between my own strength and the task entrusted to me, and I try to rely on the prayers of the Prelature’s faithful, its cooperators, and so many others who pray for our apostolic work. The Prelature of Opus Dei is not seeking any human glory; it aspires to serve, as a leaven—without any secrecy, but avoiding the limelight.

The intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom you decided to entrust this anniversary, has surely been present throughout these past 25 years.

Yes; and not only during these 25 years, but throughout the entire life of Opus Dei. Faced with any need, we have always had recourse to Mary. As soon as St. Josemaría began to sense that God was asking something of him, he always relied on our Mother. Among many other indications of this, I could mention the Marian pilgrimages he made to her shrines all over the world, including Montserrat, and especially Our Lady of Mercy in Barcelona. His visits to that basilica are closely connected to Opus Dei’s juridical path, which came to a happy conclusion 25 years ago. Both at present and in the future, we will always be in need of Mary’s help. During the Marian year that the Work is currently observing, I have encouraged all the Prelature’s faithful to pray the Holy Rosary with greater fervor, and to spread it among their colleagues, friends, and relatives. It is a very timely prayer.

China, November 16, 2008

Interview granted to “Kung Kao Po,” Catholic diocesan
Weekly of Hong Kong
(interview by K. C. Wong)

This year is the 25th anniversary of Opus Dei’s establishment as a personal prelature of the Catholic Church after a long canonical journey. As the head of Opus Dei do you think that this is its final configuration?
Yes, the personal prelature is the proper canonical form for Opus Dei according to the light St. Josemaría received in 1928, and therefore its present situation corresponds to this juridical configuration.

In viewing a personal prelature as an authentic reflection of the theology of Vatican II as far as the role of the lay faithful is concerned, do you think that this structure is appropriate for the challenges of the twenty-first century?

Of course the Second Vatican Council has inspired many other structures as well, in addition to strengthening some that already existed. I think that a personal prelature is also a pastoral solution well-suited to the world in which we live with its specific challenges. A personal prelature accords well with the challenges presented by a multicultural and mobile society, as a hierarchical structure headed by a prelate whose jurisdiction is circumscribed by a specific pastoral task that is carried out by the priests and lay faithful of the prelature. I am thinking here especially of the advantages it presents in fostering the formation of the laity, a decisive aspect of the Church’s evangelizing activity: for example, to help strengthen families, to bring Christ’s light to society through work, to resist the lure of consumerism through the witness of a Christian life.

Opus Dei is the first institution to be approved as a “personal prelature” in accord with the new Code of Canon Law. Do you think that others will follow in the near future?

I don’t know if we will have them in the near future, but it wouldn’t surprise me. I repeat: it seems to me to be a pastoral instrument that is flexible and very effective. At least, that has been my experience.

Regarding The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown, what do you have to say about its influence on Opus Dei? Has this book, and the commotion that it caused, had any influence on Opus Dei’s strategy in relation to the communications media.

Millions of people know what the reality of Opus Dei is. And for these persons, the caricature of the Church and of Opus Dei—as part of the Church—that this book presents could not produce anything but sadness. While those who didn’t know Opus Dei before and became interested in it, have had an opportunity to learn more about it. I give thanks to God because in many cases this curiosity has given rise to the desire to seek
Christ, to find him, and to love him, with a serious Christian commitment. In some cases it has led to a radical conversion; in other cases, to a specific vocation from God (to Opus Dei, for example).

Some people have criticized Opus Dei as being attracted to power. What do you have to say about power in the Church?

Like all Catholics, the faithful of Opus Dei seek to serve others. This is the example Christ gave. The service that Opus Dei provides to the dioceses in which it is present consists in contributing to the spread of Christ’s message in the middle of the world. One only has to ask the thousands of people who receive Christian formation in centers of the Prelature to discover the role that Opus Dei plays in their lives: how it helps them to commit themselves in a Christian way to the improvement of society, to participate more fully in parish life, to more fully support, pray for, and love their bishop and the other pastors.

You have been the Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei since 1994 and before that you lived for many years close to the Founder, St. Josemaría… Can you tell us what the message of Opus Dei is? What panorama does Opus Dei offer people today?

The core of Opus Dei’s message is the universal call to holiness. God wants us all to be holy, every one of us: men and women, single and married, young and not so young, healthy and sick, intellectuals and manual workers, we are all called to the fullness of Christian life in the midst of the ordinary circumstances of our life. On October 2, 1928, St. Josemaría “saw” (this was how he always put it) that God was asking him to remind all people of the reality of this call. This is how God wanted the Work to be born, this “little portion” of the Church, which tries to remind people of that vocation.

St. Josemaría used to say that the message of the Work is as old and as new as the Gospel. This means that it is always up to date.
We have to find and stay close to God in the midst of the most diverse situations of daily life, because he is present there, and he awaits our response, our effort to bring the world to God and, in a phrase of St. Josemaría, to “put Christ at the summit of all human activities” (The Forge, no. 685), thus helping to further the Church’s mission.

*In the service that Opus Dei provides to the Church, do you put stress on social work and initiatives for the poor? Or is the emphasis rather on intellectual development and the Christian formation of people?*

These two services are present in the Prelature of Opus Dei’s activity, and in the life of each of its faithful and of the people who participate in its formative activities. These aspects don’t contradict each other but are mutually related. It is impossible to give what one doesn’t have. The Church invites us to transmit God’s love with specific acts of service to all: to each according to his or her needs. But we have to be “well equipped” above all with God’s love. Therefore, Catholics need a deep Christian formation, with a knowledge of doctrine and a life of close friendship with Jesus Christ, through prayer and the sacraments.

Opus Dei helps men and women to behave in conformity with their Christian faith in their daily activities. And it offers them the required spiritual attention and formation. The principal apostolate of Opus Dei is that which each of its faithful carries out, acting in their own environment with personal initiative, with freedom and responsibility. There are, in addition, many social works in which Opus Dei, as an institution, guarantees the Christian orientation. These are always not-for-profit undertakings, which offer educational services or social development. But there are many other activities that provide service to others, as a fruit, among other things, of the impetus that their promoters receive from being reminded, in the warmth of the spirit of Opus Dei, of their call to be saints.

There are many examples of this also in Venezuela. I had the opportunity to get to know some of these initiatives personally when I was there in 2001. I recall for example the work for the advancement of women carried out by the Kasanay Institute, on the outskirts of Maracaibo. I was also able to visit Monteávila University, in Caracas, which at that time was taking its first steps and which, like all work at a university, is trying to
carry out a very important service to society. I also followed closely all the work that is being done from the parish of the Holy Family of Nazareth and St. Josemaría Escrivá. For example, the summary of the Catechism that they distributed recently in honor of the 80th anniversary of the foundation of Opus Dei. I am filled with deep joy and give thanks to God, together with the bishops and faithful of Venezuela, for initiatives such as these, which reach even small villages in the Andes or on the plains, and provide the opportunity to come to know Jesus Christ and his Church better.

*Can you give us some ideas on how to be faithful to the Church’s teachings in a world where values have been relativized in such an alarming way?*

The spread of Christ’s message always encounters a line of resistance, but what may be impossible for man is possible for God, and for a Christian assisted by divine grace. What is required is our struggle waged day by day, with well-done work, offered to God, being true friends of those around us, in the small opportunities to serve that are presented to us continually throughout the day. All of this is possible through the strength received in the Eucharist, in sacramental confession, and in the effort to persevere in prayer. St. Josemaría continually taught us the need for the Eucharist, which he defined as the center and root of the interior life.

The Church knows she is the bearer of a message of salvation, which she has received from God to spread to the ends of the earth. “Christianity, Catholicism is not a list of prohibitions, but a positive option... One has heard so much about what is not permitted that now it is necessary to say: in reality we have a positive idea to propose,” Benedict XVI said on one occasion (Interview, August 13, 2006). In the face of relativism, Christians know they are anchored in Jesus Christ, who is never out of date, who has a perennial youthfulness, and who alone can satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. We have to open wide the doors to Christ, as Pope John Paul II invited us to do, and let him enter our life, our family, our work, our world. We Christians, I repeat, have to stay close to God in prayer and in the sacraments, so that our work too will be turned into prayer.

*Opus Dei has come to remind everyone of the universal call to holiness and the sanctifying value of work. Could you explain to us in a practical way how it*
is possible for an ordinary person, through their daily work, to become holy? Isn’t this somewhat Utopian?

St. Josemaría explained that “there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it” (Conversations, no. 114).

God created man, we read in the Book of Genesis, in order to work. And Christ himself gave us an example with his years of work in St. Joseph’s carpenter shop, with his daily life in Nazareth.

All of this reflects a reality in the life of many Christians, who struggle each day to do their work well, to offer it all to God, the successes and the failures, what is easy and what is more difficult. How many people, in Venezuela and all over the world, get up early to take care of their family, or to leave for work; and they commend themselves to God from the first moment, and continue praying as they leave home; they ask him for patience in the face of obstacles or setback, and pray for their parents, for priests, and for all mankind, striving to finish their daily tasks well. All of this, which can seem so normal and ordinary, also opens for us the path of holiness.

For most people, their family holds first place among their duties of each day. Nevertheless, with so many sad experiences and marriage breakdowns, some people now have a real fear of marrying, and even more so when it’s in the Church. What is the most important thing to enable married people to live united “until parted by death” and to be fully happy? Isn’t it perhaps simply a “question of luck” that for some couples their married life “goes well”?

The vital importance that marriage and the family have for the Church and for society is clear. Marriage was raised by Christ to a Sacrament of the New Covenant. As Christ loved his Church, thus a man has to love his wife, ready to give his life for her. And so must the wife be faithful to her husband and make use of all of her ability and dedication to create a “bright and cheerful home,” as St. Josemaría used to say. In contrast, when people seek to satisfy their own selfishness, when they think more about themselves than about the others, difficulties and crises will necessarily arise in marriage and family life.

As this holy priest also pointed out, “You need a heart which is in love,
not an easy life, to achieve happiness” (Furrow, 795). And love is shown in
sacrifice, in the capacity to forget about oneself and give oneself to one’s
neighbor. Husband and wife, created for one another, have to discover
their vocation to love; and they need to understand that, if they want to
fulfill their high calling well, they have to prepare themselves and pray a
lot. Marital happiness is built up each day, through details of service and
affection, learning to forgive and to ask forgiveness, to understand, to love.

In Venezuela, as well as everywhere, there are many exemplary
marriages, spouses who live for one another, and who have built up, with a
lot of love and more than a few sacrifices, families that are welcoming,
congenial, and cheerful. I invite young Venezuelans to look to these
examples, to not let themselves be persuaded by the false models that so
often are set before us, and to know they are pioneers, because each has to
struggle, with God’s help, to respond with love to his or her vocation.

In the face of the panorama presented by today’s world, many people lament
how evil has prospered and how widespread the “weeds” are. St. Josemaría used
to say that we have to “drown evil in an abundance of good.” We have also heard
you say that the times we live in are marvelous times. Could you explain these
ideas better? How is it possible to drown evil with good and what are the reasons
for Christian optimism?

Actually these are marvelous times in which we have been called to live,
and in which God has called us to know and love him, to carry him
everywhere. We are seeing great technological, scientific and medical
developments, and also in the area of communication. We are confronting,
in different ways in different countries, more than a few problems with the
advance of moral relativism, the spread of drugs, the instability of families,
the irresponsibility of parents in raising their children, etc. The Church,
however, knows that the answer to the great questions and challenges is
found in a Person, Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us and who
communicates to us, through the power of his resurrection, hope [that]
does not disappoint us (Rom 5:5).

Jesus has conquered death, sin and the devil. He accompanies us in the
Eucharist. He seeks us and listens to us at every moment. With the Father,
he sends us the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts and to infuse his own divine life into us. Don’t we have deep reasons to be filled with hope?

Certainly, our personal effort is needed, our struggle, because God wants to count on our response to help make this world of ours more human. “These world crises are crises of saints,” wrote St. Josemaría (The Way, no. 301). The response to the proliferation of evil should, therefore, be a humble and resolute effort to live our vocation to holiness.

You were in Venezuela in 1974 and 1975, accompanying St. Josemaría during his catechetical trips to our country; and also seven years ago, in August of 2001. Could you share some memories of these trips with our readers at the end of this interview?

St. Josemaría had great affection for Venezuela and its people. I can say that I do too. I recall, for example, what our Founder said in a meeting with a large group of people in 1975, a few months before his death. Someone asked him what he hoped for from Venezuela, and he answered: “I hope for this nation which is so great, so great, that you have a beautiful present, and a future filled with God’s blessings, that you be more Christian every day. More Christian in people’s minds, in their faith and customs, in their way of living and working and loving one another, contributing to peace in the world.” I ask God that this desire and hope of St. Josemaría becomes a reality. I direct myself to Our Lady of Coromoto, so that she continue protecting this land of hers, and fill with blessings her Church on pilgrimage in Venezuela, and all men and women, whether Catholics or not, in this great country.

Australia, August 1, 2008

Interview granted to

“Catholic News Service”

(with Peter Rosengre)
The Prelate of Opus Dei hopes that young people will follow the invitation of Benedict XVI and “once more pledge themselves to the friendship that God offers to everyone.”

He also said that parents who love one another and each of their children “without limit” give a marvelous example.

Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, made these remarks in an interview granted on July 26 to The Record, the weekly paper of the Archdiocese of Perth, during a visit that coincided with World Youth Day in Sydney. Bishop Echevarría also visited the faithful of Opus Dei in the cities of Melbourne and Victoria, as well as in New Zealand.

He expressed his wish that the young people “continue to practice what they learned during World Youth Day when they return to their own countries. “This includes the desire to get to know the teachings of the Church, to spend periods of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, and to receive the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Confession.

“And, of course, that they live the joyful truth of knowing themselves to be God’s children. As Catholics they should continue to be the happiest young people in the world.”

The Prelate said he prayed that the impact of World Youth Day would spread to many others when the young people returned to their families.

“World Youth Day has been an opportunity for hundreds of thousands of young people to be united to the Holy Father and among themselves. This is something that I was able to see in past events as well.

“I hope that all of these young people will follow the inspirations the Holy Spirit has placed in their hearts and struggle to put into practice what they have learned during these days.

“For this to happen they need God’s grace, which is communicated to us through the sacraments and through prayer, and also through helping one another.”

The Prelate stressed that the formation provided by Catholic families, where parents daily express their mutual love and their love for their children, is very valuable.
“A childhood where one breathes God’s love and experiences a lot of affection is a solid foundation for the young people of the future.”

He encouraged young people who fear the demands of commitment to follow the advice Benedict XVI gave in the Angelus on July 19, during World Youth Day.

“The Pope cited the Gospel of St. Luke’s words addressed to the Blessed Virgin: ‘Do not be afraid, Mary.’ We should not have any fear when we have the Holy Spirit, who gives us strength. Happiness can only be obtained by a total commitment to God’s friendship.”

Bishop Echevarría joined Opus Dei while he was quite young, having met it through a relative of his. He was named Prelate of Opus Dei by Pope John Paul II in 1994.

“I was captivated by the idea of being able to aspire to sanctity while I practiced my profession of law, spent time with friends, or took part in sports, something that I enjoyed.”

The Prelate did not mention any numbers, but he said that Opus Dei continued growing in the number of its faithful and that it attracted people from all walks of life.

“Thanks be to God, Opus Dei, as part of the Church, continues to be young and growing.

“Many people respond to the message of Opus Dei all over the world. People of all ages, cultures and occupations. This is due to the fact that our message is that of the Gospel: that personal holiness is possible with God’s grace and our own efforts.”

According to the Opus Dei web page, there are some 500 faithful of Opus Dei in Australia.

Back to Contents

Italy, October 3, 2008

Interview granted to La Repubblica
Bishop Echevarría, The Da Vinci Code gave you a lot of publicity, but its image of Opus Dei as a suspicious, secretive group is still circulating.

“ Doesn’t it seem a bit odd to be talking about secrecy in the pages of a major newspaper? Every day hundreds of inquiries reach us from people who want to get in contact. At www.opusdei.org we provide current news, documentation, and personal accounts in 28 languages. Anyone who has met one of the Prelature’s faithful knows about his or her commitment and dedication to Christ. For us, transparency means letting Jesus be seen in our friendship and in the relationships of daily life.”

*Are its members found especially among those in positions of leadership, among influential, well-placed people?*

“In reality, the majority of Opus Dei’s faithful belong to the middle class and many are hard pressed financially at the end of each month. But the important point is that any honorable profession can be sanctified and become an opportunity to find Christ. Our spiritual formation is meant for people in all social categories.”

*Aren’t the members of Opus Dei a bit too eager to do proselytism?*

“Jesus called all Christians to follow him and become ‘fishers of souls.’ Apostolate and proselytism should not be seen as ends in themselves nor as the way an institution might try to build itself up. Our goal is to bring Christ to many other people, always respecting their personal freedom. Opus Dei has no other aim than to echo the teachings of the universal Church.”

*What is the central focus of your mission today?*

“Our mission follows the priorities of every historical period. Today the main challenge is the family: the upkeep of a home, educating the children, caring for the elderly and infirm, harmonizing the parents’ work schedules. Consequently, one of our priorities is the Christian formation of many parents, whether or not they belong to Opus Dei.”

*Even atheists and agnostics?*
“We are open to everybody, including people who don’t even know they have an immortal soul, and don’t want to know it. We treat them as friends, as brothers and sisters, and place ourselves at their service, the same as we do for everyone else.”

Eighty years is a long time: What has Opus Dei learned? What defects need to be corrected?

“I see what I so often heard St. Josemaría Escrivá say, not out of pride or arrogance: that Opus Dei will never need to be reformed in order to adapt itself to a changing world. For its aim is to teach everyone, beginning with ourselves, to sanctify daily life. Since we live in the world, it will always be necessary to keep our eyes on the God who never leaves us, who always extends a helping hand for us to grasp so as to walk with his help.”

What have you personally learned as Prelate?

“Every day I have to learn how to pray, how to be more mortified, how to serve everyone I meet. For our Lord’s words are not simply a story, but a reality. He said: ‘If you have mistreated the sick, the poor, the uneducated, you have mistreated Me.’ “

What do you especially remember about St. Josemaría?

“What impressed me was his good humor, along with his love for God. He was a good teacher who knew how to encourage and correct people, a priest and a father who devoted himself completely to the service of God and souls. He used to laugh a lot and joke with me. On trips in the car he would sing popular love songs, expressing in them his love for God. Once he told us that when he was dying he wanted to hear the Italian song about opening the windows to let in ‘the springtime sun.’ “

You are also carrying out apostolic work in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. What is happening there?

“Everywhere these days we hear a lot about consumerism, but let’s not forget that a large part of humanity lives in conditions of poverty and misery. In the West, too. The Church’s response has always been not only to provide welfare, but also education. For example, in the Peruvian Andes, some of the Prelature’s faithful, alongside other persons, have set up a network of ‘rural co-ops’ that teach language skills and basic hygiene and
sanitation. In so many countries, both in the Southern and Northern hemisphere, the challenge is to help local people assume responsibility for improving their own society.”

Are you also in China?

“China is not new to us, and neither is Russia. Many of Opus Dei’s faithful work in China—as diplomats, engineers, lawyers, teachers. They are ordinary citizens who deal with many people around them, making them feel understood and loved. They also bring them the seed of Christ’s teaching. We have educational and social aid facilities in Hong Kong, Macao, and Canton. And priests are responding to the call to help people on mainland China.”

Bishop Echevarría: Josemaría Escrivá has already been canonized. Now the process of beatification has begun for his successor, Álvaro del Portillo? Why are you so interested in having your own saints?

“We don’t have a hunger for saints but for sanctity. It is sanctity that brings us close to our Lord, who is peace and joy for the whole world. It’s not our aim to point to saints and say, ‘Look how special this saint is!’ Our aim is to help all men and women see that, if they want, they can strive to be a saint.”

Back to Contents
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
St. Josemaría Escrivá Church, Munyaka, Kenya

In 2001, some faithful of Munyaka decided to build a church in their area. Devotion to St. Josemaría had spread in that community since 1984, when a woman from Munyaka, Mrs. Leah Kinyanjui, reported that she had been cured of a liver ailment after praying to St. Josemaría. As a result, the people there decided to dedicate the church to the Founder of Opus Dei. The Church was consecrated on August 31, 2003. With the number of faithful growing rapidly each year, the church soon proved to be too small. Therefore a new church with a capacity for 700 persons was planned, financed mainly by the parishioners themselves. On August 25, 2008, some parishioners of Josemaría Escrivá Church visited the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in Kenya, Msgr. Alberto Pampillón, to ask for an image of St. Josemaría for the new church.

Publishing news

On October 2, 2008, the first edition of The Forge appeared in Chinese, using traditional ideograms. It was published with a printing of 2000 copies by Spring Publications Ltd. of Hong Kong. The title in Cantonese is Lihn Louh. With this printing, all the main books of St. Josemaría are now available in the Chinese language.

In December 2008, the publisher Le Laurier brought out in Lebanon the first Arabic language edition of Christ Is Passing By, with a printing of 2,000 copies.

The Way has just been published in Kinyarwanda, a language of Rwanda (1,500 copies), and in the Malayalam language of Kerala, India, with an initial printing of 4,000 copies.

In Russia, The Forge has been published in the Russian language for the first time, while in Germany the third and final volume of the biography of St. Josemaría by Andrés Vázquez de Prada, Der Gründer des
*Opus Dei: Die römischen Jahre*, was presented in five cities (Cologne, Stuttgart, Munich, Essen and Berlin).

The book *St. Josemaría in St. Peter’s Basilica* provides a photographic documentary of Tuscan artist Romano Cosci’s creation of a statue of St. Josemaría, which was placed in 2005 on one of the outer walls of St. Peter’s. The book, edited by Giancarlo Polenghi, includes photos by Aurelio Amendola and other photographers along with a commentary by Guillaume Derville and Michele Dolz. It has been published in two bilingual editions: English-Spanish and Italian-French.

*Blanco y los viajes a Barbastro* (Blanco and the Trips to Barbastro) is a new children’s book on the early years of the life of St. Josemaría, from his birth to his first communion. Its author is Carlos Zambrano, a first year literature student at the National University of St. Mark in Lima, Peru. The illustration is provided by Luis Chumpitaz Gonzales from the School of Art of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru. The book, produced by the Association for Life and the Family of Peru, was presented at the Feria Internacional del Libro (International Book Fair).

After completing her book *Educazione alla responsabilità in San Josemaría Escrivá* (2007), Giuseppina Capozzi Matarrese has continued her in-depth study of the message of the Founder of Opus Dei. Her latest work, *Educazione al valore della famiglia in San Josemaría Escrivá*, was published in September 2008. It considers various aspects of the saint’s teaching on the family, and provides testimonies from persons who have implemented these teachings in their own family life.
A church dedicated to St. Josemaría in Kinkala (R.D. Congo)

On November 8, 2008, a church was dedicated to St. Josemaría in Kinkala (R. D. Congo). The ceremony was presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio of Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon, Archbishop Andres Carrascosa, and included Bishop Louis Portella Mbuyu of Kinkala, and Bishop André Minzonzo of Nkay. The origin of the church goes back to 2005, a year dedicated by Pope John Paul II to the Eucharist. Previously Archbishop Carrascosa, when addressing the students at Orvalle High School in Madrid, had spoken about the difficulties the diocese of Kinkala faced because of the war raging in the Congo, with the destruction of schools and churches, the loss of infrastructure, etc. Some time later the girls at the school organized a fund-raising campaign to contribute to solving some of these problems and to foster Eucharistic devotion. The money collected was used for the construction of this church, built with the assistance of people from the surrounding area. A statue of St. Josemaría has been placed in the church.

Inauguration of a chapel in the Parish of Our Lady of the Angels (Madrid)

On September 29, Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco, Archbishop of Madrid, blessed a chapel in honor of St. Josemaría in the parish of Our Lady of the Angels, in the district of Quatro Caminos. During the Mass, the Cardinal used the chalice that St. Josemaría had given to the parish in 1972. In the same ceremony the three new bells of the church were blessed. They were manufactured with contributions from the parishioners, some of them faithful of Opus Dei. The names of the bells are Our Lady of the Angels, St. Josemaría, and Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. At the foot of the chapel's reredos are three plaques recalling the day Opus Dei was founded: “On the morning of October 2, 1928, feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, while hearing the sound of the bells of this parish, St. Josemaría received
the light from God to begin Opus Dei, thus opening up a path of sanctity for many men and women, as ordinary Christians, through their professional, family, and social occupations in ordinary life.” The chapel has a painting by the Cadiz artist Ignacio Valdés de Elizalde which shows St. Josemaría on that October 2nd, kneeling and in an attitude of thanksgiving for the illumination he had just received. Next to this is an image of our Lady and a mural portraying various places in Madrid linked to the foundation of Opus Dei.

Back to Contents

Statue and paintings of St. Josemaría in Vilnius (Lithuania), Kerala (India), and Aparecida (Brazil)

On October 6, 2008, in Vilnius, Lithuania, a solemn Mass was celebrated in the Church of All Saints for the 80th anniversary of the foundation of Opus Dei. Cardinal Audrys Juozas Backis, the Archbishop of Vilnius, was the principal celebrant. At the end of the Mass, the Cardinal blessed a painting of St. Josemaría on a side wall of the church. Following this, a relic of St. Josemaría was made available for the veneration of the faithful.

Also on October 6, the sixth anniversary of his canonization, a statue of St. Josemaría was blessed in the Chapel of Chaithanya, in Kottayam, Kerala (India). The ceremony was presided over by the Archbishop Emeritus of Kottayam, Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry, who was accompanied by Mar Mathew Moolakkatt and Mar Joseph Pandarasserril, present Archbishop and Auxiliary Bishop respectively. The statue, approximately 4 ft 7 in. (140 cm.) tall, is the work of the sculptor T.J. Vincent of Trichur. After Holy Mass, in the auditorium of the pastoral center, there was a presentation of the first edition of The Way in Malayalam (Divyapathâ).
On November 8, 2008, a statue of St. Josemaría was enthroned and blessed in the Old Basilica of Nuestra Señora Aparecida (Our Lady who Appeared), which the Founder of Opus Dei had visited on May 28, 1975, during his stay in Brazil. The ceremony was presided over by Archbishop Raymundo Damasceno Assis of Aparecida, who is the President of the Latin American Bishops Council. At the end of Mass the Archbishop gave the faithful a blessing with a relic *ex ossibus* of St. Josemaría.

Fiftieth Anniversary of St. Josemaría’s first visit to England

On August 15, a Mass was celebrated at the shrine of Our Lady of Willesden in London, in commemoration of the first visit of St. Josemaría to this church in 1958. The principal celebrant was the Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in England, Msgr. Nicholas Morrish. On Wednesday, October 8, the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, celebrated the Eucharist in Westminster Cathedral on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Opus Dei and the 50th anniversary of St. Josemaría’s first visit to Great Britain. In his homily, the Cardinal said: “What is so attractive about the teaching of St. Josemaría Escrivá is that quite simply it is so familiar, because he taught and lived those realities of our Catholic faith for which we can never be sufficiently thankful: God as Father; the Church as family; Mary as Mother of all believers; all humanity as brothers and sisters, and all the baptized as God’s children.” Thanksgiving Masses for these anniversaries were also celebrated in Glasgow and Manchester.

St. Josemaría on video
The web page of Opus Dei (www.opusdei.org) has opened a new section: “Short videos of the Founder.” In 52 installments, one for each week of the year, it offers brief excerpts from get-togethers with St. Josemaría. As John Paul II said on October 6, 2002 during the canonization homily, the Founder “has helped so many ordinary members of the faithful to discover the redemptive power of faith, its capacity to transform the earth.” These videos show part of his conversations with large audiences, sometimes thousands of people, in which St. Josemaría answers the questions and concerns of those present: “How can I love my children more each day?”; “Speak to us about confession”; “Father, life has dealt me a setback”; “How can I sanctify my work?”

On Tuesday, August 19, the documentary “Learning to love: a dialogue with St. Josemaría Escrivá,” produced by Juan Martín Ezratty, was presented in the Borges Cultural Center of Buenos Aires. The video reflects teachings of the Founder of Opus Dei about forgiveness, understanding, affection, helping others in family life, at work, and in social relations.

Also taking part in the production were: Sara Shaw de Crito, president of FundTV; Federico Suarez, religion coordinator for the city of Buenos Aires; Juan Pablo Cannata, from the Opus Dei Office of Communications in Argentina, and Omar Abboud, representative of the Islamic Center of the Argentinean Republic. The moderator was journalist Rolando Vera.

On October 19, the Italian television network Rete 4 broadcast an animated movie about St. Josemaría Escrivá that depicts episodes from the saint’s childhood. The film was made in North Korea and produced by Mondo TV, one of the principal European producers of animated films. The text was by the Italian writer Francesc Arlanch.
Second Conference on "Paths of Freedom through the Pyrenees"

On November 22, 2008, the Second Conference of Camins de llibertat a través dels Pirineus (Pathways of freedom through the Pyrenees), took place in the Rocafort Auditorium in Sant Julià de Lòria. More than a hundred people attended the event. The conference made mention of the passage of St. Josemaría through Andorra, after crossing the Pyrenees, in the autumn of 1937. It was organized by the Association of Friends of the Path of Pallerols de Rialb to Andorra, with the collaboration of the University of Andorra and the city government of Sant Julià de Lòria, the Government of Andorra, and the Regional Council of L'Alt Urgell. The object of the gathering was to recall all those who throughout the centuries have crossed the Pyrenees in one direction or the other in search of better living conditions and greater freedom. Jordi Piferrer spoke about the expeditions led by the famous guide Josep Cirera, and highlighted especially the group that included St. Josemaría. His presentation ended with the projection of an interview with Cirera himself.

Albert Pintat, Head of the Government of Andorra, closed the conference. He encouraged its organizers to continue their work of fostering the ideals of mutual respect, freedom and coexistence.

Back to Contents
News
New Centers of the Prelature

The regional vicars have established new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Pretoria (South Africa, two centers), Benin City (Nigeria, two centers), Chía (Colombia), Bogotá (Colombia), Santiago (Chile), Paysandú (Uruguay), Nairobi (Kenya, three centers).

Collection of videos for the Pauline Year

Throughout the year dedicated to St. Paul, a number of professors from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome have presented a series of videos on the Apostle to the Gentiles, edited by the Argentinean producer Digito Identidad. The letters of St. Paul, his apostolate, his determination to unite faith and reason, and his intimate conversation with Jesus, are some of the themes of the collection of 13 brief videos published in monthly installments on the Opus Dei website (www.opusdei.org).

The series was introduced by Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, who invited viewers to take advantage of the Pauline Year, as “a gift of the Holy Father,” to get to know Jesus Christ better, through St. Paul. He said our Lord is telling all Christians “my grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9), to carry on the struggles of ordinary life.

The American professor and priest, John Wauck, explained that St. Paul clearly understood that his sufferings identified him with Christ; his example “is an invitation to take up the cross in our ordinary life.” In another video, Professor Wauck reflects on St. Paul's affection for the first Christian communities which, in many cases, he himself founded.

Theologian Carla Rossi Espagnet presented two of the Pauline videos. In the first one she explained some aspects of the Apostle's teaching on marriage: “Love and respect; that is what St. Paul asked of spouses.” In a second video she considered St. Paul's teaching on charity. “Without charity, without love for others,” she said regarding the Apostle's hymn to charity, “our actions would lack meaning.”
Professor Robert Gahl dedicated one of the videos to the reality of our divine filiation: “Christians can call God 'Father'... this is something that we learn from Paul.” In the tenth video of the series, he stressed the Apostle’s closeness to Christ: “in him Paul discovered the Son of God, the Lord, the Messiah.”

Fr. Bernardo Estrada, Professor of Sacred Scripture and specialist in St. Paul's letters, spoke about Saul's vocation after his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. Professor Maria Angeles Vitoria, from the School of Philosophy, highlighted the union of faith and reason in the Apostle to the Gentiles. St. Paul, she said, revealed a faith “that was in no way opposed to human logic. Therefore he was always a friend of sincere dialogue with those who rightly sought the truth.”

St. Paul and work is the topic dealt with by Maria Aparecida Ferrari, professor in the department of ethics and sociology. Professor Eusebio Gonzalez, in one of the first videos, pointed to St. Paul's apostolic zeal: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” The series concluded with a consideration of St. Paul and the Eucharist.

World Youth Day and Kenhurst Study Centre

The Holy Father arrived in Sydney on July 13, 2008. During his first days in Australia, His Holiness resided at Kenhurst Study Centre, a conference center entrusted to the Prelature of Opus Dei, where he was able to rest after his long trip and prepare for the World Youth Day. Kenhurst Study Centre, where hundreds of young people and adults take part each year in spiritual retreats and other activities of Christian formation, was honored to receive Benedict XVI and thus assist him in his service to the Church. On July 16, His Holiness moved to Cathedral House, where he resided during the days of the World Youth Day activities.
Thousands of pilgrims from all over the world traveled to Sydney for this event. The centers and apostolic works of Opus Dei in Australia helped to prepare for Benedict XVI’s visit in various ways.

Nairana Study Centre organized a course for the volunteers who would lend assistance to the people arriving from overseas. The girls from the Tangara School collected funds to subsidize participation in World Youth Day by twelve students from the island of Tonga. During WYD, seven priests spent many hours each day in the school chapel, providing the Sacrament of Reconciliation. At the same school, a student from Hamilton, who traveled with the group from New Zealand, was baptized by the bishop of her city.

On July 17, more than 200,000 pilgrims received the Holy Father at Barrangaroo (Sydney). The Pope presented a hope-filled message to the young people. “Our world,” he said, “has grown weary of greed, exploitation and division, of the tedium of false idols and piecemeal responses, and the pain of false promises. Our hearts and minds are yearning for a vision of life where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth, and where identity is found in respectful communion. This is the work of the Holy Spirit!”

On Sunday the 20th, almost half a million people attended the Holy Mass celebrated by the Roman Pontiff. In his homily, the Holy Father asked: “What will you leave to the next generation?... How are you using the gifts you have been given, the 'power' which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you?” And he ended his homily by insisting: “Dear young friends, the Lord is asking you to be prophets of this new age, messengers of his love, drawing people to the Father and building a future of hope for all humanity.”

During World Youth Day, the people of Sydney were witnesses to a moving manifestation of faith in Christ and affection for the Holy Father. Many of the young people were captivated by the Pope’s kindness and wisdom and resolved to go to Madrid to take part in the next World Youth Day in 2011.
The Tribunal of the Prelature completes the Investigative Phase of the Process of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo (August 7, 2008)

On August 7, 2008, the Tribunal of the Prelature of Opus Dei ended the investigative stage on the life and virtues of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. The ceremony, which took place in the John Paul II Auditorium of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, was presided over by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría. It is customary in the Church that when the holiness of a bishop is being studied, it is his own circumscription that carries out the corresponding investigation.

The Prelate of Opus Dei, as the competent bishop for investigating the cause of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, asked the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints that, in addition to the Tribunal of the Prelature, the diocese of Rome also be authorized to take part in the process. Therefore, two equally competent tribunals were opened for the investigative phase. During the past four years, both tribunals have collected evidence concerning the holiness of Don Álvaro. Besides examining the writings of the Servant of God and other documents, testimony was taken from numerous witnesses regarding the first successor to St. Josemaría as head of Opus Dei.

The work of the Tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome closed with a ceremony in the Lateral Palace on June 26, 2008. Cardinal Camillo Ruini presided in one of his last public acts as Vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome.

With the conclusion of the investigatory phase, the preparation of the Positio super vita et virtutibus begins, a synthesis of the person's life and Christian virtues. The Positio will be presented to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints by the postulator of the Cause, Msgr. Flavio Capucci. After studying the evidence, the Congregation will give its decision about the heroicity of the virtues of the Servant of God.
A Solidarity Project: "Harambee Africa International"

“Harambee — All together for Africa,” a project whose first steps were connected with the canonization of St. Josemaría in 2002, promotes educational initiatives in Africa and about Africa. Through development projects in the sub-Saharan region and informational activities in the rest of the world, it spreads knowledge of the values and future possibilities of African culture. During the past six years, thanks to the help of many people, Harambee has spread to Spain, France, Portugal, the United States and Ireland, and has provided economic support to 28 social and educational initiatives in 14 countries. Due to this international growth, in June 2008 the association “Harambee Africa International” was set up in Rome to coordinate the various projects in which other entities such as the “Harambee USA Foundation” and the “Asociación Harambee-España” participate.

Letter of the Prelate of Opus Dei to the Rector of the University if Navarra regarding the terrorist attack at the University

On October 30, a few hours after a car bomb exploded at the University of Navarra, Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Chancellor of the University, sent a letter to the Rector expressing his deep solidarity in the sorrow caused by the painful attack.

In his letter Bishop Echevarría asked the Rector to convey his sentiments “to everyone at the University: administrators, professors, students and other personnel.” The Chancellor thanked God that the losses had only been material. In regard to the gathering for peace set for
the following October 31st at the University, he suggested that, besides being an “act of solidarity,” it should also be an occasion for prayer and “an expression of forgiveness.” He also encouraged those who take part to strive to foster “a just and equitable social order, with respect for all persons and a commitment to peace in the world.”

Finally the Chancellor recalled in his message that difficult moments are an opportunity for Christians to become “sowers of peace and joy,” drowning evil in an abundance of good, as St. Josemaría used to advise.

**Pontifical appointments**

On April 12, 2008, Msgr. Juan Ignacio Arrieta Ochoa de Chinchetru, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts since February 15, 2007, was appointed Titular Bishop of Civitate. He was ordained a bishop by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Papal Secretary of State, on May 1, 2008.

On July 26, 2008, Father Pablo Gefaell, a professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, was named Consultor for the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts.

On September 6, 2008, Bishop Javier Echevarría, Titular Bishop of Cilibia and Prelate of Opus Dei, was appointed Member of the Twelfth General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

On September 24, 2008, Professor Juan José Silvestre Valor, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, was named Consultor for the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff.

And on December 30, 2008, the following professors of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome were appointed Consultors for the Congregation for the Clergy: Rev. Davide Cito, Rev. Jesús Miñambres, and Rev. Luis Navarro.
A Marian Year Concludes for the Prelature

Friday, November 28, marked the end of the Marian Year that Bishop Echevarría had convoked for the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Opus Dei as a personal prelature by Pope John Paul II, and to prepare for the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Work.

The Prelate had wanted in this way to follow in the footsteps of Don Alvaro del Portillo, who in 1978 convoked a Marian Year in preparation for Opus Dei's golden jubilee. This way of expressing thanks to God responds to the conviction deeply engraved in the soul of St. Josemaría that “Opus Dei has been born and has developed under the mantle of our Lady.”

A video channel on YouTube

The channel of the Opus Dei Information Office on YouTube was opened in September 2008 with the address www.youtube.com/opusdei. Its purpose is to provide short videos about leading a Christian life and informative reports about Opus Dei. Among the material included are videos of St. Josemaría in which he speaks about Christ and the Catholic faith. As in all the channels in this free service, users can organize their selection of videos in the way they themselves choose.
INITIATIVES

• In Brief
Conference on St. Josemaría and artists, Florence (October 3, 2008)


Taking part in the book's presentation were Romano Cosci, the sculptor of the statue; Rev. Guillaume Derville, theologian and Central Spiritual Director of Opus Dei; Paola Grossi Gondi, a painter; Dony MacManus, a sculptor; and Giancarlo Polenghi, journalist and editor of the above-mentioned book. About two hundred people attended the colloquium.

Giancarlo Polenghi recalled some texts in which the saint compared God's action with the work of an artist. “With our ordinary life, St. Josemaría said, we can make epic poetry. He also said that God the Father sculpts in our soul Christ’s image, and that he paints with us—who are brushes in his hand—marvelous works of art.”

Paola Grossi Gondi exhibited some of her artistic works, which seek to bring out the beauty of everyday realities: a fried egg, a window, or even a puddle of water. “I have always seen beauty in these things. But I didn’t know why until I came to know the spirit of St. Josemaría. I came to understand that in the beauty of material things one can grasp in some way the beauty of the Creator.” She added that her surprise was even greater “when I learned that those everyday objects I was painting formed part of my pathway to heaven, as the Founder of Opus Dei taught.”

The Irish sculptor Dony MacManus also showed some of his works, including a statue of St. Joseph and a bust of Benedict XVI that will be installed in Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York. “In my artistic works,” he said, “I try to reflect some of the teachings that I have learned from the Founder of Opus Dei, such as the value of fatherhood and the family. Our
present culture is certainly undergoing a crisis in these values. I see art as an indispensable tool for once again enriching our culture.”

Romano Cosci talked about some memories of his work on the statue. He dedicated more than a year to the sculpture of St. Josemaría which is now installed on the lateral façade of St. Peter’s Basilica. “I received a lot from the teachings of St. Josemaría,” said Cosci. “I would like those who look at the statue to ask themselves if it really is meaningful to contemplate it, that is, if it raises their sight and becomes a spiritual mediation. If that happens, the statue has meaning.” Cosci recalled the day when the statue was installed at St. Peter’s. “When I saw it finally finished, I felt something similar to what a father feels on the day when, after having raised a son for years, he finally sees him setting out on his own. In this statue I tried to leave something of myself: something very personal, something that goes beyond a style or technique. I think I can say that I tried to communicate a part of my heart: of my heart as an artist which, as those who know me realize, finds in the faith a pathway of meaning and dialogue. Therefore I would like those who in future look at the statue to feel themselves drawn into this flow of personal communication, this conversation with God and mankind: a conversation in which St. Josemaría also takes part, as he intercedes for us.”

Father Guillaume Derville closed the ceremony with a theological reflection on the inscription carved on the base of the sculpture: Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnes traham ad meipsum (Jn 12:32). “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” “These words refer to Christ, God made man, on the Cross. Christ on the Cross, says St. Augustine, didn’t seem to have any beauty after the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the spitting, the nails that pierced his hands and his feet. Where was his beauty, his adornment? And St. Augustine responds: dilectionem caritatis, in the love of charity.”

He then went on to speak about the artist’s efforts to sanctify his work: “The artist understands that sanctification of work is not a kind of perfectionism, because he is always dissatisfied with his work. Only God, through love, makes saints. The love that God asks of us does not seek perfection as an end in itself. One day St. Josemaría, observing some persons painting a chapel dedicated to the Holy Cross, said that there is
nothing that we do in this life that could not be improved. The important thing is to act with love, which in some way is more important than mere technical competence. It is perhaps in this sense that one can understand the comment of a great pianist about a young colleague’s technique: ‘he plays too mechanically; he isn’t imitating the human voice.’”

He concluded his address by referring to the fact that St. Josemaría, in Romano Cosci’s sculpture, is wearing priestly vestments for the celebration of Mass. And he related this to the work of art of our sanctification, which is also carried out from Christ’s Cross and is prolonged throughout history through the “supreme art” of the sacramental liturgy. “It is thus that Jesus looks at us, from the Cross, as sons and daughters of God; it is thus that Christians see in their neighbor a child of God. Thus we see the Eucharistic bread, which will be changed into the Body of Christ. Thus the artist sees the statue inside the marble. God sculpts in us an image, that of Christ. Each of these affirmations contains a projection toward the future, or even more, towards the next life... If it is true that our works can survive us for a certain time, the Mass, opus Christi, opus Dei, is already heaven descending to earth. It is in the liturgy, perhaps the supreme art, that we are freed from death. Clocks should stop during Mass, St. Josemaría used to say. In the reading of the Gospel even today there blows the breeze from the lake of Genesareth, and in Jerusalem the olive trees continue to weep.”

Back to Contents

In Brief

Nairobi, Kenya -- Ethics and leadership

In line with Pope Benedict XVI’s encyclical Deus Caritas Est, Kianda Foundation organized a series of conferences to spread knowledge of the social doctrine of the Church among women who hold managerial posts in various types of businesses.
The first four sessions, directed by Catherine Dean and Rose Catacutan, professors of ethics at Strathmore College, were held in 2007 and 2008. These dealt with such topics as the dignity of the human person, the common good, and the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. Each conference was followed by a “case study” that tried to apply the principles discussed to the specific circumstances of Kenyan society.

The conferences took place in the Jacaranda Hotel in Nairobi. Among the participants were the president and executive director of *Maendeleo ya Wanawake*, Rukia Subow and Bernadette Musundi, respectively. *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* ("Women for Development") is a non-governmental organization founded 56 years ago with the aim of improving the social and economic situation of the women of Kenya. More than four million women belong to the organization. With some 25,000 affiliated groups, it holds a position of clear national leadership. It has helped many women to take up posts of responsibility in Kenyan society, whether in politics, in the private sector or in government organizations. The cycle of conferences will continue throughout 2009.

Madrid, Spain -- Fiction and entertainment at the Santillana Student Residence

The Santillana Student Residence has been organizing a University Conference on Communication since 1987. The 21st edition took place on November 19, under the title “Think Tank TV: What does television think?” The work of scriptwriters and production companies was given special attention.

The two round tables were directed at university students in the field of communications. The first included the producers Arturo Rodríguez Bernal of “Magnolia” and Juan Carlos Cueto of “Multipark,” the film critic Alberto Moreno, and Carmen Fuente, a professor at the Villanueva University Center. The session analyzed social models in television series. The second round table studied new formats of fiction and entertainment,
with the participation of Jesús Moreno of Antena3TV, Encarnación Pardo of Boomerang, and Juan Antonio Dominguez of Vertice 360º. The moderator was Javier Perez de Silva, professor of audiovisual production.

São Paulo, Brazil -- Bioethics for medical students

During the months of August to October, the Vila Mariana University Center in São Paulo hosted a cycle of conferences on Bioethics, directed to medical students and young doctors. The organizer and coordinator of the course was Professor Luiz Clemente Pereira de Souza Rolim, from the Federal University of São Paulo, a specialist in endocrinology.

Employing a multidisciplinary focus, a team of professors from various medical schools in São Paulo discussed, among other topics, “The dignity of the human person,” “Conscience and ethics,” and “Bioethics and the terminally ill.” All of these topics are especially timely in Brazil because of their influence on laws regarding health care.

Aracaju, Brazil -- Volunteer project in northeast Brazil

During the month of September, thirty-four university women who take part in the activities of the Itaporã and Varanda Cultural Centers in Rio de Janeiro, and Enseada in Niteroi, taught a multidisciplinary course in the poor neighborhoods of Piabeta and Grageru de Aracaju, the capital of Sergipe. The request for this social project came through a priest who was concerned about the professional development of his parishioners.

The young women, students in the final years of university courses in hostelry, management, law, and computer science, began by giving various classes for housewives on the running of a household, in which the value
and dignity of domestic work as well as its professional character were stressed. The classes also dealt with workplace legislation and civic rights and duties.

Another group of volunteers was responsible for the course entitled “The First Job.” Among other things, they taught girls from the area how to prepare a curriculum vitae. Dr. Mannoun Chimelli, a doctor at the Antonio Pedro University Hospital of Niterói, gave talks to mothers and daughters on challenges in raising adolescents. Dentistry and physical therapy students provided free assistance for those needing it. Techniques of oral hygiene were also taught.

Limbe and Yaoundé, Cameroon -- Lobéké-Dykes Family Weekend

The Lobéké-Dykes Association of Cameroon Families organized two family weekends this year, one in Limbe, near Douala, and the other in Yaoundé, the capital. The idea arose on the occasion of the International Family Congresses that took place in Kenya and in Rome during recent years, and which led to the forming of the Cameroon association.

Married couples with experience in the subject directed the sessions of family orientation for those attending. One of the sessions was centered on the studies of school age children, and the other on spiritual formation in the home. The participants expressed gratitude to the organizers for all the useful suggestions raised and for the opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with other couples. At the end the proceedings of the conference were published.

Santiago, Chile -- Aconcagua Cultural Center: Pauline Congress
On the occasion of the Pauline Year, the Aconcagua Cultural Center organized a conference about the Apostle to the Gentiles and his historical milieu.

In one of the talks, Fr. Jose Miguel Ibañez Langlois described the human and supernatural personality of Saul of Tarsus. The speaker stressed that the spiritual riches bequeathed by St. Paul are a perennial treasure for the whole Church. He also highlighted the vocation of each of the baptized and the role of the lay faithful in spreading the Gospel message throughout the world. The second part of the conference was given by Prof. Raquel Soaje, a specialist in ancient history. His presentation was entitled “The Roman World in the Era of St. Paul.”


The SOKA Foundation, which provides assistance to the Zonnewende Conference Center in Moergestal, celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2008. The Board of Directors chose the following topic for the commemorative celebration: “A free person is one who observes, reflects, and cooperates in the renewal of culture.”

Part of the program involved a collection of funds for a water purification project in the Congo. Each donor received the gift of a bottle of water—a symbolic gesture in a country filled with lakes and canals.

Among other activities, a series of conferences was held on questions currently being debated in The Netherlands. The first of these studied the ethical and legal implications involved in the donation of organs. The second dealt with the paradox between the desire for eternal youth and the spread of legal euthanasia. Another considered questions connected with the selection of embryos. A Dutch language version of the series of 8 DVD’s on the “Culture of Life” was also presented. A symposium on “The Pontificate and Modernity,” with Prof. Joaquin Navarro-Valls, former
Communications Director for the Holy See, taking part, proved to be very popular. The close of the twenty-fifth year of SOKA will be on March 7, 2009, with a symposium on the identity of Europe.

Back to Contents

Pamplona, Spain -- "War and Peace in the Promised Land"

Over one hundred political figures, historians and journalists took part in a course on “The History of Israel and the Jewish People: War and Peace in the Promised Land,” which was held at the University of Navarre from September 1 to 3. Within the framework of the 60th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel, the program offered a panorama of the history of the Jewish people, with special attention to the current situation in the Middle East. The course combined theoretical sessions with audiovisual workshops and round table discussions. Its object was to help bring culture and religion closer to one another.

Samuel Hadas, former Israeli ambassador to the Holy See, Mexico and Spain, and a member of the International Committee on Jewish-Catholic Relations at the Peres Center for Peace, gave one of the talks. He stressed that “the world’s religions in the past have helped to prevent and resolve conflicts, and will continue do so in the future.” In his judgment, “one shouldn’t overlook the positive influence that religion can have on people’s consciences. There is an urgent need to transmit the true message of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which is a message of peace opposed to totalitarianism.”

Among others taking part in the seminar were Rafael Schutz, Israel’s current ambassador to Spain; Danielle Rozenberg, a professor at the University of Paris and recipient of the Alberto Benveniste prize in 2007; Daniel Blumenthal, international correspondent in Israel and the Middle East since 1980; and the Palestinian researcher Munther S. Dajani, from the Al Quds University in East Jerusalem and director of the Issam Sartawi Center for the Advancement of Peace and Democracy. According to the
Palestinian specialist, “These days are crucial in the history of Israel and Palestine. If there is a lack of prudence and rationality to check the power of extremism and fanaticism, we could enter another vicious circle of violence.”

São Paulo, Brazil -- Refresher course for priests

From July 22 to 25, the International Institute of Social Sciences of São Paulo, in collaboration with the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, and with the support of the Brazilian bishop’s conference and the Archdiocese of São Paulo, organized the first Refresher Course for Priests. The topic was Human Nature, Marriage and the Family. The course offered an in-depth look at key moral questions for the Brazilian Church, in line with the proposals of the Fifth General Conference of Latin-American Bishops, which took place in Aparecida in May 2007.

The priests attending came from 40 different dioceses. The session centered on topics related to marital morality. “Structure and meaning of human sexuality,” “Responsible paternity and marital fidelity,” “Artificial procreation,” “Homosexuality and homophobia” were the titles of the sessions directed by Msgr. Angel Rodriguez Luño, Professor of Fundamental Moral Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome and Consultor of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Fr. Rafael Stanziona de Moraes, professor of moral theology, explained the theological underpinnings to responsible paternity. Fr. Placimario Ferreira, vicar general for the Archdiocese of Brazilia, spoke about pastoral attention to divorced faithful. Prof. Manoel Augusto dos Santos, from the Pontifical University of Porto Alegre, directed study sessions on gender ideology and on globalization and demographic questions. The final day featured two conferences on the topics of “Fragmentation of experience and the formation of emotional stability” (Prof. José Lino Currás Nieto) and
“Information on family values and family models in the communications media” (Fr. Michelino Roberto).

Arequipa, Peru -- International Conference on Tourism and Culture

More than 60 students from Lima, Arequipa, and various cities of Bolivia took part in the First International Conference on Tourism and Culture in Arequipa, organized at the beginning of August by the Nuestra Señora del Pilar High School and the Wayrana Cultural Center, both begun by faithful of the Prelature in this southern Peruvian city.

The program included conferences on current events, a video-forum and sessions on character formation and emotional development in young people.

During the conference, participants had an opportunity to visit the city’s outstanding expressions of colonial art in churches, monasteries, and estates. The closing session was a festival of folklore that provided a sample of the regional music and dances of Peru and Bolivia.

Jaén, Spain -- "The social dimension of life"

On the weekend of November 14 to 16, the Fourth International Symposium on St. Josemaría was celebrated, with the focus on “The social dimension of life.” In the inaugural act the mayor of Jaén, Carmen Peñalver, said that “we all understand as a daily challenge the importance of serving and helping others.”

The first address was given by Teresa Maria Perez Payan, board member of the Foundation for the Promotion of Culture. She stressed St. Josemaría’s spirit of initiative, daring and optimism, and considered at length one of his key ideas: “para servir, servir” (to be useful, serve others).
A round table discussion followed on some of the initiatives inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría. Those taking part included Josep Masabeu, director of the Braval Volunteer Service in Barcelona; Pilar Lopez de Uralde, president of Child’s World in Malaga, and Francisco Martín Lopez-Quesada, president of the Laguna Palliative Care Center in Madrid.

The closing conference was given by Bernadette W. Musundi, executive director of Women for Development in Kenya. She reminded everyone that Africa is “hungry” for assistance: “The aid we need is not merely material but human. The kind of aid that Europe once provided to Africa, but now seems anxious to withdraw. We need education in virtue. It is only by fostering virtues and values that we can prevent corruption, delinquency, and the menace of AIDS, which has already taken millions of lives.”

Back to Contents
IN PACE
Suffrages for the Deceased

In the second half of 2008, 334 faithful of the Prelature and 10 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.

To read the full version of Romana, you can subscribe to the print edition.
A study
Development of Societies

Dr. Bernardo M. Villegas

Vice President for Research,

University of Asia and the Pacific (UA&P;)

Chairman, Center for Research and Communication

Introduction

Development is a multi-faceted word that is shared by academics and social scientists, on one hand, and policy makers and program implementors on the other. To differentiate the various nuances, a wide range of adjectives have been affixed to the word, as in such phrases as economic development, sustainable development, human development and socio-cultural development.

The purpose of this paper is to present the multiple interpretations given to the word “development”, starting with the connotations contained in the action programs of international agencies and national governments. Then we shall examine these programs in the light of the social doctrine of the Catholic church. Finally, I shall cite concrete examples of initiatives for attaining authentic human development all over the world that have been inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Since Pope Paul VI uttered in 1967 the famous phrase that development has “to be for all men and for the whole man” (Populorum Progressio, 14), much has been done by world leaders to shift attention from mere economic growth (as measured by an increase in the Gross Domestic Product of a nation) to integral human development. A most prominent effort has been that of the United Nations in mobilizing all member countries to achieve the so-called UN Millennium Development Goals. Addressing various dimensions of human development, the MDGs form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and leading development institutions.
The eight MDGs are (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (2) achieve universal primary education; (3) promote gender equality and empower women; (4) reduce child mortality; (5) improve maternal health; (6) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (7) ensure environmental sustainability; (7) develop a global partnership for development.

The recent report card on how the MDGs are being achieved appeared in the Millennium Development Goals Report 2006, published by the United Nations. Under Goal 1, Asia leads the decline in global poverty. From 1990 to 2002, rates of extreme poverty fell rapidly in much of Asia, where the number of people earning less than US $1 a day dropped by nearly a quarter of a billion people, most of them in China. Progress was not so rapid in Latin America and the Caribbean, which now has a larger share of people living in poverty than Southeast Asia and Oceania. Poverty rates in Western Asia and Northern Africa remained almost unchanged between 1990 and 2002 and increased in the transition economies of Southeastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In Sub-Saharan Africa, although the poverty rate decreased marginally, the number of people living in extreme poverty increased by 140 million. The good news is that many sub-Saharan countries are now showing potential for long-term growth that could bring up standards of living.

As Jose Antonio Ocampo, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, wrote in the Foreword to the Report: “...we know that disparities in progress, both among and within countries, are vast, and that the poorest among us, mostly those in remote areas, are being left behind. Much more can and must be done, both by developed countries in increasing their support and of developing countries in using foreign assistance and their own resources more effectively.”

Models of Development

In the last fifty years, the most successful countries that attained many of the goals contained in the MDGs, especially those of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and achieving universal primary education, were the so-called “miracle economies” of East Asia, i.e. South Korea,
Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In just one generation, these territories rose from Third World living conditions to the status of newly industrializing countries that practically eradicated mass poverty and unemployment. As the famous U.S. economist, Paul Krugman, argues in a celebrated article entitled *The Myth of Asia's Miracle*, the spectacular growth of East Asian economies in the last thirty years of the twentieth century and the impressive performances of today's giant economies like China and India, can be mainly attributed to the massive and intelligent mobilization of human resources, illustrating the time-tested truth that people are the ultimate resources of any society. Despite the tremendous advances in technology in recent years, human work is still the ultimate explanation for the success of the emerging economies, yesterday and today.

Referring to Singapore's much-vaunted “economic miracle” between 1966 and 1990, Krugman comments that the “miracle turns out to have been based on perspiration rather than inspiration. Singapore grew through a (massive) mobilization of resources... The employed share of the population surged from 27 to 51 percent. The educational standards of that work force were dramatically upgraded: while in 1966 more than half of the workers had no formal education at all, by 1990 two thirds had completed secondary education.”

Such massive mobilization of human resources was made possible, however, by the enlightened decisions of State officials to allow much leeway for individuals to exercise their freedom of economic initiative. In addition to respecting market forces within reasonable limits, the State in each of these East Asian economies also carried out its indispensable role of constructing the physical infrastructures of the country, establishing peace and order and administering justice. The State also managed the fiscal and monetary sectors of the economy, controlling inflation and thus encouraging high rates of domestic savings. Public investments were also judiciously channeled to universal education and providing social security. Using the terminology of the West, these countries did not embrace the extreme or rugged form of capitalism but blended social policies with market forces. They thus emulated, wittingly or unwittingly, the social market model made famous by the Germans under Konrad Adenauer.
In contrast with these successful East Asian economies, most of Latin America followed a socialist, interventionist model that greatly suppressed the freedom of economic initiative with excessive regulation, as well as protectionist and ultranationalist policies. This model spawned a host of inefficient industries and greatly neglected rural and agricultural development, to the detriment of the masses of the population who were living in the countryside. In the last decade of the last century, however, many of these countries—together with India and China—learned their lessons and started to introduce more market-oriented policies through one degree or another of deregulation, privatization, and liberalization. Today, the largest emerging economies that give the most hope for attaining authentic development in the next twenty years are Brazil, Russia, India, China and the Southeast Asian nations mainly composed of Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand. These regions are being referred to in financial circles today with the initials BRICA (Brazil, Russia, India, China and the ASEAN-Association of Southeast Asian Nations). They all have a common denominator: a greater emphasis on the freedom of economic initiative and a socially responsible State that proactively creates an attractive investment climate through adequate infrastructures, macroeconomic stability, and good governance.

The Social Doctrine of the Church

It is highly likely that these emerging economies will be among the most successful in attaining the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015, as China has already demonstrated in the last twenty years. The Social Doctrine of the Church, however, sets even higher goals for truly authentic human development. As Pope Paul VI defined development in Populorum Progressio (21), societies must go beyond meeting the minimum bodily and educational needs of the human being. There has to be a struggle against “oppressive structures, which come from the abuse of having or abuse of power, from the exploitation of workers or the injustice of transactions.” Development becomes more human with an increase in the consideration of the dignity of others, an orientation towards the spirit of poverty, the cooperation towards the common good, the will to promote peace.

“Then man can acknowledge the highest values and God himself, their
author and end. Finally and above all, there is faith-God’s gift to men of good will-and our loving unity in God, the Father of all men.”

These words of Pope Paul VI remind us that the common good is not to be defined as the “greatest good for the greatest number” (a dangerous utilitarian principle embraced by a number of so-called democracies). More correctly, it is a juridical or social order which enables every member of society to attain his or her fullest development economically, politically, culturally, socially and spiritually. Development must benefit the entire individual person, body and soul.

Christians should not hesitate to bring up the importance of the religious dimensions of human development. They should propose, without imposing, the truth that God has a plan of love for the human person. As stated in the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (34), “In the communion of love that is God, and in which the Three Divine Persons mutually love one another and are the One God, the human person is called to discover the origin and goal of his existence and of history. The Council Fathers, in the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes (24), teach that 'the Lord Jesus Christ, when praying to the Father 'that they may all be one...as we are one' (Jn 17:21-22), has opened up new horizons closed to human reason by implying that there is a certain parallel between the union existing among the divine Persons and the union of the children of God in truth and love. It follows, then, that if man is the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake, man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself’ (cf. Lk 17:33).”

In fact, Gaudium et Spes 24 and 25 has a blueprint that greatly exceeds the aspirations contained in the Millennium Development Goals. In a systematic manner, it presents the themes of culture, of economic and social life, of marriage and the family, of the political community, of peace and the community of peoples, in the light of a Christian anthropological outlook and of the Church's mission. The person is always the starting point and the viewpoint from which everything else is considered. The document constantly emphasizes the truth that man is the only creature that God willed for its own sake. For the first time, the Magisterium of the Church, at its highest level, speaks at great length about the different temporal aspects of Christian life. It should not come as a surprise that the
attention given by the Constitution to social, psychological, political, economic, moral and religious changes has stimulated an increase in the Church's pastoral concern for men's problems and its involvement in the world.

In addition to his oft-quoted definition of authentic human development, Pope Paul VI is also famous for another line in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (76): “Development is the new name of peace.” He outlines an integral development of man and of a development in solidarity with all humanity (21, 42). These two topics are to be considered the axes around which the Encyclical is structured. In wishing to convince his audience of the urgent need for action in solidarity, the Pope presents development as the “transition from less than human conditions to truly human ones” and indicates its characteristics. This transition is not limited to merely economic or technological dimensions, but implies for each person the acquisition of culture, the respect of the dignity of others, the acknowledgment of the highest good, the recognition of God Himself, the author and end of all blessings. Development that benefits everyone, that responds to the demands of justice on a global scale, that guarantees worldwide peace and makes it possible to achieve a “complete humanism” guided by spiritual values.

If development is the new name of peace, then human work is the main road to development, as has been amply demonstrated in the success stories of the East Asian economies described above. In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981), Pope John Paul II referred to work as the fundamental good of the human person, the primary element of economic activity and the key to the entire social question. *Laborem Exercens* (6) outlines a spirituality and ethic of work in the context of a profound theological and philosophical reflection. The Pope pointed out that work must not be understood only in the objective and material sense. One must also keep in mind its subjective dimension, insofar as it is always an expression of the person, however menial or humble the work may be, objectively speaking. Besides being a decisive paradigm for social life, work has all the dignity of being a context in which the person's natural and supernatural vocation must find fulfillment.
Another innovative insight contributed by Pope John Paul II to the means of attaining authentic human development is his addition of the “freedom of economic initiative” to the list of human rights. In his encyclical Centesimus Annus (1991), the Pope describes economic initiative as an expression of human intelligence and speaks of the necessity of responding to human needs in a creative and cooperative fashion (cf. n. 32). Creativity and cooperation are signs of the authentic concept of business competition: a competere, that is, a seeking together of the most appropriate solutions for responding in the best way possible to needs as they emerge. The sense of responsibility that arises from free economic initiative takes not only the form of an individual virtue required for individual human growth, but also of a social virtue that is necessary for the development of a community in solidarity. As the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states (n. 343), citing Centesimus Annus: “Important virtues are involved in this process, such as diligence, industriousness, prudence in undertaking reasonable risks, reliability and fidelity in interpersonal relationships, as well as courage in carrying out decisions which are difficult and painful but necessary, both for the overall working of a business and in meeting possible set-backs.”

Development Strategies Inspired by St. Josemaría Escrivá

Always united to the teaching authority of the Church, St. Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei, reinforced and in some instances anticipated the social doctrine of the Church in giving concrete solutions to the goals of authentic human development. Fifty three years before Laborem Exercens, St. Josemaría Escrivá had already started to preach about the sanctifying value of human work. In an interview published in the Spanish magazine Palabra (October 1967), St. Josemaría explained the meaning of “sanctifying work”: “The expression 'sanctifying work' involves fundamental concepts of the theology of Creation. What I have always taught over the last forty years, is that a Christian should do all honest human work, be it intellectual or manual, with the greatest perfection possible: with human perfection (professional competence) and with Christian perfection (for love of God's Will and as a service to mankind). Human work done in this manner, no matter how humble or insignificant it may seem, helps to shape the world in a Christian way. The world's
divine dimension is made more visible and our human labor is thus incorporated into the marvelous work of Creation and Redemption. It is raised to the order of grace. It is sanctified and becomes God's work, *operatio Dei, opus Dei*.”

Human work is completely indispensable for the personal development of each human being. As St. Josemaría used to repeat, each person must sanctify his work, sanctify himself in his work, and sanctify others through his work. But besides being a personal obligation work is also a communitarian task. It is a requirement of the common good. From the very beginning of his apostolic work in Opus Dei in 1928, St. Josemaría had already preached what would be stated in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (n. 264) almost five decades later: “No Christian, in light of the fact that he belongs to a united and fraternal community, should feel that he has the right not to work and to live at the expense of others (cf. 1Thes 3:6-12). Rather, all are charged by the Apostle Paul to make it a point of honor to work with their own hands so as ‘to be dependent on nobody’ (1 Thes 4:12), and to practice a solidarity which is also material by sharing the fruits of their labor with 'those in need' (Eph 4:28). Saint James defends the trampled rights of workers: 'Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts' (Jas 5:4). Believers are to undertake their work in the style of Christ and make it an occasion for Christian witness, commanding 'the respect of outsiders' (1Thes 4:12).”

St. Josemaría did much during his lifetime to teach and encourage numerous individuals all over the world to make use of their ordinary work to contribute to the common good. Some examples of these private initiatives imbued with the spirit of solidarity, which especially characterized the teachings of Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus*, are found in a series of publications entitled *The Grandeur of Ordinary Life*. This series was published by the University of the Holy Cross in Rome on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of St. Josemaría, in 2002. In an introduction to Volume XI of the series, Dr. Carlos Cavallé, referring to the very graphic phrase "Christian materialism" coined by St. Josemaría, wrote: “Christian humanism gives priority to
spiritual well-being, which is reached as the result of one's effort to achieve union with God. At the same time, however, Christian humanism insists on the inseparable synthesis between spiritual and material well-being, since it is precisely through created things and honest human activities carried out in the world that most ordinary Christians can and should reach union with God. This kind of 'Christian materialism' is at the center St. Josemaría's message.

“If we focus on the business world, we see that St. Josemaría's message is clear and sound. Pointing out the desire and the duty of all Christians to 'reconcile all things with God, placing Christ, by means of their work in the middle of the world, at the summit of all human activities, Blessed Josemaría is telling the corporate world and their executives that this desire to contribute from their business, each one according to his or her own possibilities to building a better society, and creating and distributing goods in a just and equitable way, should be combined with professionalism, a spirit of service which involves putting the needs of others first, and the noble aspiration to bring every human being to Christ. These are ideas that Blessed Josemaría not only preached all over the world, but which, as the Church solemnly declared, he also lived heroically.”

St. Josemaría captured perfectly the freedom of initiative highlighted in the writings of Pope John Paul II, especially in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987). But he saw this freedom, not only from the standpoint of the entrepreneur trying to achieve his legitimate profit by the production and sale of goods and services, but also as the right of businessmen to contribute to the common good through not-for-profit initiatives. He motivated people in business to establish business schools in many parts of the world whose mission is to train men and women of business who commit themselves to work for a just and humane society as they operate and expand their respective businesses with the utmost professional competence and social responsibility. The first one of these business schools was IESE (*Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Empresa*) Business School in Barcelona, Spain, whose establishment in 1958 was personally encouraged by St. Josemaría. Today, IESE Business School, the business faculty of the University of Navarre in Spain, is considered among the top business schools in the world, having been ranked number one among all schools
offering the Masters in Business Administration (MBA) Program by The Economist in 2005 and 2006. What distinguishes IESE Business School is the commitment to the common good that it tries to inculcate in all who participate in its manifold programs, as a consequence of St. Josemaría's teachings.

The following words of the present Dean, Dr. Jordi Canals, in the Introduction to the MBA Program brochure, captures well how IESE, inspired by St. Josemaría, has committed itself to the training of business leaders who have integrated the spirit of solidarity into their corporate mission: “IESE Business School has a proven track record of innovation. It was the first in Europe to establish a two-year MBA and the first in the world to offer a bilingual MBA. Today, IESE has secured its position as a top business school globally, with campuses in Barcelona and Madrid, and pioneering activities in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin American and the United States. Our mission is to transform business and society through management education and leadership development, creating a better world by developing better leaders: people with big aspirations and a spirit of service equipped with the skills and capabilities to make a positive difference.”

IESE’s experiences have been replicated all over the world by business schools such as the IPADE in Mexico, the IAE in Argentina, and the Lagos Business School in Nigeria, among others. In today’s fully globalized economy, business leaders can often be more effective in promoting the international common good than governmental organizations.

In the context of a developing country like the Philippines, I have been personally involved in another undertaking directly promoted by St. Josemaría in the late 1960s. I am referring to the Center for Research and Communication (CRC), a private think tank and graduate school in the Philippines that trained professional people in the field of business economics, mass media, politics and education who were completely conscious of their moral obligation to contribute to the common good of Philippine society. As I described in the same volume to which I referred above, in the series of publications on "The Grandeur of Ordinary Life," CRC was instrumental in encouraging professional people, especially those in business, to promote the common good, through the Makati Business
Club. This Club "arose from the efforts of a small group of business executives who received an intense formation in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church during the decade of the seventies in a top management course offered by CRC, where the doctrinal training of all program participants is entrusted to Opus Dei."

All the participants in CRC's programs became keenly aware of the principle of solidarity which businesses should exercise in promoting the good of the entire society, a recurring theme in the teachings of St. Josemaría. What they had heard from St. Josemaría was fully reinforced by the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, which clearly states that people should not regard material goods as belonging exclusively to themselves. Goods, while being privately owned in most cases, must be used for the benefit of all. Private property must always have a social function.

Established in 1981, the Makati Business Club now has over 800 members from the business community. Clearly distinguished from the traditional chamber of industry association that ordinarily works for the vested interests of particular groups, the MBC espouses causes for the common good, such as democratic reforms, eradication of mass poverty, or good governance. For the past twenty years it has played a major role in raising the consciousness of business people in the Philippines regarding their responsibility to use their talents and resources to promote the human development of each and every member of society.

The Training of Youth and Workers

The apple of the eye of St. Josemaría was the young generation. He encouraged a wide range of initiatives that prepared the young—in whatever profession or occupation—for their future work, and that helped them to see this work as a contribution to authentic human development. In full consonance with the doctrine contained in *Laborem Exercens* of Pope John Paul II, these projects in many parts of the world would be oriented toward either university students or young workers acquiring a technical education. Almost at the same time that CRC was being established in the Philippines, St. Josemaría asked an Italian engineer with a vast experience in the formation of university students to establish the Institute for University Cooperation (ICU in Italian). This organization would mobilize
the talents and generosity of thousands of university students all over the world to work for the uplifting of the underprivileged, especially in Latin America, Asia and Africa. In a paper that appeared in Volume IX of The Grandeur of Ordinary Life, the late Dr. Umberto Farri described the genesis of ICU: “In the spring of 1966, St. Josemaría asked me to be at the forefront of a task of formation which directly dealt with the training of university students at the international level. He believed that the experiences I had obtained during several years in the management of university residences, cultural centers and academies in different parts of the world could serve as a guiding thread that could help to define and resolve different problems faced by the universities all over the world and which need above all serene analysis and educational solutions. It was urgent to have a cooperative effort at the international level so that university students would take interest in their own problems, so that they would understand in a manner that is serene and constructive the different ways of seeing things.

“Without much ado, but with a profound exchange of ideas and experiences among the young university students coming from various educational centers in Italy and other European countries, and in order to respond to the suggestions of St. Josemaría, the participants in a Congress that took place in Villa Falconieri drafted the guidelines for action of the ICU, the Istituto per la Cooperazione Universitaria. ICU was to be an association of university people meant to facilitate international cooperation and development through training projects, research and teaching in order to face the new challenges of the world of the University throughout the globe, with special focus on the needs of the newly independent countries.”

From that moment on, ICU has been a channel for university students working under the supervision of experienced professional people to contribute their talents, material resources and time to social works in such developing countries as Peru, the Philippines, China and Vietnam.

Without trying to be exhaustive, a final example of how St. Josemaría was the source of inspiration for an undertaking that had far-reaching implications for rural life in many developing countries is the so-called Family Farm School. As discussed above in the discussion of development
models, there is a consensus among economists that mass poverty is directly correlated with rural poverty, or the inability of farmers and farm workers to eke out a decent living in the countryside. As in all economic sectors, the most crucial factor for addressing poverty in the rural area is human capital, and in particular the education and training of youth in the farming sector.

As recounted in great detail by Felipe González de Canales and Jesús Carnicero in the book entitled *Roturar y Sembrar* ("Plowing and Sowing"), St. Josemaría played a very important role in the spread of family farm schools in many regions of the developing world. “This concern for the folks in the countryside, for their dignity, was to be translated into the need to establish some projects that would enable the farmers to take root in the rural areas, avoiding in this way the temptation to seek in the urban areas what they are missing in the countryside. It became clear that the main beneficiaries of these projects, of this training had to be the young people, without neglecting the parents...

“Choosing the youth as the main targets of the work of the Family Farm Schools that would be created three or four years later had a simple rationale: to prevent them from abandoning the countryside, which would deprive the rural areas of their best resources, and at the same time making available to them the adequate professional and cultural means, so that they would be capable of providing for their future and that of their children.

“The Founder of Opus Dei had all these very clearly in his mind. Way back in 1930, he had already written about the work that could be undertaken by his children in Opus Dei together with many other persons in order to give dignity to the life and work of the families in the farming sector...

“St. Josemaría was very glad that the students would be formed in an environment of freedom and responsibility and that the monitors would reside with them and would educate them with authority but without authoritarianism. St. Josemaría saw the Family Farm Schools as an instrument to help the farmers through the training that would be given to them and for the dynamism that would be fostered in the rural sector by means of its associative character and social stimulus. That work that you are trying to implant must make you undertake a great catechesis in order
to reach, through the Associations of Parents, all the corners of the rural environment.' And he stressed the fact that, because of its extension and implication for individual persons and its repercussions on the entire farming community, such an initiative would be a personal undertaking of those involved in the Family Farm School and not a corporate undertaking of Opus Dei.”

Conclusion

The initiatives directly promoted by St. Josemaría and the countless others that have mushroomed all over the world as a result of the spirit he gave to Opus Dei conform completely with the ideal of authentic human development as defined in the social encyclicals: development for all men and for the whole man. He always insisted that among a hundred souls, a Christian must be interested in helping all one hundred. And much before the phrase “sustainable development” became fashionable, St. Josemaría already had in mind the material and spiritual welfare not only of the present generation but of all human beings who will come to occupy the planet earth until the end of the world. As he told journalist Ted Szulc of the New York Times in an interview on October 7, 1966 (Conversations with Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer, n. 56): “Opus Dei is still very young. Thirty-nine years is barely a beginning for an institution. Our aim is to collaborate with all other Christians in the great mission of being witnesses of Christ's Gospel, to recall that it can vivify any human situation. The task that awaits us is immense. It is a sea without shores, for as long as there are men on earth, no matter how much the techniques of production may change, they will have some type of work that can be offered to God and sanctified. With God's grace Opus Dei wants to teach them how to make their work an act of service to all men of every condition, race and religion. Serving men in this way, they will serve God.”

Selected Bibliography

Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter Deus Caritas Est.

Pope John Paul II, Laborem Exercens, 1981.

______________, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1987.

Gaudium et Spes, Documents of Vatican II.


St. Josemaría Escriva, Christ Is Passing By, Scepter Press.


Paul Krugman, The Myth of Asia’s Miracle, web mit.edu/krugman/www/myth.html

Felipe González de Canales y Jesús Carnicero, Roturar y Sembrar, Rialp 2005


Ángel Rodríguez Luño, "Firming One's Conscience on Social and Political Matters as Seen in the Teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá," Romana (Jan. to June, 1997)