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

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature. This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.
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We have just celebrated the 50th anniversary of the homily Passionately Loving the World, given by St. Josemaría on October 8, 1967 during an outdoor Mass celebrated on the campus of the University of Navarra in Spain. This homily was prepared with special care by the founder of Opus Dei, who summed up central aspects of his spiritual message on the sanctification of work and daily life.

Work and the home, study and research, human love and the family, rest and sports, art and culture in all its forms, St. Josemaría tells us, are a true setting for Christian life and an opportunity for an encounter with God. “Your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind,” the founder of Opus Dei insists.

God passionately loves the world that has come from his hands. In the place where he himself became flesh, he waits for us every day. Jesus teaches us, by the example of his thirty years of hidden life, that work is a means of sanctification. Christ acts in each baptized person. His love transforms the world from within, through work enlivened by charity, shaped by the Christian virtues and humanly well done. That is why “when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God.”

In our hands, as in those of Christ, work can become prayer and service to all men and women. Thus everyday situations, even those that might seem trivial, when transformed by love become a means and opportunity for a continuous encounter with God. For “there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations,” St. Josemaría tells us in that homily.

“In and from the ordinary, material, and secular activities of human life,” we Christians have to reconcile all things with God, placing Christ at the summit of all human activities. “In the laboratory, in the operating theater, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the
workshop, in the fields, in the home, and in all the immense panorama of work,” God awaits us every day.
HOLY SEE

- The Roman Pontiff
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The Roman Pontiff

Homily at the Mass With Young People, St. Mary’s Cathedral, Rangoon, Myanmar (November 11, 2017)

As my visit to your beautiful country draws to a close, I join you in thanking God for the many graces we have received in these days. Looking out at you, the young people of Myanmar, and all those who are united with us outside this cathedral, I want to share with you a phrase from today’s first reading that resonates within me. Taken from the prophet Isaiah, it was echoed by St. Paul in his letter to the young Christian community in Rome. Let us listen once again to those words: “The footsteps of those who bring good news are a welcome sound” (Rom 10:15; cf. Is 52:7).

Dear young people of Myanmar, hearing your young voices and listening to you sing today, I want to apply those words to you. Yes, you are “a welcome sound”; you are a beautiful and encouraging sight, for you bring us “good news,” the good news of your youth, your faith and your enthusiasm. Indeed, you are good news, because you are concrete signs of the Church’s faith in Jesus Christ, who brings us a joy and a hope that will never die.

Some people ask how it is possible to speak of good news when so many people around us are suffering? Where is the good news when so much injustice, poverty and misery cast a shadow over us and our world? But I want a very clear message to go out from this place. I want people to know that you, the young men and women of Myanmar, are not afraid to believe in the good news of God’s mercy, because it has a name and a face: Jesus Christ. As messengers of this good news, you are ready to bring a word of hope to the Church, to your own country, and to the wider world. You are ready to bring good news for your suffering brothers and sisters who need your prayers and your solidarity, but also your enthusiasm for human rights, for justice and for the growth of that “love and peace” which Jesus brings.
But I also have a challenge to set before you. Did you listen carefully to the first reading? There St. Paul repeats three times the word *unless*. It is a little word, but it asks us to think about our place in God’s plan. In effect, Paul asks three questions, and I want to put them to each of you personally. First, *how are people to believe* in the Lord unless they have heard about him? Second, how are people to hear about the Lord unless they have a messenger, someone to bring the good news? And third, how can they have a messenger unless one is sent? (Rom 10:14-15).

I would like all of you to think deeply about these questions. But don’t be worried! As a loving “father” (or better, a “grandfather”), I don’t want you to wrestle with these questions alone. Let me offer a few thoughts that can guide you on your journey of faith, and help you to discern what it is that the Lord is asking of you.

St. Paul’s first question is: “How are people to believe in the Lord unless they have heard about him?” Our world is full of many sounds, so many distractions, that can drown out God’s voice. If others are to hear and believe in him, they need to find him in people who are *authentic*. People who know how to listen! That is surely what you want to be! But only the Lord can help you to be genuine, so talk to him in prayer. Learn to hear his voice, quietly speaking in the depths of your heart.

But talk also to the saints, our friends in heaven who can inspire us. Like St. Andrew, whose feast we keep today. Andrew was a humble fisherman who became a great martyr, a witness to the love of Jesus. But before he became a martyr, he made his share of mistakes, and he needed to be patient, and to learn gradually how to be a true disciple of Christ. So do not be afraid to learn from your own mistakes! Let the saints lead you to Jesus and teach you to put your lives in his hands. You know that Jesus is full of mercy. So *share with him all that you hold in your hearts*: your fears and your worries, as well as your dreams and your hopes. Cultivate your interior life, as you would tend a garden or a field. This takes time; it takes patience. But like a farmer who waits for the crops to grow, if you wait the Lord will make you bear much fruit, a fruit you can then share with others.

Paul’s second question is: “How are they to hear about Jesus without a messenger?” Here is a great task entrusted in a special way to young people:
to be “missionary disciples,” messengers of the good news of Jesus, above all to your contemporaries and friends. Do not be afraid to make a ruckus, to ask questions that make people think! And don’t worry if sometimes you feel that you are few and far between. The Gospel always grows from small beginnings. So make yourselves heard. I want you to shout! But not with your voices. No! I want you to shout with your lives, with your hearts, and in this way to be signs of hope to those who need encouragement, a helping hand to the sick, a welcome smile to the stranger, a kindly support to the lonely.

Paul’s last question is: “How can people have a messenger unless one is sent?” At the end of this Mass we will all be sent forth, to take with us the gifts we have received and to share them with others. This can be a little daunting, since we don’t always know where Jesus may be sending us. But he never sends us out without also walking at our side, and always just a little in front, leading us into new and wonderful parts of his kingdom.

How does our Lord send St. Andrew and his brother Simon Peter in today’s Gospel? “Follow me!” he tells them (Mt 4:19). That is what it means to be sent: to follow Christ, and not to charge ahead on our own! The Lord will invite some of you to follow him as priests, and in this way to become “fishers of men.” Others he will call to become religious or consecrated men and women. And yet others he will call to the married life, to be loving fathers and mothers. Whatever your vocation, I urge you: be brave, be generous and, above all, be joyful!

Here in this beautiful cathedral dedicated to Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception, I encourage you to look to Mary. When she said “yes” to the message of the angel, she was young, like yourselves. Yet she had the courage to trust in the “good news” she had heard, and to express it in a life of faithful dedication to her vocation, total self-giving, and complete trust in God’s loving care. Like Mary, may all of you be gentle but courageous in bringing Jesus and his love to others.

Dear young people, with great affection I commend all of you, and your families, to her maternal intercession. And I ask you, please, to remember to pray for me.

God bless Myanmar! [Myanmar pyi ko Payarthakin Kaung gi pei pa sei]
Letter on the Occasion Of the International Conference “From Populorum Progressio to Laudato si”

Venerable Brother
Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development

In these days, convened by the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the representatives of the various trade union organizations and workers’ movements met in Rome to reflect on and discuss the theme “From Populorum progressio to Laudato si’. Work and workers’ movements at the center of integral, sustainable and fraternal human development.” I thank your Eminence and your collaborators, and cordially greet you all.

Blessed Paul VI, in his Encyclical Populorum progressio, states that “development … cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded,” that is, it must fully promote the entire person, and also all people and populations.[1] And since “a person flourishes in work,”[2] the social doctrine of the Church has highlighted on several occasions that this is not one issue among many, but rather the “essential key” to the whole social question.[3] Indeed, work “is the condition not only for economic development but also for the cultural and moral development of persons, the family, society.”[4]

As a basis for human realization, work is a key to spiritual development. According to Christian tradition, it is more than merely “doing”; it is, above all, a mission. We collaborate in the creative work of God when, through our work, we cultivate and preserve creation (cf. Gen 2:15);[5] we share in the Spirit of Jesus, his redemptive mission, when by means of our activity we give sustenance to our families and respond to the
needs of our neighbor. Jesus, who “devoted most of the years of his life on
earth to manual work at the carpenter’s bench,”[6] and consecrated his
public ministry to freeing people from sickness, suffering and death,[7]
invites us to follow his steps through work. In this way, “every worker is the
hand of Christ that continues to create and to do good.”[8]

Work, as well as being essential to the realization of a person, is also a
key to social development. “Work is work with others and work for
others,”[9] and the fruit of this act offers “occasions for exchange,
relationship and encounter.”[10] Every day, millions of people cooperate in
development through their manual or intellectual activities, in large cities
or rural areas, with sophisticated or simple assignments. All are expressions
of a concrete love for the promotion of the common good, of a civil love.[11]

Work cannot be considered as a commodity or a mere tool in the
production chain of goods and services,[12] but rather, since it is the
foundation for development, it takes priority over any other factor of
production, including capital.[13] Hence the ethical imperative of
“defending jobs,”[14] and of creating new ones in proportion to the increase
in economic viability,[15] as well as ensuring the dignity of the work
itself.[16]

However, as Paul VI observed, one must not exaggerate the “mystique”
of work. The person “is not only work”; there are other human needs that
we must cultivate and consider, such as family, friends, and rest.[17] It is
important, therefore, to remember that any work must be at the service of
the person, not the person at the service of work,[18] and this implies that
we must question structures that damage or exploit people, families,
societies and our mother earth.

When the economic development model is based solely on the material
aspect of the person, or when it benefits some people only, or when it
damages the environment, it provokes a cry, from both the poor and from
the earth, “pleading that we take another course.”[19] This path, to be
sustainable, must place the person and work at the center of development,
but integrating work and environmental concerns. Everything is
interconnected, and we have to respond in a holistic way.[20]
A valid contribution to this integral response from workers is to show to the world what you know well: the link between the three Ls: land, lodgings and labor [the three Ts: tierra, techo y trabajo ]. We do not want a system of economic development that increases the number of unemployed, or homeless, or landless. The fruits of the land and of labor are for all, and “should be in abundance for all in like manner.” This theme acquires special relevance with reference to land ownership, in both rural and urban areas, and the legal provisions that guarantee access to it. And in this regard, the quintessential criterion of justice is the “universal destination of goods,” whose universal right to use is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order.”

It is pertinent to remember this today, as we prepare to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, and also at a time when economic, social and cultural rights demand greater consideration. But the promotion and the defense of such rights cannot be realized at the expense of the earth and of future generations. The interdependence between work and the environment obliges us to reset the kinds of employment we want to see in the future and those that must be replaced or relocated, such as the activities of the combustible fossil fuel industry, which pollutes. A shift from the current energy industry to a more renewable one is unavoidable to protect our mother earth. But it is unjust for this movement to be paid for with the labor and homes of those most in need. Or rather, the cost of extracting energy from the earth, a universal common good, cannot fall on workers and their families. Trade unions and movements that know the connection between labor, homes, and land have a great contribution to give in this respect, and must do so.

Another important contribution of workers for sustainable development is that of highlighting another triple connection: this time between labor, time and technology. With regard to time, we know that the “continued acceleration of changes” and the “intensified pace of life and work” which may be called “rapidification,” favor neither sustainable development nor its quality. We also know that technology, from which we receive many benefits and many opportunities, can be an obstacle to
sustainable development when associated with a paradigm of power, rule and manipulation.\textsuperscript{[27]}

In the current context, known as the fourth industrial revolution, characterized by this “rapidification” and sophisticated digital technology, robotics and artificial intelligence,\textsuperscript{[28]} the world is in need of voices such as ours. It is workers who, in their struggle for a just working day, learned to face a utilitarian, short-term and manipulative mentality. For this mindset, it does not matter if there is social and environmental degradation; it does not matter what one uses and what one discards; it does not matter if there is forced child labor or if a city’s river is polluted. The only thing that matters is immediate profit. Everything is justified on the basis of the god of money.\textsuperscript{[29]} Given that many of you have contributed to combating this pathology in the past, today you are well placed to correct it in the future. I beg you to confront this difficult theme and to show us, in accordance with your prophetic and creative mission,\textsuperscript{[30]}

that a culture of encounter and care is possible. Today there is at stake not only the dignity of the employed, but also the dignity of the labor of all people, and the home of all people, our mother earth.

Therefore, and as I have affirmed in the Encyclical \textit{Laudato si’}, we need a sincere and profound dialogue to redefine the idea of labor and the route of development.\textsuperscript{[31]} But we cannot be ingenuous and think that dialogue will occur naturally and without conflict. There is a need for people who can work tirelessly to bring to life processes of dialogue at all levels: at the level of the business enterprise, the trade union, the movement; at the level of the neighborhood, the city, regional, national, and global. In this dialogue on development, all voices and visions are necessary, but especially the least-heard voices, those of the peripheries. I know the effort made by many people to make these voices emerge in the places where decisions are taken regarding work. I ask you to take on this noble commitment.

Experience tells us that, for a dialogue to be fruitful, it is necessary to start out from what we have in common. To dialogue on development it is useful to remember what unites us as human beings: our origin, belonging and destination.\textsuperscript{[32]} On this basis, we can renew the universal solidarity of all peoples,\textsuperscript{[33]} including solidarity with the peoples of tomorrow. In
addition, we will be able to find a way of leaving behind the market—and finance—driven economy that does not accord to labor the value it deserves, and guide it towards another model in which human activity is at the center.[34]

Trade unions and workers’ movements must by vocation be experts in solidarity. But to contribute to development in solidarity, I beg you to be on your guard against three temptations. The first is that of collectivist individualism, that is, protecting only the interests of those you represent, ignoring the rest of the poor, the marginalized and those excluded from the system. It is necessary to invest in a solidarity that goes beyond the walls of your associations, that protects the rights of workers, but above all of those whose rights are not even recognized. “Syndicate” is a beautiful word that derives from the Greek dikein (to make justice) and syn (together).[35] Please, make justice together, but in solidarity with all marginalized people.

My second request is to guard yourselves against the social cancer of corruption.[36] Just as, on certain occasions, “politics itself is responsible for the disrepute in which it is held, on account of corruption,”[37] the same can be said of unions. It is terrible to see the corruption of those who call themselves trade unionists, who make agreements with business leaders and are not interested in workers, leaving thousands of colleagues without work; this is a scourge that undermines relationships and destroys many lives and many families. Do not allow any illicit interests to ruin your mission, so necessary in the time in which we live. The world and the whole of creation aspire with hope to be freed of corruption (cf. Rom 8:18-22). Be makers of solidarity and hope for all. Do not let yourselves be corrupted!

The third request is not to forget your role of educating consciences in solidarity, respect and care. The awareness of the labor and environmental crisis needs to be translated into new styles of life and public policies. To give life to such styles of life and law, we need institutions such as yours to cultivate social virtues that favor the flourishing of a new global solidarity, which enables us to flee from individualism and consumerism, and which motivate us to question the myths of indefinite material progress and a market without just rules.[38]
I hope that this Congress will produce a synergy able to propose concrete lines of action, starting from the perspective of workers, ways leading to human, integral, sustainable, and fraternal development.

I thank you once again, Cardinal, and all those who have participated and offered their contribution, and I send my blessing to all.

From the Vatican, November 23, 2017.

Francis


[8] St. Ambrose, De obitu Valentiniani consolatio, 62, cit. in Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 265.


[15] Cf. ibid, 204.
[16] Cf. ibid, 205.
[17] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers’ Unions (CISL).*
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Cf. ibid., 102–206.
[29] It is a dangerous “practical relativism”; cf. Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’,* 122.
[30] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers’ Unions (CISL).*
[31] Cf. nos. 3 and 4.
[33] Cf. ibid., 14, 58, 159, 172, 227.
[34] Cf. *Address to the Italian Confederation of Workers’ Unions (CISL)*
[35] Cf. ibid.
On the First World Day of the Poor, The Vatican (November 19, 2017)

We have the joy of breaking the bread of God’s word, and shortly, we will have the joy of breaking and receiving the Bread of the Eucharist, food for life’s journey. All of us, none excluded, need this, for all of us are beggars when it comes to what is essential: God’s love, which gives meaning to our lives and a life without end. So today too, we lift up our hands to him, asking to receive his gifts.

The Gospel parable speaks of gifts. It tells us that we have received talents from God, “according to the ability of each” (Mt 25:15). Before all else, let us realize this: we do have talents; in God’s eyes, we are “talented.” Consequently, no one can think that he or she is useless, so poor as to be incapable of giving something to others. We are chosen and blessed by God, who wants to fill us with his gifts, more than any father or mother does with their own children. And God, in whose eyes no child can be neglected, entrusts to each of us a mission.

Indeed, as the loving and demanding Father that he is, he gives us responsibility. In the parable, we see that each servant is given talents to use wisely. But whereas the first two servants do what they are charged, the third does not make his talents bear fruit; he gives back only what he had received. “I was afraid,” he says, “and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours” (v. 25). As a result, he is harshly rebuked as “wicked and lazy” (v. 26). What made the Master displeased with him? To use a word that may sound a little old-fashioned but is still timely, I would say it was his omission. His evil was that of failing to do good. All too often, we have the idea that we haven’t done anything wrong, and so we rest content, presuming that we are good and just. But in this way we risk acting like the unworthy servant: he did no wrong, he didn’t
waste the talent, in fact he kept it carefully hidden in the ground. But to do no wrong is not enough. God is not an inspector looking for unstamped tickets; he is a Father looking for children to whom he can entrust his property and his plans (cf. v. 14). It is sad when the Father of love does not receive a generous response of love from his children, who do no more than keep the rules and follow the commandments, like hired hands in the house of the Father (cf; Lk 15:17).

The unworthy servant, despite receiving a talent from the Master who loves to share and multiply his gifts, guarded it jealously; he was content to keep it safe. But someone concerned only to preserve and maintain the treasures of the past is not being faithful to God. Instead, the parable tells us, the one who adds new talents is truly “faithful” (vv. 21 and 23), because he sees things as God does; he does not stand still, but instead, out of love, takes risks. He puts his life on the line for others; he is not content to keep things as they are. One thing alone does he overlook: his own interest. That is the only right “omission.”

Omission is also the great sin where the poor are concerned. Here it has a specific name: indifference. It is when we say, “That doesn’t regard me; it’s not my business; it’s society’s problem.” It is when we turn away from a brother or sister in need, when we change channels as soon as a disturbing question comes up, when we grow indignant at evil but do nothing about it. God will not ask us if we felt righteous indignation, but whether we did some good.

How, in practice can we please God? When we want to please someone dear to us, for example by giving a gift, we need first to know that person’s tastes, lest the gift prove more pleasing to the giver than to the recipient. When we want to offer something to the Lord, we can find his tastes in the Gospel. Immediately following the passage that we heard today, Jesus says, “Truly I tell you that, just as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). These least of our brethren, whom he loves dearly, are the hungry and the sick, the stranger and the prisoner, the poor and the abandoned, the suffering who receive no help, the needy who are cast aside. On their faces we can imagine seeing Jesus’ own face; on their lips, even if pursed in pain, we can hear his words: “This is my body” (Mt 26:26). In the poor, Jesus knocks on the doors of our heart, thirsting
for our love. When we overcome our indifference and, in the name of Jesus, we give of ourselves for the least of his brethren, we are his good and faithful friends, with whom he loves to dwell. God greatly appreciates the attitude described in today’s first reading: that of the “good wife,” who “opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy” (Prov 31:10, 20). Here we see true goodness and strength: not in closed fists and crossed arms, but in ready hands outstretched to the poor, to the wounded flesh of the Lord.

There, in the poor, we find the presence of Jesus, who, though rich, became poor (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). For this reason, in them, in their weakness, a “saving power” is present. And if in the eyes of the world they have little value, they are the ones who open to us the way to heaven; they are our “passport to paradise.” For us it is an evangelical duty to care for them, as our real riches, and to do so not only by giving them bread, but also by breaking with them the bread of God’s word, which is addressed first to them. To love the poor means to combat all forms of poverty, spiritual and material.

And it will also do us good. Drawing near to the poor in our midst will touch our lives. It will remind us of what really counts: to love God and our neighbor. Only this lasts forever, everything else passes away. What we invest in love remains, the rest vanishes. Today we might ask ourselves: “What counts for me in life? Where am I making my investments?” In fleeting riches, with which the world is never satisfied, or in the wealth bestowed by God, who gives eternal life? This is the choice before us: to live in order to gain things on earth, or to give things away in order to gain heaven. Where heaven is concerned, what matters is not what we have, but what we give, for “those who store up treasures for themselves, do not grow rich in the sight of God” (Lk 12:21). So let us not seek for ourselves more than we need, but rather what is good for others, and nothing of value will be lacking to us. May the Lord, who has compassion for our poverty and needs, and bestows his talents upon us, grant us the wisdom to seek what really matters, and the courage to love, not in words but in deeds.

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Torna ai contenuti
The Roman Curia

Motu Proprio: Maiorem hac Dilectionem (July 11, 2017)

“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).

Worthy of special consideration and honor are those Christians who, following more closely the footsteps and teachings of the Lord Jesus, have voluntarily and freely offered their life for others and persevered with this determination unto death.

Certainly the heroic offering of life, inspired and sustained by charity, expresses a true, complete and exemplary imitation of Christ, and thus is deserving of that admiration that the community of faithful customarily reserves to those who have voluntarily accepted the martyrdom of blood or have exercised Christian virtues to a heroic degree.

With the support of the favorable opinion expressed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints which, in its Plenary Session on 27 September 2016, carefully studied whether these Christians are deserving of beatification, I establish that the following norms be observed:

ART. 1

The offer of life is a new cause for the beatification and canonization procedure, distinct from the causes based on martyrdom and on the heroism of virtues.

ART. 2

The offer of life, in order that it be valid and effective for the beatification of a Servant of God, must respond to the following criteria:

a) a free and voluntary offer of life and heroic acceptance propter caritatem of a certain and untimely death;

b) a nexus between the offer of life and premature death;
c) the exercise, at least as ordinarily possible, of Christian virtues before the offer of life and, then, unto death;

d) the existence of a reputation of holiness and of signs, at least after death;

e) the necessity of a miracle for beatification, occurring after the death of the Servant of God and through his or her intercession.

ART. 3


ART. 4

The Positio on the offer of life must respond to the dubium: An constet de heroica oblatione vitae usque ad mortem propter caritatem necnon de virtutibus christianis, saltem in gradu ordinario, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur.

ART. 5

The following articles of the said Apostolic Constitution are thus modified:

—Art. 1: “It is the right of diocesan Bishops or Bishops of the Eastern Rite and others who have the same powers in law, within the limits of their own jurisdiction, either ex officio or upon the request of individual members of the faithful or of legitimate groups and their representatives, to inquire about the life, virtues, the offer of life or martyrdom and reputation of sanctity, of the offer of life or martyrdom, alleged miracles, as well as, if it be the case, ancient cult of the Servant of God, whose canonization is sought.”

—Art. 2.5: “The inquiry into alleged miracles is to be conducted separately from the inquiry into virtues, the offer of life or martyrdom.”

—Art. 7.1: “To study the causes entrusted to them, together with collaborators from outside the Congregation, and to prepare the Positions on
virtues, on the offer of life or on martyrdom”.

—Art. 13.2: “If the meeting judges that the cause was conducted according to the norms of law, it decides to which Relator the cause is to be assigned; the Relator, then, together with a collaborator from outside the Congregation, will prepare the Position on virtues, on the offer of life or on martyrdom according to the rules of critical hagiography.”

ART. 6

The following Articles of the said Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopi facendis in Causis Sanctorum are thus modified:

—Art. 7: “A cause can be recent or ancient; it is called recent if the martyrdom or virtues or the offer of life of the Servant of God can be proved through the oral depositions of eye witnesses; it is ancient, however, when the proofs for martyrdom or virtues can be brought to light only from written sources.”

—Art. 10.1: “In both recent and ancient causes, a biography of any historical import of the Servant of God, should such exist, or otherwise an accurate, chronologically arranged report on the life and deeds of the Servant of God, on his virtues or on his offer of life or martyrdom, on his reputation of sanctity and of signs. Nor should anything be omitted which seems to be contrary or less favorable to the cause.”

—Art. 10.3: “In recent causes only, a list of persons who can help bring to light the truth about the virtues or the offer of life or the martyrdom of the Servant of God, and about his reputation of sanctity or of signs. Those with contrary opinions must also be included.”

Art. 15. a): “Once the report has been accepted, the Bishop is to hand over to the promotor of justice or to another expert everything gathered up to that point so that he might formulate the interrogatories most effective in searching out and discovering the truth about the life of the Servant of God, his virtues, his offer of life or martyrdom, his reputation of holiness, of the offer of life or of martyrdom.”

Art. 15.b) “In ancient causes, however, the interrogatories are only to consider the reputation of sanctity, of the offer of life or martyrdom existing until
the present as well as, if it be the case, the cult given to the Servant of God in more recent times.”

Art. 19: “In order to prove the martyrdom or the practice of virtues or the offer of life and the reputation of signs of the Servant of God who belonged to any institute of consecrated life, a significant number of the proposed witnesses must be from outside the Institute unless, on account of the particular life of the Servant of God, this should prove impossible.”

Art. 32: “The inquiry on miracles is to be instructed separately from the inquiry on virtues or the offer of life or martyrdom and is to be conducted according to the norms which follow.”

Art. 36: “Any solemn celebrations or panegyric speeches about Servants of God whose sanctity of life is still being legitimately examined are prohibited in Churches. Furthermore, one must also refrain, even outside of Church, from any acts which could mislead the faithful into thinking that the inquiry conducted by the Bishop into the life of the Servant of God and his virtues or martyrdom or offer of life carries with it the certitude that the Servant of God will be one day canonized.”

All that I have deliberated with this Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio, I order be observed in all its parts, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even should it merit particular mention, and I establish that it be promulgated by publication in L’Osservatore Romano, entering into force on the same day of its promulgation and that, subsequently, it be inserted into the Acta Apostolicae Sedis.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on July 11, Fifth Year of my Pontificate.

FRANCIS

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Activities of the Prelate

A meeting with Faithful of Opus Dei from the Delegation of Rome (December 3, 2017)

On Sunday December 3, the Prelate of Opus Dei met with faithful of Opus Dei who live in Rome. The gatherings were held at ELIS, a training center located in the Tiburtino neighborhood. Msgr. Ocáriz invited all those present to take advantage of the liturgical time: “Your entire day should be in some way like this time of Advent, a time of waiting, a time to foster the desire to find Christ.” “The time of Advent,” he said, “is particularly apt for being concerned more about others and less about oneself.”

This service to others is carried out mainly through work: “We can turn work into apostolate, helping the others. Sometimes we lack time, but there is always an opportunity to exchange a smile or dedicate a few words to a friend. A person who works well is concerned about others.”
The pastoral trips that the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, made during the summer began in Madrid. On June 29, the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, he went to the parish of St. Josemaría (diocese of Getafe) to pray and ask for prayers for Pope Francis, “who carries on his shoulders the weight of the whole Church and the world.” On the same day he visited the Fuenllana and Andel schools, and encouraged the teaching staff “to always give priority to the families” in the educational activities that they carry out.

On June 30, in the morning, he visited the Los Tilos school and the parish of St. Albert the Great, in the neighborhood of Vallecas, where Venerable Isidore Zorzano is buried, one of the first faithful of Opus Dei. Together with the people gathered in the church, he entrusted to Isidoro Zorzano vocations to the priesthood, “so needed for the whole Church.” In the afternoon, in a meeting with faithful of Opus Dei, he stressed the importance of the centrality of Christ in all aspects of life: social relationships, one’s profession, family, friendships, etc. And he encouraged them to discover our Lord in reading the Gospel: “God has become visible in Jesus Christ, and his life is present in the Gospel,” he told them.

On July 1, the Prelate held several family gatherings with people of Opus Dei. He reminded them that a Christian’s life is grounded on love for Christ: “Our life is not a sugary novel, but an epic poem, always confronted with cheerfulness, because we rely on our Lord’s help. We are never alone. Through the communion of saints we form one Body with Christ.” In another talk, held at Retamar high school, he underscored the value of personal testimony for evangelization, “which is much more effective than theoretical discourses.”

On Sunday July 2, Msgr. Ocáriz took part in two meetings with faithful of the Prelature. He encouraged them to make compatible their family life, the demands of their work, and their spiritual life. He reminded them of the need to put Christ at the center of their whole day, through prayer and Eucharistic piety, “because that’s where we receive the true
strength to care for the family, sanctify work, and love people.” The Prelate also said that “love for freedom, an inheritance from St. Josemaría,” should be shown especially in educating children, trying to combine affection, friendship, demands, and prayer.

On his last day in Madrid, he visited the Laguna Hospice, a center specializing in end-of-life palliative care. After spending time with some of the sick people, he thanked the professionals at the medical center for their work and encouraged them to consider that by their work they are caring for the suffering flesh of Christ, as Pope Francis stresses, also when their task demands more effort and fatigue sets in: “See Christ in each person and in each moment,” the Prelate advised them.

Portugal, from July 4 to 8

On Tuesday July 4, Msgr. Ocáriz arrived at the Marian shrine of Fatima, where the regional vicar of Opus Dei in Portugal, Msgr. José Rafael Espírito Santo, awaited him. After placing a bouquet of flowers at our Lady’s feet, he remained recollected in prayer and entrusted to Mary the needs of the whole Church. Afterwards, he greeted some married couples and chatted with a group of students who were volunteering in various healthcare centers in the vicinity of the shrine.

On July 5, at the Enxomil Conference Center, the Prelate met with a group of priests from various dioceses, priests of the Prelature, and seminarians. In the afternoon he had two get-togethers with faithful of Opus Dei and also greeted three of the first women of the Work in Portugal. In the evening, in Porto, he gave a conference on his pastoral letter summing up the conclusions of the recent General Congress.

On July 6, the Prelate was received by Bishop António Francisco dos Santos of Oporto, in the episcopal palace. He dedicated the afternoon to meetings with faithful of the Prelature. At the end of the day he had several get-togethers with groups of young people in the sports center at the Horizonte school. He also met with a group of people who are promoting the construction of the new center for a youth club in Braga.

On his last day in Portugal, Msgr. Ocáriz spoke with two large groups of the faithful of the Prelature in the auditorium of the Cupertino de Miranda Foundation in Oporto. “In all of life’s situations,” the Prelate told
them, “our way of reacting should be the way Christ reacted.” This is possible “through prayer and the Eucharist, for in the Eucharist we are transformed into what we receive.” He recalled that the Holy Father encouraged him, and through him all the faithful of the Work, “to look after the vast periphery of the middle classes, who just manage to make ends meet, and who sometimes are so far from God,” without forgetting about the poor. In these meetings, as in all those he held in Portugal, he asked people to pray for the Pope and his intentions.

Barcelona, from July 13 to 17

Msgr. Ocáriz spent four days in Barcelona, during which he spoke about the joy of Christian life, building up the Church, and bringing God’s love to all mankind. After visiting the archbishop of the city, Cardinal Juan José Omella, he had several meetings with families and members of Opus Dei in the Xaloc school, and visited some sick people. “Let us not wait for extraordinary circumstances to do all we can to help and show affection for others; we have to be willing at every moment to serve others, seeing Jesus in them,” the Prelate insisted. He asked for prayers “for all the sick of the world,” who give witness by their lives to “the logic of the Cross,” “where Christ has shown in the highest way God’s love for us.”

The Prelate visited El Raval, one of the poorest neighborhoods of Barcelona, where he greeted volunteers and those responsible for Braval and Terral, two social initiatives that provide social and educational support for young immigrants and their families. These initiatives grew up around the church of Santa María de Montalegre. There, he wanted to pray before the grave of the servant of God José María Hernández Garnica, one of the first three priests of Opus Dei, whose process of canonization is underway. He also prayed in the oratory of Santa María de Bonaigua, in the crypt of Montse Grases, a young Barcelona woman who Pope Francis declared venerable on April 27, 2016.

He took advantage of his stay in Barcelona to spend time with some of the people who, in many cases encouraged by St. Josemaría, helped begin educational centers that entrust the Christian formation they provide to the Prelature. Educational centers he visited included Pineda, Xaloc, Canigó
and the University Clinic of Dentistry at the International University of Catalonia.

Following in the footsteps of St. Josemaría, who on his many visits to Barcelona gave expression to his deep devotion to our Lady, Msgr. Ocáriz went to pray before Our Lady of Mercy, the patroness of the city.

*Paris, from August 1 to 5*

The first meeting with the faithful of Opus Dei in Paris took place a few hours after his arrival, on Wednesday August 1. That same day Msgr. Ocáriz visited Fontneuve, a center of the Prelature that offers spiritual and cultural activities for young women. “Christians are called to be joyful, to have good humor, and to spread peace around them. Why? Because they are beloved children of God,” he told them. With words of St. Josemaría, Msgr. Ocáriz reminded them that one can also be cheerful in difficult moments, with the help of prayer. Afterwards, he met with a group of people at Garnelles, a cultural center close to the river Seine.

On August 2, Msgr. Ocáriz went to Couvrelles conference center, where some faithful of Opus Dei from France, Italy, Philippines, Spain and the Middle East were taking part in a course of Christian formation. The people there told him about various social and apostolic initiatives being carried out in their own countries. Msgr. Ocáriz reminded them of the effectiveness of the communion of saints, thanks to which we can all help one another. “We are never alone: each of our actions, each of our prayers has an impact on the lives of the rest.”

On August 4, in the afternoon, the Prelate visited the chapel of the Miraculous Medal in Paris. There he greeted the Sisters of Charity who welcome the faithful and went up to the second floor of the chapel to pray the rosary. The previous day, he had shared with several people the intentions he wanted to entrust to our Lady: the Church and the Pope, the faithful of Opus Dei and their apostolic initiatives all over the world. He also stressed the importance of praying for the Holy Father, who has been entrusted with an important mission: “The First Vatican Council made clear that the Pope’s mission is to strengthen the unity of Catholics. His mission therefore is quite difficult. To achieve it, he needs our prayer and fidelity.”
Msgr. Ocáriz also went to the Spanish parish in Paris, where he was baptized on November 18, 1944. The parish priest welcomed him warmly. They spent some moments in prayer together in the church and then went to look at the registry of baptisms, where his name is inscribed. Before leaving, the Prelate wrote these words in the visitor’s book: “With the joy of visiting this church where I received holy Baptism, with my prayer for the community that continues to carry out pastoral work among the Spanish people in Paris.”

During the fifth day of his stay in Paris, the Prelate visited with several families.

Germany, from August 5 to 22

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz was in Germany from August 5 to 22. He took advantage of his stay in Solingen to visit with faithful of the Prelature in the nearby cities of Brussels, on August 12, and Amsterdam, on August 14.

On Saturday the 19th, he celebrated Holy Mass in the parish of St. Pantaleon of Cologne, with 30 priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. “All of us, each in our own environment, in our family, our work, our social relations, can and should make present the word of reconciliation, make present the Gospel, make present Christ. What a marvelous mission, despite our own weakness!” the Prelate said in his homily, reproduced in full in this issue of Romana. At the end of the Mass, in which he especially remembered the victims of the terrorist attacks in Barcelona, Msgr. Ocáriz thanked God for the fact that the Church is truly a great family, and asked that the faithful be always closely united among themselves and with the Pope. “May we not let a day go by without frequent prayer for the Pope, for his intentions, for his work as pastor of the universal Church,” he said. That same Saturday, the Prelate had a meeting with priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. In the afternoon, he took part in other meetings with faithful of the Prelature and visited the International University Residence, Campus Muengersdorf.

Belgium, August 12

On his first trip to Belgium as Prelate, Msgr. Ocáriz had two get-togethers with people of Opus Dei in the Dongelberg conference center. “All our activities should be centered on Christ,” the Prelate told them.
“We need to be faithful to him in our daily life. Being faithful to a Person, to Christ, is much more inspiring than being faithful to an idea.” Those present there asked questions about the meaning of suffering, doing apostolate with people who don’t believe in God, giving Christian witness in a professional environment distant from the faith, contributing to evangelizing efforts in other countries, love for the Pope and the Church, what to do when one’s children dress inappropriately… Among other advice, the Prelate stressed the importance of friendship: “We need to know the others well and let ourselves be known, giving testimony to the realities we bear in our heart. Our conversations should always be serene.”

The Netherlands, August 14

The Prelate made the short trip from Solingen, Germany, to the Zonnewende cultural center in Amsterdam, to spend some time with faithful of the Prelature from the Netherlands and those attending the international course that was being held in those facilities. Msgr. Ocáriz also met with several groups of women of the Prelature in the Netherlands. “Opus Dei doesn’t exist to organize activities or construct buildings. Opus Dei is its people, each person who responds to God’s call, seeking sanctity in their work and daily life,” the Prelate said. At the end of the day, after spending time in prayer in the Zonnewende oratory, he returned to Germany.

Milan, from August 22 to 25

Msgr. Ocáriz arrived in Milan on August 21 in the afternoon. He first went to pray before the mortal remains of María Dolores Jiménez, a faithful of the Prelature who had begun the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Milan and who died a few hours before his arrival.

On August 22, he spoke with a group of students who receive spiritual formation in centers of the Prelature in various cities of northern Italy. He then met with several families and visited the parish of San Gioachimio, entrusted by the Archdiocese of Milan to priests of Opus Dei. Accompanied by the parish priest, Father Marco Busca, the Prelate invited those present to pray for Cardinal Angelo Scola and his successor at the head of the Church in Milan, Archbishop Mario Delpini.
In that same parish, on August 23, he celebrated the funeral Mass for María Dolores Jiménez. Afterwards he went to the Castello di Urio conference center, where some people of Opus Dei were spending a number of days studying and relaxing. “Living the Gospel in the place where each one should fulfill his or her own duties, always brings with it benefits for society as a whole. Living as Christians in the middle of the world: this is truly a revolution, without any form of violence,” Msgr. Ocáriz told them.

On August 24 he met with priests from various Italian dioceses. “We have been sent by our Lord,” the Prelate said, “who wants to act through us as instruments of his. Let us work with faith and hope. Let us give ourselves generously to the others, without human calculations, placing Christ at the center of all our activities.” He gave similar advice to a group of university students with whom he shared another period of conversation.

At the end of the day he met with a group of families. They spoke about some current challenges, including the education of children, caring for the elderly, accompanying young families, and fortitude in facing setbacks and suffering that can crop up in family life.

On Friday the 25th, Msgr. Ocáriz visited the archbishop emeritus of Milan, Cardinal Angelo Scola, accompanied by the Vicar of Opus Dei for Italy, Fr. Matteo Fabbri. At the end, the Prelate went to pray in the cathedral. After spending some minutes in front of the tabernacle, he lit a votive candle to the Madonna del'Aiuto (Our Lady of Help), and then spent some time praying before the tombs of three archbishops of Milan: Blessed Ildelfonso Schuster, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, archbishop from 1979 to 2002, and Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi, who died recently, on August 5.

Afterwards, Monsignor Ocáriz had a get-together with faithful of the Prelature in the Porta Vercellina center. He also spent time with the women who look after the domestic management of the Torrescalla university residence. At the end of the day, in a gathering with families, the Prelate said that “finding Christ in one’s work and family is inseparable from striving to transmit this joy to others. It is impossible to seek sanctity without communicating it.” He also reminded parents of the importance of
fostering in their children the desire to serve others. “When children have the opportunity to help a poor person they are happy and discover something new. And we help to prevent them from being dominated by material goods.” On August 26, in the morning, the Prelate ended his pastoral visit to northern Italy and traveled to Marseille, in France.

*Marseille, from August 26 to 28*

Msgr. Ocáriz arrived in Marseille on August 26. Over the course of two days he had the opportunity to meet with faithful of the Prelature, cooperators and a number of people who take part in the activities of Christian formation organized by faithful of Opus Dei.

“All of us have a very effective way to bring Christ to souls: through personal friendship,” the Prelate stressed in one of the gatherings. He encouraged his listeners to pass on to others the joy of their own encounter with Christ, and “to do so with the impetus that faith gives,” knowing that “nothing we do is ever lost,” the Prelate said, recalling some words of St. Josemaría.

*Torreciudad, September 3*

For the priestly ordination of two deacons of Opus Dei, Msgr. Ocáriz spent a few days in the Shrine of Torreciudad, where he also met with several groups of young people who were taking part in activities of cultural and Christian formation close to the shrine. With the approaching Synod of Bishops on Youth, the Faith and Vocation, as backdrop, the Prelate advised them: “in order to know what we have to do, above all when it is a matter as serious as that of the vocation to which God is calling us—because we all have a vocation, the Christian vocation that is specified in different ways, and is always a vocation to holiness—we need to ask our Lord for light to see and strength to want to.”

Msgr. Ocáriz also spent some time conversing with the families and friends of the two newly ordained priests on September 3. “The priesthood,” he told them, “is certainly a great gift of God for the person who receives it; but it is also a great gift of God for everyone: realize that with our poor hands, with our poor voice, there is truly made present all the efficacy of the Sacrifice of the Cross, the redemption of the world.”
The United Kingdom, December 14 to 17

Msgr. Ocáriz spent several days in London in December 2017. His last stay in this country had been in 2008, when he accompanied Bishop Javier Echevarría, the previous Prelate, on his pastoral visit to the United Kingdom. Since this was his first visit to the region as Prelate, his main motive was to be with his spiritual daughters and sons, and to encourage them in their apostolic work.

On Friday the 15th, he met with Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the archbishop of Westminster, and visited the cathedral, where St. Josemaría had been almost sixty years ago. In the afternoon he met with priests, with groups of promoters of schools in London, and with the organizers of family orientation initiatives. He also had an opportunity to visit two university residences, Dawliffe Hall and Netherhall House, where he had get-togethers with groups of faithful of Opus Dei and their friends.

On Saturday the 16th, he met with groups of young people both in Brentor, a center for the care and formation of immigrants, and in Netherhall House. In the evening he had a get-together with several hundred people in Ashwell House, a women’s residence for university students in London.

Although he didn’t have time to visit other apostolic initiatives, groups of teachers and students from The Laurels and The Cedars schools had the opportunity to greet him and talk about these schools, as did young people from various high school clubs in London and other cities in the country.

Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter of September 24, 2017

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!
After the recent months, during which I had the joy of seeing many of you, I now write to you with my thoughts already on the upcoming Synod of Bishops, which will take place in a year’s time in Rome. The topic of the Synod will be “Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment.” As you know, the apostolic work with young people was an important topic in the recent General Congress.[1] With this letter I would like to encourage you to consider, without getting down to many details, how we can intensify this primary concern of our Christian vocation.

“What do you seek?” our Lord asks John and Andrew, as they first approach him (Jn 1:38). Youth is a time for searching; it is the period in life when the question “who do I want to be?” comes to the fore. For a Christian this also means “who am I called to be?” It is the question about vocation, about how to respond to God’s love. “You, dear young man, dear young woman, have you ever felt the gaze of everlasting love upon you, a gaze that looks beyond your sins, limitations and failings, and continues to have faith in you and to look upon your life with hope? Do you realize how precious you are to God, who has given you everything out of love?”[2]

Today there are many obstacles, at times quite complex, that stand in the way of this personal encounter with God’s love. But there are also signs of hope. “It isn’t true that young people think only of consumerism and pleasure. It isn’t true that they are materialistic and self-centered. Just the opposite is true: young people want great things.”[3] These words reflect the reality of the life of many young people, eager to improve the world. But these words also seem to conflict with the indolence of so many others we see “made old” by the constant bombardment of consumption, entertainment, living for the moment, frivolity. It’s easy to lament this situation. But what requires more effort is finding ways to challenge the desires for great things that lie in the hearts of young persons, sometimes covered over with a layer of apparent indifference. Are we capable of inspiring them with the beauty of the faith, of a life lived for others? I ask each of my younger sons and daughters: are you able to inspire in your friends a hunger for this God of ours who is Beauty, Goodness, Truth, the only one who can satisfy the desire for happiness they carry in their heart? And for those of us who are no longer so young in terms of age, but who
strive to keep our heart youthful: do we try to understand their difficulties, their dreams? Do we become young once again with them?

St. Josemaría liked the way young people are referred to in Portuguese as *os novos*. As he once said: “You should all be very young. Be renewed!... To be renewed is to once again become young, to once again be new, to have a new capacity for self-giving.”[4] In order to encourage many souls to foster generous dreams of self-giving to God and other men and women, all of us Christians need to strive to be authentic witnesses to a life that sincerely struggles to be identified with Christ. Despite our limitations, with God’s grace we can be sowers of peace and joy in that place—whether a small corner of the world or a crossroads of culture—where our Lord wants us to be. Let us try to conserve and strengthen the “youth” that God gives us.[5] Our serene testimony of this youthful spirit always leaves on others a mark that, sooner or later, becomes a help for their life.

St. Josemaría used to say (and this consideration applies to all those who take part in one way or another in the education of young people) that parents are responsible for 90 percent of their children’s vocation. With all of you in mind and especially the cooperators and supernumeraries, I encourage you to consider whether you can increase, with creativity and generosity, your involvement in formative initiatives for young people (like schools and clubs). Even more, I suggest that you turn your attention to your own home. Consider whether your children can be happy to belong to their family, because they have parents who listen to them and take them seriously, who love them as they are, who are able to ask themselves the same questions that their children are asking themselves. Parents who help them to grasp, in the small realities of daily life, the real value of things, the effort required to bring forward a home. Parents who can make demands on them, and who aren’t afraid to put them in contact with suffering and human weakness, so often present in the life of many people, perhaps beginning in their own family. Parents who help them, by their piety, to “touch” God, to be “souls of prayer.” In short, you need to help them grow with a strong and healthy heart, in order to hear God saying to each of them, as he did to John and Andrew, “come and see” (*Jn* 1:39).

Your Father blesses you with all his affection,
Fernando
Rome, September 24, 2017,
Feast of Our Lady of Ransom


Homilies

On the First Anniversary of the Death of Bishop Javier Echevarría, St. Eugene’s Basilica, Rome

"The souls of the righteous are in God’s hands" (see Wis 3:1). These words with which we have begun the Liturgy of the Word today lead us to recall with heartfelt gratitude Bishop Javier Echevarría. He lived his life with this firm conviction, and often made it manifest to others. A few days before his death, he was reminded of this by the doctor who had looked after him for many years: “As you yourself have so often told us, Father, we are in God’s hands.”

“He who believes in me, even if he dies, shall live,” Jesus says to Martha. “Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” And our Lord continues: “Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:26-27). Today our Lord addresses this question, as so many others in the Gospel, to each one of us.

Torna ai contenuti
“Do you believe this?” Do you believe that, not only at the end of your life but at each moment, including now, God is thinking of you and wants you to be close to him? Do you believe that you are always living in God’s hands, even when it might seem that he has forgotten you?

I am reminded of a story I recently heard, told by a medical doctor who was diagnosed with a grave illness a few months ago. Shortly after his diagnosis, he ran into a colleague in the hospital who asked him, with the frankness with which friends speak to one another: “Tell me, what have you gained by praying so much?” He replied, “Look, by praying I find myself now happy, calm, at peace, myself and my whole family; we fully trust in God and accept his will.” The friend (a non-believer) looked at him with tears in his eyes, and as they parted he said: “How beautiful it is to have faith in God!”

Yes, how beautiful it is to have faith in God, although this beauty is not an easy consolation, obtained by reading or listening every now and then to some nice ideas, only to return to the crude reality of everyday life with its worries and unexpected setbacks. The beauty of faith comes from abandonment in God, in realizing we are in his hands, an interior attitude that should grow in our hearts each day, with serenity. And it grows especially through prayer, by dedicating some time each day to personal prayer, to dialogue with God. Even when it seems to us we don’t have time for God; even when we think we have nothing to say to him. By doing so, little by little we allow ourselves to be won over by God, and learn to abandon ourselves in his hands. We can entrust to him so many things, even in the midst of traffic, in intense work, in family life, when resting.

"Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love" (Wis 3:9). This passage from the Book of Wisdom that we have just heard speaks to us of the righteous who have left this world; but it does so by glancing backward, recapitulating their life. Therefore it is speaking about us, about the path on which we find ourselves. These other words are also very appropriate: "God tested them and found them worthy of himself; like gold in the furnace he tried them, and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them" (Wis 3:5–6).
Let us pause for a moment at this beautiful image. The lower part of the furnace was called the crucible, where the precious metal separates itself from the dross, so as to become more pure. Purification by fire symbolizes a path marked by two realities: suffering and love. Suffering that God lovingly allows in our life, in so many different ways. Suffering that is also sometimes caused by our own sins or by our limitations. But it is also a suffering that can serve to stir up love in us, to purify the gold that God has put in our heart. Suffering can purify our love from the dross of selfishness, of pride; the dross of things that we sometimes fail to notice, but that diminish our joy, because they become obstacles between us and God, between us and others. And how does God transform suffering into love? Through the uninterrupted dialogue that he wants to keep up with us, so long as we also want to open ourselves to him.

In one of his last pastoral letters, Bishop Echevarría wrote: “Interior peace does not belong to those who think they do everything well, nor to those uninterested in loving: it arises in the person who always, even after falling, returns to God’s hands” (Pastoral Letter, December 1, 2016). So let us ask our Lord that we allow him to purify our heart, with trust, even if at times we do not understand his paths (see Is 55:8). Let us ask him now, in these days of preparation for Christmas. Today, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, we entrust this desire to Holy Mary, who also is close to us, as she told St. Juan Diego and as she made Don Javier realize, especially on his last day here on earth: “Am I not here, I, who am your Mother?” (Nican Mopohua, 119).

Praised be Jesus Christ.

At the Opening of the Academic Year, Campus Bio-Medico University, Rome (November 22, 2017)

"A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you...and cause you to walk in my statutes" (Ezek 36:26-27). Let us begin this
new academic year by entrusting ourselves to the Holy Spirit. He is the one who helps us see our projects, our dreams, with the wisdom of God: a wisdom that is a true medicine, the medicine the world needs. Come, Holy Spirit! We ask that this may be true for everyone: teachers and students, administrators, non-teaching staff. Because where the Holy Spirit is, where he is welcomed, life grows. He wants to live in the midst of us, to make the Campus a more closely united community, a place where one learns to combine professionalism and sincere affection for people.

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, at the inauguration Mass for the Campus Bio-Medico University, on October 15, 1993, exhorted you to strive to ensure that “the doctrine and love of Christ... guide and inform more deeply the exercise of the noble medical and nursing professions. For without the guidance and impulse of this doctrine and love,” he said, “they could easily turn into cold and blind techniques.” Words that are still very relevant today. Pope Francis never tires of reminding us that God awaits us in those we find along the path of our life, especially in the weakest, among whom we need to include the sick, the children who are just beginning life, and those who are approaching the end of their earthly life: “To cure the sick, to welcome them, to serve them, is to serve Christ: the sick are the flesh of Christ” (Angelus, February 8, 2015). In this area you have a special mission and a great responsibility.

Everything that is done at the Campus can help restore hope and optimism to people. We need teachers who are true teachers, wise and attentive towards students and patients. Students need to dedicate themselves eagerly to their studies, in order to acquire the knowledge needed to serve society better. We need administrative staff, at all levels, who do their work joyfully, knowing that it will contribute to the success of a joint effort.

In this regard I like to remember another piece of advice from Blessed Alvaro. Reflecting on the logical difficulties an initiative of this type encounters, especially at the beginning, he said: “I recommend that you work with a spirit of unity and understanding, with optimism; thus you will overcome the obstacles with God’s help. You will be happy and (what is more important) you will attain sanctity and help others to do so, because you will be practicing the commandment of love.”
I endorse these recommendations. Try to work closely united. Doing so with joy, humility, openness to one’s neighbor, a spirit of constructive criticism, mutual help, and the ability to provide solutions. We dream of the educational and social work that the Campus carries out and will carry out, with an ever greater depth and extension. We rely on the help of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus himself tells us, he (the Holy Spirit) "will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). Let us never tire of beseeching the Holy Spirit: “Come, Holy Spirit!” Remind us of everything Jesus told us (see Jn 14:26). May the difficulties that might arise help to foster unity and not division. St. Josemaría expressed it in a thousand different ways: “Your charity should be warm and affectionate. Without neglecting prudence and naturalness, try to have a smile on your lips for everyone at all times, though you may be weeping inside. The service you give to others should be unstinting too” (The Forge, 699).

The awareness that we are children of God gives us courage and optimism, as St. Paul reminds us in the second reading: "You did not receive a spirit of slavery, to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, whereby we cry 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom 8:15). We also ask the Holy Spirit for the grace of knowing how to learn from each other. And that we not be surprised by the mistakes and limitations of others: each of us has his or her shortcoming and defects, but the Holy Spirit helps us not to be scandalized, but always to look for specific ways to help those who are mistaken. He helps us to always look with the penetrating look of God’s children, that is, to recognize in the other person a brother or a sister.

I don’t want to finish without thanking, once again, the doctors, nurses, and everyone in the Polyclinic who looked after Bishop Javier Echevarría during his final days in the hospital, almost a year ago. You know very well how much he prayed for you during those days. I'm sure that now, from Heaven, God will allow him to be next to each one of you, your families, your work, and your difficulties, to help you overcome them.

Within a year we will celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Campus Bio-Medical. During the course of the year before we reach that date, let us thank God for so many realities that have surpassed our dreams,
and continue dreaming for the present and the future: dreaming with the dreams of God.

Praised be Jesus Christ.

At the Inauguration of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 3, 2017)

The Gospel we have just heard announces a promise of our Lord that gives full security to the Church on her journey through history: "These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:25-26).

At the beginning of the academic year, it greatly helps us to hear again these words of Jesus. They tell us that the Holy Spirit is the Teacher of our souls, a Teacher who gives us constant lessons to attain an ever deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ.

Let us therefore invoke the Paraclete for light in our study of the sacred sciences, so that this knowledge will sink in deeply and touch our hearts.

By drawing close to the Holy Spirit, his illuminations will allow us to contemplate with amazement the depths of the mysteries of faith, and his fire will enkindle in our hearts sincere desires to be closely united with our Lord and to communicate his love to many souls.

All of you, professors and students, will have to dedicate long hours to your studies. Go to the Holy Spirit as the true Teacher, the only one able to lead us to a full understanding of Jesus’ teachings. Our Lord himself tells us: When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth (Jn 16:13). Jesus does not promise just any truth, but the complete truth: the truth that sustains the world, that guides our aspirations and strengthens human relationships, imbuing them with justice and charity.
The truth leads us to authentic freedom, as Jesus himself said: "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:31-32). How much we need to meditate on these words of our Lord! Especially when we are immersed in a culture that recognizes the great value of freedom, but so often does not find a way to achieve it, above all the inner freedom that is, in the end, the ability to love.

To deepen in your knowledge of the mysteries of the faith you need to study, but that is not enough: prayer is also needed. In dialogue with God, he himself leads us into the luminosity of his triune being and into his salvific plans. With the light of the Holy Spirit, we internalize theological knowledge so that it is no longer just a sum of notions and concepts, but is transformed into knowledge imbued with love, that is, into wisdom. And we will discover the loving invitations addressed to us by the Lord to lead us to "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). As a result, we will be able to understand a bit better the depth of God’s love for us and, with great joy, risk our freedom on his salvific plans.

This is the wisdom we want to ask the Holy Spirit for today, as we prepare to begin a new academic year. As St. Josemaría reminded us, this divine gift opens us to the world: “Among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I would say that there is one which we all need in a special way: the gift of wisdom. It makes us know God and rejoice in his presence, thereby placing us in a perspective from which we can judge accurately the situations and events of this life” (Christ Is Passing By, no. 133). The hope of being able to share this divine gift with so many people is another reason to put great care into our prayer and our study. The Holy Spirit makes us sharers in his sanctifying action, and enables us to be, as Pope Francis says, “sowers of hope, to be, we too —like him and thanks to him— ‘paracletes,’ that is, comforters and protectors of our brethren, sowers of hope” (General Audience, May 31, 2017).

We entrust our resolutions to be docile to the Holy Spirit to the motherly mediation of our Lady, Sedes Sapientiae. The Virgin Mary, Throne of Grace and Wisdom, will help us to welcome Jesus, incarnate Wisdom, with ever increasing intensity into our lives.
So be it.

Torna ai contenuti

In St. Pantaleon, Cologne, Germany, on the Occasion of a Pastoral Trip (August 19, 2017)

My dear brothers and sisters:

In the first reading (2 Cor 5:14-20), we heard St. Paul exhorting us: *The love of Christ urges us on*. It is the urgency of living not for ourselves, but for the One who died and rose for us, for Christ. The apostle himself sums up what was taking place in Jesus’ passage through our world: *In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself*. Nevertheless, so much still needs to be reconciled to God in this world of ours! St. Paul adds that God *has committed to us the word of reconciliation*.

Christ’s love urges us on to live for him and not for ourselves: this entails for all of us the Church’s apostolic, evangelizing mission, the mission to bring to all sectors of society the “word of reconciliation.” To do so we need to deepen our knowledge, especially by getting to know the Gospels better. As St. Josemaría Escrivá tells each of us: “There is an urgent need to spread the light of Christ’s doctrine. Store up your training, fill yourself with clear ideas, with the fullness of the Christian message, so that afterwards you can pass it on to others” (*The Forge*, no. 841).

Perhaps there arises in our heart the question that Jude Thaddeus addressed to Jesus: *Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?* (Jn 14:22). Wouldn’t it be better, Lord, for you to do everything instead of entrusting it to our poor efforts. Jesus’ reply, to Thaddeus and to us, is clear: “*If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*” Truly, it is our Lord who does everything, but he does it and will always do it through his Church, through each one of us, to the extent that he is in us through love.
All of us, each in our own environment, in our family, our work, our social relations, can and should make present the word of reconciliation, make present the Gospel, make present Christ. What a marvelous mission, despite our own weakness! As Benedict XVI said at the solemn inauguration of his Pontificate: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him.”

The Gospel passage we just heard (Jn 17:20-26), has directed our thoughts to the Cenacle at Jerusalem, to our Lord’s Last Supper. In his long priestly prayer, Jesus at one point asks God the Father not only for the Apostles, for those present there, but also for us, for all who down through the centuries will be his disciples. And what does Christ ask for us? For unity: “that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” For the unity that is necessary for effective evangelization, so that the world may recognize Christ; as our Lord says, “so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

This unity that Jesus asks for us has its paradigm and foundation in the divine unity between the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit, infinite personal Love. So let us strive to be instruments of unity in the Church, by being instruments of unity in our own family, in our own setting, in our ordinary life, through love, through a charity shown in affection and deeds.

“That they may all be one... so that the world may believe.” These words turn our thoughts to Pope Francis who, as Roman Pontiff, is the visible source and foundation of unity in the Church (See Const. Lumen Gentium, n. 18). May each of our days contain frequent prayer for the Pope, for his intentions, for his work as shepherd of the universal Church.

As St. Josemaría prayed: all united to the Pope, let us go to Jesus through Mary. Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam!
Words of the Prelate at an Interdisciplinary Conference on Work, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (October 21, 2017)

The Prelate of Opus Dei spoke at a recent conference on work held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. What follows is a summary of his remarks, delivered during an academic colloquium that lasted an hour.

Marking 500 years since the Protestant Reformation, an international conference on “The Future of Work and its Meaning” was held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome.

Monsignor Ocáriz, Chancellor and former professor at the University, began his remarks with a question: What does it really mean to sanctify work? “Within the context of sanctifying ordinary life,” he said, “work occupies a very important place; not only because of the amount of time dedicated to it, which is a lot, but also because of the consequences our work has for ourselves and other people. Work and family are, together with our relationship with God, the columns that uphold God’s design for humanity, as Genesis narrates to us.”

Referring to a scene from the movie There Be Dragons, the Prelate reflected on the moment when St. Josemaría understood his mission from God and the message of the sanctifying value of work: “In this moment of the film, the actor playing St. Josemaría is shown writing down the words ‘everyone’ and ‘everything.’ Everyone is called to holiness; all honorable human realities, all jobs can and should become a path, a means to holiness, to encountering Christ. Sanctifying work, any honest work, means to do it for God and for others, which demands of us that we do it well. Work stems from love and leads us to Love (with a capital ‘L’), in every circumstance of our lives.”

Citing words of St. Josemaría, “Add a supernatural motive to your ordinary work and you will have sanctified it,” Monsignor Ocáriz said: “this
doesn’t mean adding on a pious detail. We are talking about the finality of our work: the why and for what of work, which affects the very way in which we carry it out. And what is this supernatural motive? Love for God and service to others.”

An extended round of questions and answers followed the Prelate’s remarks. One professor brought up a conversation he had had with a Lutheran colleague of his about whether or not the sanctification of work was just something having to do with our personal relationship with God or if it could actually produce a change in the work itself.

Monsignor Ocáriz replied: “Something becomes holy insofar as it is offered to God. The things of this world already belong to God, but through our freedom they acquire a new dimension. With our freedom the same work, including its material aspects, can become holy, thus becoming more God’s.”

The Prelate also recalled how “when St. Josemaría set to work, he would say to Christ, with or without words: ‘we’re going to do this together.’ Christians have to do everything in Christ; there is no other way to reach God.”

Towards the end, another person asked how to discover the something holy that the founder of Opus Dei often talked about, especially among jobs as diverse as being a university professor or being the mother of a family. “By discovering in everything an expression of God’s love for us: in people, in circumstances, in the material reality of different tasks, in setbacks. St. John wrote, giving a summary of the Apostles’ experience of their relationship with Christ: ‘We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.’ Discovering that quid divinum is to see others as creatures loved by God; even in difficulties that we don’t understand, seeing God’s hidden love.”
At the Opening of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (October 3, 2017)

Your excellencies, teachers, assistants, students, ladies and gentlemen:

Today we officially start the academic year, the day after a new anniversary of the founding of Opus Dei. It is a good moment to thank God for all the good that the University of the Holy Cross, with divine help and the contribution of so many people, has produced in these three decades of its existence.

It is the first time that I address you as Chancellor of this University, and it is only fair and gives me joy to remember with deep gratitude the first two Chancellors, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and Bishop Javier Echevarría. Both of them have done so much for our University, leaving us a rich legacy and a bright example.

On this occasion I would like to reflect on a topic very dear to Bishop Echevarría: the Christian fraternity lived by those who are carrying out together a project of Christian inspiration. Thanks to this fraternity, each one’s personal commitment is not an isolated reality, but is joined to the totality of everyone’s efforts, producing a wave of effectiveness, as St. Josemaría said using a very evocative image: “Just as the clamor of the ocean is made up of the sound of each of its waves, so the sanctity of your apostolate is made up of the personal virtues of each one of you” (The Way, no. 960). Precisely because we consider the other person as someone who belongs to us —and to whom we belong— we want to render the maximum, with a commitment shown in quality service. Para servir, servir!, St. Josemaría used to say: in order to be useful, serve! Charity spurs us to work in a professional way.

We are all called to carry out our work in a spirit of unity. True unity is not the result of simply our good intentions; rather it stems from God’s love that “has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). Therefore unity is not just a matter of organization, of distributing jobs, but above all of charity. Out of love for God we want to live our freedom and responsibility as Christians fully,
putting our knowledge and experience, our special sensitivity for certain problems and challenges at the service of everyone. At the same time, we are aware that the others are also committed to this shared mission, and that their perspectives provide a rich contribution to the activity we are carrying out together. Hence the diversity of opinions on organizational, academic, and even material issues does not decrease unity and the need to work as a team.

The sincere effort to help others brings joy in its wake, the true joy of God’s children. It is a joy that is often shown in the good humor that one encounters in the corridors of this building, and that is reflected in the willingness to cheerfully help a colleague who is carrying a heavy workload, as Saint Paul advised: *Alter alterius onera portate et sic adimplebitis legem Christi* (*Gal 6:2*). “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

A direct manifestation of this inner joy is the desire to share it with others. Good is diffusive of itself (see *S. Th.* I, q. 73, a. 3, ad 2) and cannot remain walled-up. The fraternal charity that we strive to live in the University extends outward, towards our families, our fellow students, our friends, but also towards all those who, as Pope Francis often reminds us, are found on the “existential peripheries” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013). Thinking about all those who, in a certain sense, are waiting for us, is always a strong spur to commit ourselves to our mission.

With my best wishes for a fruitful year of work, I offer my warm greetings to each and every one here and declare the academic year 2017-2018 inaugurated.

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**Articles and Interviews**
Interview Granted to Tertio, Belgium  
(November 8, 2017)

By Immanuel Van Lierde

*How did you meet Opus Dei? What led you to discover your vocation to Opus Dei and to the priesthood?*

I met Opus Dei through one of my brothers, whom I’m very thankful to. He invited me to take part in some formational classes organized in a center for young students. I liked the environment, the friendly and practical tone of those classes. However, since in the Jesuit school where I was studying we already had enough religious formation classes, I didn’t see the need to continue participating. Later, in 1961, during the summer before attending the university, I started going around to another center of Opus Dei. When during that summer the possibility was raised of my joining the Work, I thought about it a lot. I prayed and concluded that God was asking me for this, and I wrote a letter to the founder asking for admission. It was that simple.

Six years later, I accepted the invitation to move to Rome, to deepen my philosophical and theological studies. And that’s where the possibility of serving others in a new way, through the priesthood, was opened to me. The founder himself, St. Josemaría Escrivá, was the one who asked me if I was willing to be ordained. Since it was something that was already in my mind, little was needed to decide. These are fundamental decisions that are made in prayer, in dialogue with Christ.

*You are the third successor of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei. What was his specific charism and why did he found Opus Dei? Do you have personal memories of St. Josemaría?*

St. Josemaría said that Opus Dei was not his idea, but the result of an inspiration from God, which took place in Madrid on October 2, 1928. Neither the Christian context of the time, nor the reflections of young Josemaría based on his theological studies, nor his intense prayer life in the years prior to the foundation of the Work, explain the birth of Opus Dei, although logically they helped him to receive that foundational light with the appropriate dispositions.
His essential message is the need to seek God—our good and merciful Father—in our daily activities, especially in our professional work, and also in our family life and friendships. The mission of this prelature of the Catholic Church is to remind people that holiness is not a goal for the privileged, but something accessible to you, to me, to a young person or an elderly one, to the mother or father of a family, to the healthy or sick, the rich or the poor. In the words of the founder, its message is “as old as the Gospel, and like the Gospel new.”

I first met St. Josemaría when he came to see those of us who were attending a summer course at the University of Navarra, in the summer 1963. I was drawn by his human warmth, and his ability to speak with simplicity about deep realities. But it was above all in Rome, from October 1967 until his death in June 1975, that I had more contact with him in smaller groups, and sometimes in personal conversations.

What struck me, above all, was his love for God, for our Lady and for the Church; his love for freedom and his good humor. I remember him as a person with a very big heart, who made his own the needs of others and who knew how to bring us to God. I also remember him as a person who governed wisely—energetic and decisive when necessary.

*What are the priorities of Opus Dei in today’s world? How is the original charism applicable to our day and age?*

The main objective is that every woman and man who takes part in Opus Dei’s apostolic activities feels accompanied and helped to live Christianity in its fullness, sanctifying their professional work and all the other tasks and circumstances of ordinary life. For this to happen, the first thing needed is to contemplate Jesus Christ. Hence St. Josemaría’s advice will always be valid: “May you seek Christ; may you find Christ; may you love Christ.” We need to enter more and more deeply into the paths of contemplation in the middle of the world, amid each one’s profession, whether in the great buildings of Brussels or in the peripheries of the large metropolises such as Sao Paulo, Lagos, Mexico City, or Manila.

Opus Dei’s General Congress, which took place in January 2017, highlighted as priorities, among other things, the work of evangelization in the field of the family, of young people, and of the most needy. Today it is
especially necessary to rediscover the beauty of matrimonial love. As regards young people, a key need is to help them find the answers to their yearnings, concerns, and ideals. As for the needy, both in body and in spirit, it is important to keep in mind that they are at the center of the Gospel and in Christ’s heart. We need to continue fostering initiatives that help alleviate their specific needs in this wounded world of ours, through which one can transmit to them the consolation of God.

Many lay people are members of Opus Dei. What is your opinion about the apostolate of the laity? How can they be witnesses to the faith in their jobs and secular tasks? How can one empower the laity in the Church and in society?

The ministerial priesthood is essential in the Church. Without the sacraments—especially the Eucharist and Penance, which only the priest can administer—the apostolate of the laity would be completely inadequate. However, without the apostolate of the laity the ministerial priesthood would be extraordinarily limited. What could we priests do to educate the new generations in the faith without the assistance of fathers and mothers? How could the pastoral work of priests reach so many people from the world of science, economics, human rights, politics, art, journalism, and so many other professions and jobs?

St. Josemaría said that the most specific way lay people contribute to sanctity and apostolate in the Church is by bringing the leaven of the Christian message to society, through their free and responsible action in temporal structures.

There, in society, lay people evangelize with their example—with their honesty, industriousness, justice, joy, loyalty, faith, and fraternity with everyone. Through friendship with their colleagues and the professional prestige their work gives them, they can help others personally to encounter the Gospel, despite the limitations we all have and our mistakes.

The Second Vatican Council reminded us that this is the main mission of the laity in the Church. This doesn't mean that some are not called, in addition, to positions of responsibility in the structure of the Church which don't require for their exercise having received the sacrament of Holy Orders. This is another example of generosity and service to others. But let's not forget that this is not what is essential to the lay person, and, as
Pope Francis says, encouraging the role of lay people in the Church doesn’t mean “clericalizing” them.

*Various prejudices and negative perceptions exist regarding Opus Dei. How can we counteract these perceptions and make it clear that people should not be afraid of Opus Dei?*

In the face of criticisms, from wherever they may come, the first thing we need to do is to examine our own conduct, to see if they are justified in any way because of our own behavior, our lack of correspondence to God’s grace; and if so, we need to correct ourselves. We also need to be patient. Opus Dei is still quite young and new realities in the life of the Church and society have often met with difficulties.

I sincerely think that there is no reason to be “afraid” (to use the word that you did) of Opus Dei, inside or outside the Church. We don’t seek to impose ourselves on others or to impose anything. We love—and not only respect—our own freedom and that of everyone, also the freedom of those who don’t think or live like us. The only ambition of a Christian, whether in Opus Dei or not, is to show how Christian hope responds to the longing for happiness in each person’s heart.

*Recently you said to the press that there is a warm relationship between Pope Francis and Opus Dei. How does Opus Dei support the priorities of this Pope: to be merciful, to reach out to the peripheries and the poor, to be a poor Church for the poor, to show others the joy of the Gospel, to provide assistance to families, to young people and to the elderly, to care for our “common home”...?*

Like all Catholics, we know that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ in the universal Church. And that Catholics need to strive to be united to the head, to bring—as St. Josemaría said—“Rome to the peripheries and the peripheries to Rome.”

In the audience that he granted me after my appointment, the Pope was very affectionate and close, and expressed interest in the apostolic work of Opus Dei in a number of different countries. He gave me advice on how to respond, with fidelity to the charism received from the founder, to the changing circumstances of each time and place. Among other things, he encouraged us to make a special effort to evangelize the “periphery of the middle classes”: to bring God’s love to the immense world of the human
professions. There was also an opportunity to speak about some of the initiatives that people of the Prelature and friends have begun, to try to alleviate pressing human needs in various countries, including the integration of refugees and immigrants in Germany, initiatives for palliative care in places of the so-called “first world,” new projects to advance human dignity in poor neighborhoods of different cities, and activities for human and Christian formation in many countries of the world.

Of course, we try support the priorities of Pope Francis with the means at our disposal and we would like to do much more.

In 2018 there will be a Synod dedicated to young people and vocations. Today, in many places, young people feel dejected, without ideals and often without hope. How can we give hope, faith and love to young people? What can the Church and Opus Dei offer them?

We Christians have an answer to offer young people, although often it may not be heard because of so much noise on the social networks and discouragement in their hearts because of corruption and injustice.

The Christian challenge, as Benedict XVI and Francis have reminded us, is not only or mainly offering a body of teachings, let alone a series of hard-to-understand precepts, but a person: Jesus of Nazareth. We need to help each young person to find Christ; to face the God-man, who knows us and loves us personally.

From the Cross or from the consecrated Host, Jesus looks at each one of us. He tells us that he knows us by our name, and that he also knows our mistakes, discouragements and miseries. But despite everything he has decided to come into this world, to suffer the passion and die to attain happiness for us, both earthly and eternal. And that he only asks for our correspondence.

We Christians need to present this panorama to the current generation, especially to the many young people who have already found Jesus and who can draw close to their friends more easily than adults. This apostolate has to be done, first of all, with prayer, then with our lives, and finally with our word.
In Rome, Opus Dei is also responsible for the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. What are the strengths of this University? How does it serve the Church? What do you expect from the mission of this academic center?

The University of the Holy Cross is one of the youngest pontifical universities. I must admit that I have a special place for it in my heart, because it has been desired by St. Josemaría, founded by his successor, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, and followed very closely by my predecessor, Bishop Javier Echevarría. Moreover, before becoming Grand Chancellor, I myself was a teacher of Fundamental Theology there for many years.

In its still short lifetime, it has produced some well-regarded publications and seeks to give a complete formation to its students—doctrinal, of course, but also pastoral and spiritual.

Thus it seeks to serve the Church, the bishops and religious superiors who send students there; and to cooperate with the other pontifical universities, some in existence for centuries now, in preparing clergy and a well-trained laity, with a theological, juridical and philosophical training that is up to date, while also being faithful to the centuries-old tradition of the Church. This is no small ambition. I ask for prayers from the readers of Tertio so that it can continue doing so.

An Interview Granted to Corriere della Sera, Italy (October 12, 2017)

By Gian Guido Vecchi

Opus Dei in the time of Pope Francis. Has anything changed Monsignor? What is the relationship between the charism of the founder and the recent pontiffs?

The Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, which Pope Francis defined as a “program” for his pontificate, invites us to bring the joy of the Gospel to the men and women of our time. It’s about starting from the beauty of faith, from the joy that is born of the encounter with Jesus Christ.
The charism of Opus Dei offers a specific way of carrying out this mission, especially for those who want to be faithful to the Gospel in their daily life, in their work, their families and their social relationships.

All pontiffs point out priorities, and we are all called to commit ourselves to carrying them out.

After your election, and then in your audience with Pope Francis, you spoke about three priorities: the family, young people, and a “proactive sensitivity towards the most needy.” The first two points are clear, but what does the third one mean?

Taking up the image of the Church as a field hospital, I would like each of us to be a “hospital” for those around us. That’s what I would like for everyone, and first of all for myself: there is still a long way to go.

Our society has so many wounded people: the sick and the abandoned elderly, those suffering from loneliness, those out of work, those who have experienced a sorrowful failure in their love, those who have lost all hope, etc. The faithful of Opus Dei, in their life in the middle of the world, are challenged every day by these wounds. Often they suffer them in person, or in their own families, or find them in a co-worker or in a neighbor living close by.

The challenge is to become better Samaritans, men and women who “roll up their sleeves,” who bring imagination and commitment to help solve the problems of others as if they were their own. Charity is never theoretical or generic; it becomes real in relationships with others, as in Jesus’ life, seeing each person as important, because Christ died for them.

Opus Dei and the poor. The image exists of the Work as a “club for the rich.” How do you respond to this cliche?

In Italy, the people of the Prelature are simply a reflection of the society. The vast majority are ordinary workers, school teachers, housewives, storekeepers, students, laborers, etc. There are also people in the Work who are lawyers, businessmen, artists, journalists.... Sometimes the public’s attention can be focused on them, but those who struggle to make ends meet each month don’t appear in the newspapers. The
important thing is that we all strive to imbue the relationships and circumstances of our daily life with God’s love and mercy.

Led by the cliché that you mention, unfortunately at times some people might approach the formational activities of the Work thinking that they will find some type of advantage. But in two weeks, when they see that one comes here to serve others and to receive spiritual accompaniment, they go away.

*Can you give an example of activities to help the needy or migrants?*

In Rome, for example, there is the ELIS center. It has been working in the Tiburtino neighborhood for 50 years. When that project was born, the district was very poor. Thanks to the training offered there, generations of mechanics, watchmakers, workers and goldsmiths have found a position in the workplace. Now the ELIS center is about to start a free full-time school, that is, one open also on weekends, to welcome and train children from the outskirts of Rome, most of them first or second generation immigrants.

There are also many personal initiatives on a smaller scale. In Naples, for example, a retired teacher has begun an association offering education to girls from disadvantaged neighborhoods and help for girls who are unemployed. They are taught a manual craft to help them find a job in society, where it is becoming more and more difficult to find people with certain needed skills: seamstresses, potters, etc. Another initiative is the effort of the girls in a university residence in Milan to assist Syrian migrants, by providing counseling help as soon as they arrive.

I remember many other examples that I had the opportunity to visit during my pastoral trips last summer. I will mention two here. In the Raval neighborhood in Barcelona, where about 20,000 immigrants live, the Braval and Terral schools have more than 300 volunteers involved in educational, sports and vocational training programs. In Cologne, Germany, I was able to meet the volunteers and priests at the parish of St. Pantaleon, who provide shelter for 30 Syrian refugee families in a structure built by the diocese and the city. Families reside there for 6 months, and when they have become better integrated in society and can make it on their own, new families are welcomed there.
Thanks be to God, institutions of this kind have arisen in many places. For example, if you ask about Opus Dei in Kinshasa, in the third poorest country in the world, many people will mention the care they are given at the Monkole Hospital, begun by faithful of the Prelature and their friends.

But as I was saying, the real revolution would be that we all decide to embody the attitude of the Good Samaritan in our home, in our workplace: truly being concerned about others, giving them spiritual and material assistance, whenever possible. I know courageous businessmen, for example, someone in the Philippines who with the profits of his three hotels started an orphanage for 50 street children; also researchers in the field of economics who dream of building a more just world, far removed from an economy of exclusion; or prestigious doctors who work tirelessly for their patients. This is an aspect in which everyone in Opus Dei has to keep growing, and also learning from others.

*What is your opinion of the accusations made in Italy against NGOs that help rescue migrants?*

Without entering into the political debate, of which I don’t know all the details, it seems to me that Italy is giving a Christian example to the rest of the world, by welcoming those who, after losing everything and driven by desperation, play their last card by crossing the Mediterranean in humiliating and inhuman conditions. It is up to political leaders to analyze how to deal with the huge waves of immigrants and how to integrate these people into our society, with generosity and within the appropriate legal framework.

And then we can consider our own attitude. A Christian heart does not build walls or place obstacles, but rather recognizes Jesus in the suffering flesh of the migrant. A Christian heart dreams of restoring hope to those who have lost everything. A Christian heart suffers on seeing this tragedy, and tries to respond as far as possible to the needs of these brothers and sisters of ours.

*What did the Pope tell you? I am thinking of what I have read on the website of the Work, about his invitation “to give priority to a specific ‘periphery’: the middle class and the professional and intellectual world that has distanced*
itself from God.”

He encouraged us especially to bring the joy of the Gospel to the peripheries of the middle classes, of the professional and intellectual world. These are not geographical peripheries, but daily existential ones, often distanced from God. We should try to see these, with God’s help, with the merciful eyes of Jesus: trying to give comfort, to listen, to accompany, to give of our time.

In the same audience, I also spoke with the Holy Father about the apostolic work the Prelature is carrying out throughout the world, especially in regard to the spiritual care of each person, ecumenism in countries where Catholics are a minority, and some educational and social projects in various continents.

The pontiff is calling for a “Church that goes out.” What does this mean for Opus Dei?

A nurse, a mechanic or a cook in Opus Dei builds up this Church “that goes out” by trying to be a consistent witness to the Gospel in their workplace and family.

The people of the Work are ordinary citizens—many have lost their jobs in this economic crisis, or work in very precarious situations. They share the same worries and fears, they denounce the same injustices and have the same hopes. And amid these challenges, their daily meeting with Jesus, in the Eucharist and in prayer, spurs them to go out to share with everyone the joy and hope of the Gospel.

This effort is also shown in their Christian consistency even in quite small gestures, such as a simple smile or lending a hand to someone who is tired—and also when making important decisions that affect the good of many other people. Sometimes even small gestures, added to those of so many others, can help to spread joy and hope in the world.
Interview Granted to Alfa y Omega, Spain (September 14, 2017)

He tends to fold his arms and then his face broadens into a smile as he speaks softly, but with gentle humor. At 72, he still has a good backhand at tennis. His sober expression is lightened by a deep but affable look.

After your election as the Prelate of Opus Dei, I don’t know whether to congratulate you or give my condolences for the burden that has fallen on your shoulders. How does it feel to be the spiritual father of thousands of people all over the world?

Though I am certainly aware of my great responsibility, I am not troubled by it. Above all, it helps me to know that God, when he gives someone a mission, a job to do, also gives the necessary graces to carry it out.

It also comforts me that the Holy Father has shown me his closeness and affection in a very tangible way, both when I was first named Prelate and afterwards when I had the occasion of seeing him. I also feel supported by the prayer and affection of so many people. I remember a letter I received from a young boy in a hospital who said he was offering his sufferings for me; and the letters of support from so many members of Opus Dei and other people. That’s how I explain the serenity I have had during these past months.

After you were elected Prelate, did your opponents let you win in your tennis games?

I hope not; I would realize it right away and the game would lose interest.

Recently you made your first pastoral trip to Spain to visit the faithful and friends of Opus Dei. What message did you want to transmit in so many face-to-face encounters?

On this trip to Spain I wanted to remind people above all that, as Christians, we should put Jesus at the center of our lives. As Benedict XVI emphasized in his first encyclical (words that Pope Francis likes to cite), a
Christian doesn’t adhere to an idea, nor solely to a doctrine, but rather follows and loves a person: Christ Jesus.

That’s what I wanted to insist upon on this trip, putting the emphasis on the spirit proper to Opus Dei: that we are called to bring Christ’s charity to our ordinary life, to our family, our work, our dealings with our friends.

In Spain, Opus Dei has produced great spiritual and social benefits. But it has also generated controversy. Many people have found God’s salvation thanks to this charism and they are happy. But there are also people who recount, some even publicly, that their time in Opus Dei occasioned deep wounds. Can it be that there was something that wasn’t done well?

In the 22 years that I worked side-by-side with the former Prelate, Don Javier, I heard him ask for pardon from those who have felt hurt or wounded by the behavior of any of his children. I join myself to that petition for forgiveness and I wish with all my heart that these persons be cured of their wounds and overcome their pain.

St. Josemaría used to say that he had a great affection for every person who came to the means of formation in Opus Dei, although maybe only for a while. Imagine his affection for those who had actually joined the Work. He felt a deep spiritual fatherhood for them and never stopped loving any child or brother of his.

It’s important to consider this on two levels. On the one hand, the message of Opus Dei is a pathway opened to follow Christ. On the other, the activities that the people and centers of the Work carry out are, as is only natural, influenced by the circumstances and ways of being of those involved. Certainly among such a great number of activities and people—all with good intentions—there are bound to be mistakes, omissions, carelessness or misunderstandings. I would like to ask pardon for each one of these.

You speak of asking for pardon. One of the blessings of the Catholic faith is that we know God’s mercy welcomes us back in spite of our mistakes. Even when these errors tarnish his Name. Perhaps one of the most joyful moments in recent years was when John Paul II asked for pardon in the name of all the members of the universal Church for past mistakes.
I think we shouldn’t separate our request for forgiveness from the praise due to God out of gratitude for the many gifts that in is mercy He constantly pours out on us and that come to us through human means, which become then the instrument of divine action.

St. John Paul II gave us a marvelous example all through his life of these two dimensions that we should always keep in mind when we contemplate God’s greatness alongside human weakness. That’s what happened on that Day of Forgiveness he called for during the Great Jubilee Year 2000. And Benedict XVI also stressed that forgiveness is the only force that can overcome evil, that can change the world. In first place, we should ask God for forgiveness. But our life also should habitually involve asking for forgiveness and forgiving others. We repeat this every day when we pray the Our Father, but too often we forget it in practice. It’s true that we have to respect the truth, that we can’t ask for pardon by accusing other people indirectly or unjustly with a kind of superficial “meaculpism.” But to forgive and to ask for forgiveness are Christian attitudes that do not humiliate, but rather exalt a person.

Christianity in the West is now in a “vocational winter” that causes worry. But there is also evidence of a coming springtime in the Church: hopeful fruits in communities that have matured through a renewed teaching of the faith. The Holy Spirit seems to be encouraging us to go deeper in our gratitude for the love of a God who comes out to meet us, who doesn’t require that we win Him over by our merits, who needs our poverty to pour out on us his mercy. How does someone in Opus Dei today live and announce this relationship with God?

The foundation of the spirit of Opus Dei is the vivid awareness that we are children of God. St. Josemaría wrote in Friends of God: “God is a Father full of tenderness, of infinite love. Call him 'Father' many times a day and tell him—alone, in your heart—that you love him, that you adore him, that you feel proud and strong because you are his child.” The announcement of our relationship with God in Opus Dei has this focus. As St. John writes: “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

In this world of ours, so often held hostage within a culture of sadness, feeling this love of a Father seems to be crucial to live with hope.
Always, and especially in these times, we should keep this marvelous reality very much in mind, since it will help us overcome the pessimism that takes over when facing the problems of life, the awareness of our own defects, the difficulties of evangelizing, and even the situation of the world.

Our life is not a romantic novel, but rather an epic poem. Realizing we are children of God helps us live with confidence, gratitude, and joy. It invites us to love this world of ours, with all its problems and all its beauty. The peace of the world depends more on what each one of us contributes in ordinary life (smiling, forgiving, not giving importance to ourselves) than on the negotiations between nation-states, however necessary and relevant these may be.

From your first pastoral letter as Prelate, you insist a great deal on the importance of having Jesus Christ as the center of one’s life, that we need to experience and constantly re-live a personal encounter with God’s love. Only as a consequence of this encounter can Christian life spring up and grace superabound in the Church. How does Opus Dei wish to proclaim this great good news?

Basically, through sincere friendship, from person to person, which is always mutually enriching. To evangelize, what’s essential is the value of personal testimony and sharing one’s own life experience: it’s much more effective than theoretical speeches. Logically, this does not exclude various personal initiatives that include evangelization (schools, health clinics, etc.). In some of these, the Prelature takes responsibility for the Christian orientation and for priestly assistance.

Opus Dei was born in the Church with a prophetic character. Nevertheless, the death of the Founder coincided with the first years of the post-conciliar “tsunami.” It seems only logical that the Work should hold on tightly to its foundations. But could there be some signs of “entrenchment” on the part of the Work in the face of so much chaos and confusion that Peter’s boat has gone and is going through?

Faithfulness to God is one thing that has always shone forth throughout the twenty centuries of Christianity. Fidelity to the Christian faith, which is fidelity to Christ, has always shown itself to be innovative, dynamic and transformative. I think it’s true, after Vatican II, when we saw the results of the “hermeneutic of rupture” (as Benedict XVI called it in a
famous speech), that the temptation to “entrenchment” you mention became a real possibility.

In any case, these are temporary reactions that it’s necessary to overcome—both “rupture” as well as “entrenchment.” They are the result of having given in to a dialectical, political mentality that is foreign to the Church, because it divides and breaks up unity. In the Church there are not, nor should there ever be, sides or parties, but rather unity within a legitimate pluralism.

Relativism has caused havoc in our disoriented society. The Work is famous for its faithfulness and loyalty to the Church and the Pope. This can be a blessing in turbulent times. Stressing doctrine amid the storms offers security; but it can also lead to an eagerness to have everything “according to the rules.” How does one harmonize complete faithfulness to the Divine Law with the joyful freedom of the children of God?

Many problems arise when we pose unnecessary dilemmas or reduce reality to dialectical stereotypes. Faithfulness or creativity, orthodoxy or freedom, doctrine or life experience… I think we should live with a more integrated attitude, that is to say, a more Christian attitude. Reality doesn’t let itself be closed up within exclusive categories. It demands of us a certain equilibrium, a pondering of things, an integral “wholeness” that ends up being very positive also in our relationships with others.

I find faithfulness to doctrine perfectly compatible with openness to the inspirations of the Spirit. The history of the Church confirms this. Without losing its identity, the Church is permanently new. In this context, I consider freedom of spirit to be important, and this obviously doesn’t consist in the absence of obligations and commitments, but rather in love. It’s what St. Augustine meant by his famous phrase: “Love and do what you wish.” Or as St. Thomas Aquinas said in different way: “The more love a person has, the freer he is.”

Then a creative fidelity, means living the freedom of love, seeking to open oneself to the perennial newness of the Spirit.

Ways of doing and speaking change, but the core, the spirit, remains the same. Faithfulness doesn’t come from a mechanical repetition; it shows itself when we know how to apply the same spirit in different
circumstances.

This sometimes implies keeping also what is accidental; but in other cases it means changing things. In this case, a serene discernment and openness to the light of the Spirit is key; above all in order to know the boundaries (often not so evident) between the accidental and the essential.

Another risk of a stagnant doctrinal zeal in our Church is the proliferation of souls trapped in a rationalism that scorns any emotional manifestations of their personal relationship with God—as if living a heartfelt faith would make them fall into sentimentalism. As a physicist, would you dare to give us an equation by which we can grow in love for God?

My years of theological study and being close to certain persons have brought me to greatly value what the light of faith also means for the exercise of reason. But always without undervaluing the importance of the heart, of the emotions, which are profoundly human. Our God is always near us: in the Eucharist, Jesus makes himself very close in the intimacy of our heart.

One of the most provocative challenges of our times is recovering the fruitful value of silence. The Work is an expert at forming Christians called to live in God’s presence in the midst of the world. Perhaps one of the “shortcuts” for doing so is Saint Josemaría’s advice to put ourselves into the Gospel, a permanent fountain of wisdom and peace, as one more person in the scene. How does one touch the living Jesus, today, now?

St. Josemaría, when he advised us to put ourselves into the Gospel scenes just like one more person there, was passing on his own experience. God granted him a lively faith in the Incarnation, from which an ardent love for our Lord sprang, to follow in the footsteps of his life on earth and to see him as a model for us.

Jesus, being God, when he came and lived as a man among us, growing up, being educated, living in a family, working, having friends, dealing with his neighbors, suffering and weeping... shows us the value of everything human in God’s eyes, and that our daily life has, in union with Him, a divine value.
Therefore, we can “touch” the living Jesus in all the situations of daily life. Above all, in those privileged “places” where he is present: in small children; in the poor, with whom he especially wanted to identify himself; in the sick, in those whom the Pope calls “the suffering flesh of Christ.” And in a more intense way, as I pointed out before, in the Eucharist.

*Opus Dei* projects an image of strong unity, which is praiseworthy. But at times it doesn’t seem to appreciate healthy self-criticism. Your first written words to the faithful of the Work pointed to all the good works (and they really are good!) that you had all carried out together. I ask myself this question: whether speaking only about the good and the ideal (and I understand that it is necessary to do this) could perhaps generate a breeding ground for self-complacency or move members toward the idealism of confusing what one desires to be (the divine charism) with what one is actually doing (so often, a poor human performance).

Self-complacency is always a danger for those who want to do good. And in *Opus Dei*, as everyone else, we also have to be vigilant and guard against this danger. As I said before, I worked closely with Bishop Javier Echevarría for more than twenty years. He used to repeat to us that those in the Work neither are, nor should we feel ourselves to be, any better than anyone else, that each of us is capable of any evil.

But humility on the personal level is not enough. There’s also a collective, institutional humility that has many manifestations: in the way we speak, in the sincere admiration we have for others, and so forth. That’s why when we acknowledge good things done it’s to give glory to God, who is the One who grants this to us, and not to compliment ourselves. I ask God to free us from praising ourselves—something Don Javier often warned us about, as did St. Josemaría as well.

Along these lines, I have always found very heart-warming an expression that he used when he spoke of *Opus Dei* as a “little part” of the Church. Spiritual families formed within the Church by inspiration of the Holy Spirit sometimes run a risk. Where I come from we call it “not seeing beyond the tip of your nose,” or in other words, living a sort of short-sighted “cult” to the institution itself, or to its charisms, or to its founder. How does one avoid promoting one’s own brand, and instead put God and the unity of the Church first?
That expression “little part” of the Church is from St. Josemaría, who was using the typical diminutive of his Aragonese background to express the affectionate tone in which he was speaking. The temptation of referring to oneself is always at hand everywhere. Often it’s through an excessive enthusiasm, or else through not recognizing other realities, or out of vanity. St. Josemaría tried to prevent that danger by reminding us frequently that the Work only exists to serve the Church as the Church wants to be served. If serving the Church—a necessary expression of our love for Christ—is always a reality in the life of each of us, then we’re doing well.

_Sometimes I ask myself why we pray for unity among all Christians but we forget about unity within the Church herself. Here’s an example: the family is one of the greatest victims in our society and, unfortunately, within the Church too. In Spain, if you have a large family, you are often asked: “Opus or Kikos (Neocatechumenate)?” How can we all, being faithful to the gifts received, learn how to love the richness of others as the fruit of God’s diverse ways of acting?_  

To love, one first has to know. Many divisions and misunderstandings in the Church come from a lack of knowledge. And they are mainly resolved by getting to know the reality, the real situation.

Moreover, loving Christ means loving everyone, and especially those who in one way or another are dedicating their lives to spreading the Gospel. Joy is also a real bridge that unites people, helping them to overcome their differences.

_In regard to getting to know one another better (first of all those who share our faith), what about organizing some joint initiatives? For example, what would happen if a family event were organized by the New Catechumens and the faithful of Opus Dei? Or if young people from Communion and Liberation took part in a UNIV congress? Or you organized an inter-religious event, side by side with the Focolare people?_  

We Catholics run the risk, as Pope Francis has pointed out, of reducing apostolate to structures, activities or events, which often are not particularly effective for reaching the hearts and minds of those who do not know Christ.

What’s essential in the Work is giving good Christian formation so that each one acts with freedom and initiative, individually. Those possible
meetings that you mention certainly at times can be very useful, and in fact have taken place on some occasions, particularly when the Pope or the bishops are the ones who take the initiative.

At any rate, I think that besides getting together in these ways, we normally spend each day carrying out our daily activities: in our workplace, our school, our culture, a business enterprise, politics. There, where there are already Catholics of different “stripes” working, we can collaborate in countless evangelical initiatives: with an open ecumenical spirit, hand in hand with other Christians, together with many other people of good will.

The next Church synod will be dedicated to the vocation of young people, a topic that has generated controversy regarding Opus Dei. A well-intentioned apostolic zeal may have “forced” some decisions to dedicate oneself or perhaps converted that apostolic mission into a task for which one has to show some results. If that’s the case, how would you avoid that happening again? Would it be productive to go beyond proselytism and promote instead an apostolate of “contagion” or example?

Benedict XVI and Francis have both made reference to proselytism in the negative sense that it has acquired in recent times, especially in the ecumenical sphere, and they have explained very well what Christian apostolate really is. Naturally, the sense in which St. Josemaría used the term “proselytism” was not a negative one; he was always a decisive defender of freedom. It’s possible that on occasion some people have committed those errors that you mention. There comes to mind, among so many practical manifestations of the love St. Josemaría had for freedom, a small detail, but one that I think is very significant. When a mother asked him to bless the child she was carrying in her womb, the blessing was this: “May you be a great friend of freedom.”

Maybe the goal should be that others ask themselves: “Where does the joy and love that these people have come from?”

Actually, it’s not so much the idea of “doing apostolate” as it is of being apostles. Therefore, I repeat that giving witness is absolutely necessary. But that does not exclude but rather demands the positive transmission of the Gospel, the proposal to follow Jesus, which stems from real love for others and therefore with complete respect for their privacy and freedom. In this,
as in everything, the example of Jesus is shining and decisive. Not only did “he pass through this world doing good,” but he was also explicit and very direct in his specific proposals: “Follow me,” “Repent and believe in the Gospel.”

*Opus Dei is known for its concern for education at all levels and on every continent. How does one live in the world without being worldly? At times, in undertakings by religious institutions, the logic of success filters in and priority is given to attaining excellence or the tangible merits awarded by rankings. How can one avoid eclipsing the authentic mission, which is to show ever better the beauty of God’s face?*

Above I referred to the danger of dialectical stereotypes. I think that when people of Opus Dei promote educational centers or schools, they want them to be excellent from the professional viewpoint, and at the same time to offer an excellent Christian education, always respecting the freedom of students and their families.

Not only then is there no conflict, but the Christian spirit requires integration. Seen in another way, it’s a question of confirming with deeds that the fact of being Christian does not bring with it a carelessness regarding human behavior; just the opposite.

*I’m afraid that I didn’t express myself well. It’s not so much an “either—or”—either human success or letting God shine. Neither am I referring specifically to apostolates of the Work. We live in a climate of belligerent secularism that can easily lead us to think that it’s dangerous to mention God and it’s better to leave Him in small letters or even add him like a detachable “sticker.” How does one face the challenge of speaking about God with naturalness, with passion, without complexes, as the wonderful Love who sustains our life and our endeavors?*

Certainly, we can have the sensation of living in unsteady times. But we can also see great desires for change. Our world seems to be distancing itself from God, and nevertheless one can sense so much spiritual thirst… God’s action is being carried out today and now, in the times in which we’ve been given to live, and I hope we open ourselves to it! When some thinkers say that interpersonal relationships in our society have gone “fluid” and they point out the shipwreck on the shores of the superficial and
ephemeral—this shouldn’t fill us with pessimism or bitterness, but rather spur us to spread the joy of the Gospel even more diligently.

*Maybe one of our first steps should be to assume that numbers aren’t as important as grace. If we live a Christianity of the minority, but with the unshakeable faith of a grain of mustard seed…*

I’m convinced that one of the most important challenges of the Church today is to give hope to each person, especially to the youngest, to families who suffer difficulties or break-up, and to victims of poverty (not only material, but so often in the form of loneliness or an empty existence).

To face this challenge, given our personal limitations and sins, the only way is to sense the merciful look of Jesus and ask Him to send us to bring his Love to our contemporaries.

*The Church granted the Work the status of being a personal prelature at the service of the universal Church and of particular churches. But often it is perceived as an “extra-diocesan” reality. To be fair, many priests of the prelature are filling in for the scarcity of diocesan priests. But in practical terms, the fact that the faithful of the prelature have means of Christian formation in their own centers, have their own confessors, their own apostolic work, can that cause them to live on the margins of the daily life of the parish? How does one confront the challenge of being “living stones” (integrated, not just added) within the structure of the Church?*

Perhaps on this point, when speaking about the Work, you are really talking about the priests of the Prelature, or the numeraries. But the majority of the faithful in Opus Dei are actually supernumeraries who take an active part in parish life, within their possibilities, juggling their work and family responsibilities. It isn’t always easy to find the time, and each one does what he or she can. On the other hand, the priests who belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross are diocesan priests, fully engaged in the pastoral tasks of their dioceses. In my opinion, as time goes by, this ecclesial aspect of their work, which perhaps today is not so well-known, will become ever clearer.

*Sometimes we fail to see the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, and that each one of us with our own vocation contributes to the wealth of grace that comes to us through the Communion of Saints. But I wonder if another of the great*
challenges facing our Church is that parishes need to become more fully enriched by the charisms of the Holy Spirit. I think some effort is needed for both these things to happen.

In that sense, what can help us is a change of attitude. Instead of keeping account of what each one does, we should give thanks to God that we’re all working together for Him! In my first letter as Prelate, I think I was clear in this respect. I wrote: “I want to encourage some faithful of the Prelature, Cooperators and young people to collaborate freely and responsibly in teaching catechism, marriage courses, providing social services in parishes or other places where these are needed, always in accord with their secular status and their lay mentality. And not by depending in any way on the authority of the Prelature. On the other hand, I also want to make special mention of the men and women religious who have done so much good and are doing so much good for the Church and for the world. ‘Whoever does not love and venerate the religious state is no friend of mine,’ Saint Josemaría taught us. I am happy besides, to think of so many religious as well as diocesan priests who have seen their vocation blossom through their association with the Work.”

There comes to mind also something that people usually question about the Work, an aspect of pastoral practice: the fact that men and women work separately, which can be effective and at times necessary. Is this part of the Work’s foundational charism? Couldn’t it be unnatural not to allow any exceptions? Externally, it could be seen as something that stifles healthy initiatives that arise naturally, or that facilitate young people coming together, or spiritual sharing among married couples…

In the Work, separation of men and women is limited to the means of formation, to the centers where these are given, and to the organizing of different apostolates. In these cases, separation is part of the original charism, which has well-experienced pastoral reasons for this practice, although I understand that some people don’t share that view and prefer other ways of doing things which are equally legitimate. Apart from these means of formation, there are many activities in which both men and women participate: courses for married couples or for engaged couples, sessions for mothers and fathers of children in youth clubs, initiatives in parishes that are staffed by priests of the Prelature, etc. That’s without
mentioning countless informal activities that come about through the initiative and creativity of families.

In my opinion, what’s important is that married couples receive formation that helps strengthen their marriage and their family. That’s the point of giving them the formation offered in the Work.

*We are living in rather tense and turbulent times. I am thinking especially about places where the Church is persecuted. How can we respond to the martyrdom of so many of our brothers and sisters who are pouring out their lives for Christ?*

First, by accompanying them with our prayer. We cannot get used to this kind of news, which unfortunately happens daily. Saint Josemaría, who felt deeply everything that was affecting the Church, denounced the “conspiracy of silence” that weighed upon persecuted Christians, especially on those who, at that time, lived behind the Iron Curtain. He asked people in the Work—and I think his advice holds for all Catholics—that we confront silence with information, making known what is happening with persecuted Christians, and helping them in whatever way we can. Information is the key, because making known the reality can move us to give more active and generous help.

*Sometimes we have the feeling that we are living in a world gone wild. What did you ask our Lady for on your recent trip to Fatima?*

In her maternal presence, I went over some of the challenges of this world of ours, so complex and exciting. I asked her for the grace to bring the Gospel to everyone, in its original pure form, and at the same time, in its radiant newness. In a message sent later to my children, I wrote something that I think can be useful: “Our calling summons each of us, with our spiritual and intellectual resources, with our professional skills or life experiences, and also with our limitations and defects, to try and see how we can cooperate more and more in the huge task of setting Christ at the summit of all human activities. To do this we need in-depth knowledge of the times we live in, its dynamics and potential, and also of the limitations and injustices, sometimes serious ones, that afflict it. Above all, we need personal union with Jesus, in prayer and the sacraments. Thus we
will be able to remain open to the action of the Holy Spirit, in order to call, with charity, at the door of our contemporaries’ hearts.”

I think that these words can be a fitting conclusion to our conversation, one in which I would have liked to bring up even more topics. But we have to leave it here. Thank you so much for your time and your frank answers, and also for not rejecting any uncomfortable questions! Thank you for having tried, together with us, to build bridges.

I also thank you for the time you have spent with me. Besides, it has been wonderful to speak in an atmosphere of freedom, openness and affection where we always learn from one another. I’m actually happy that you asked me some questions that could be annoying, but that have given me the opportunity to deal with some interesting points, and that besides were motivated by a sincere desire to spread the truth. As I say this, there come to mind some words from the third letter of Saint John: “cooperators in the truth,” which Joseph Ratzinger chose as his episcopal motto.

Thank you also for your dedication in leading thousands of people of all races and conditions throughout the world. Because we need to keep on building up families, the Church and this blessed world of ours with the joy of the Gospel. May each of our readers also beg strength from God to faithfully fulfill their mission, and thus we will all come out winners!

Torna ai contenuti

Interview granted to Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany (September 3, 2017)

By Constanze Reuscher

You are the first person at the head of Opus Dei who has not had a personal relationship with the founder. What does this mean for your work?

I met the founder when I was 19 years old. Later on I was able to see him more often, during the last eight years of his life, since (although I didn’t work closely with him) from 1967 to 1975 I had the good fortune to live in the same house that he lived in. I listened to his preaching and saw
the fatherly affection with which he treated all of us. His teachings and example impressed me and have remained forever engraved on my memory. Now I entrust myself daily to St. Josemaría and ask him to intercede for me in my task.

Being the successor of a saint is a great responsibility, which brings with it the desire to be faithful. I ask God to help me give continuity to the spirit we have received, with the creativity required of every Christian, just as my predecessors did. Their fidelity was never rigidity, since historical circumstances and new challenges often demand new solutions.

You were born in exile, in Paris, because your parents had been forced to flee from Franco’s regime. Does this affect your work in the Prelature, since at times people claim that Opus Dei had ties to Franco and to South American dictatorships?

My father had to flee from Spain in 1939 because of the Civil War, since he was in the military and loyal to the Republic, and therefore opposed to the Franco regime. As soon as he could, he arranged to bring the whole family to France.

Exile forces one to confront the consequences of a lack of freedom, although in my case I was too young to understand what was happening. In the environment of an exiled family, I learned the value of personal freedom. Maybe this was one of the reasons why the spirit of Opus Dei attracted me so strongly; in the Prelature personal freedom and responsibility are strongly fostered. They are two sides of the same coin—for life in society as well as for the spiritual life.

Opus Dei, as such, is as completely independent of politics as is a diocese or a parish. Otherwise it would be violating its purely religious, spiritual purpose. But any person in Opus Dei—as any other Catholic—can have whatever political opinion they deem opportune, provided that it respects the rules of civil co-existence and is not opposed to the teachings of the Church.

The supposed tie to Franco that you mention is due to the historical fact that a small number of members of Opus Dei were ministers during the Francoist period. But keep in mind that all ministers in the Franco regime (more than one hundred among the various governments) were
Catholics; those who belonged Opus Dei can be counted on one’s fingers, and certainly they were not a “group.” When St. Josemaría learned of their appointments he acted according to his normal way of acting: respecting their freedom, although he knew he would face some difficulties in terms of “public opinion.” But at the same time, he also defended the freedom of other members of Opus Dei who thought just the opposite.

In post-war Spain, a great majority of Catholics sympathized with the Franco regime, especially after having experienced the fierce persecution against the Church in the months that preceded the war. Seeing the historical context helps one to understand decisions that today some may find incomprehensible. In Opus Dei there were also other people with strong anti-Francoist convictions. Some of them were subjected to defamation campaigns in the press by the official party of the regime (the Falange), such as Rafael Calvo Serer, a member of Opus Dei who had to live in exile for many years. I also knew a number of university students in Opus Dei who took part, along with many others of their age, in the first public movements against that regime.

However, I don’t know the origins of that perception you mentioned about Latin America. The reality is that none of those dictatorships had any minister or person in a similar position who was a member of the Prelature. Sometimes there is too much fantasy in the collective imagination, and one can only react with patience.

*Opus Dei is famous for continuing to be a conservative community that seeks to influence politics. Is that true?*

Dividing Christians into “conservatives” and “progressives” perhaps reveals, deep down, an attitude of exclusion, an attitude of marginalization towards those who think differently from oneself. I understand that it can be easier to explain the Church by reducing it to monolithic and opposed blocks, but in doing so we lose the variety of opinions that enrich it.

If one is speaking about “preserving” the essence of the Gospel, then yes, every Christian is a conservative; and if it’s a matter of applying the Gospel to one’s own life, then every Christian is a “progressive,” because he or she wants to grow and make progress.

In any case, I prefer to avoid categories of this sort, which I see as ill-
As I said before, Opus Dei and politics are very different realities. It would be wrong to attribute to this institution of the Church the political choices of its members, choices that, thank God, are quite varied.

*Opus Dei is above all an organization of lay people, but it has a priest at the head. What is the relationship between its laity and clergy?*

In fact, 98% of the faithful of Opus Dei are lay people, from every social strata and, for the most part, married. The relationship with the remaining 2% (the priests) is typical of every part of the Church to which lay people and priests belong.

Opus Dei is neither an association of lay persons helped by priests, nor an organization of priests with which some lay people cooperate. From the beginning, Saint Josemaría wanted us to be an organic structure of lay people and priests, whose relationship is that which exists between the common priesthood (the priesthood that all the baptized share) and the ministerial priesthood (the ordained clergy), which is a constitutive relationship of the Church.

The canonical figure of the personal Prelature accords well with this theological and pastoral reality. The laity and the priests are enriched spiritually by their specific vocation and mutual interdependence.

*Can you explain the three principal aims of the Prelature?*

The Prelature offers Christian formation and spiritual assistance to its faithful and those who approach it with the desire to grow in their own spiritual life and in charity towards others. It seeks to remind people of the universal call to holiness: we are all called to our Merciful Father God’s embrace in heaven, whatever our situation.

It seeks to bring Christ and the Church everywhere, spreading the hope offered by the Gospel. It seeks to remind the businessman, the doctor, the street sweeper, the journalist, the cook, in short, everyone, that God is not far off, but can be found in ordinary life, especially in work that is well done in service of others, in daily life made up of prayer, setbacks, and joys.
After being named Prelate by Pope Francis, I pointed to three main goals that are especially urgent for all Catholics: accompanying young people on their path of faith, serving the sick and those most in need (they are at the heart of the Gospel), and helping families that are starting to build their future, since they are the hope of society and suffer in a special way from the evils that afflict it.

Opus Dei is also in Germany. Is there any activity of special interest for public opinion?

Opus Dei has been present in Germany since 1952, and since then many activities have been carried out in the field of Christian formation and catechesis.

There are some very visible realities, so to speak, such as the parish of St. Pantaleon, in Cologne, entrusted to priests of the Prelature; but at the same time, there are many people of Opus Dei who assist the parish and diocesan organizations of the places where they live.

Other better known activities include, for example, the International College Campus Müngersdorf, a women's residence in Cologne where, since the 60s, both Catholics and non-Catholics have found a home during their university years; the center for university encounters MaxTor95 in Munich, which is currently building a new site, closer to the university; and many others.

In addition to these and other initiatives, I like to think about the many faithful of Opus Dei who, spurred by their personal encounter with Christ, help organize service activities that rarely receive headlines. Specifically, not only young people but also the elderly are making the effort to assist refugees: in soup kitchens, in the struggle to get official documents from municipal and health authorities, dealing with landlords, etc.

I remember, for example, the efforts of a high school teacher in the Ruhr area to help Syrian refugees to integrate successfully in the German education system. Also, this week, some university students at the Campus Müngersdorf are carrying out a project to assist boys and girls who have been traumatized by their experience as refugees. And I could mention many other examples, such as an “integrated residence” where elderly people co-exist with young people, which was begun by a woman of the
Work, or the family orientation courses and preparation for marriage initiatives that take place in the various centers.

Since 1994, more than 150 young Germans have participated actively in the Schule statt Straße (school instead of the street), organizing work camps in isolated villages of Uganda and Kenya, where they help construct primary schools under the direction of local workers. This is an initiative of two men of Opus Dei.

*In Rome there are a number of pontifical universities. What is the specific role and special nature of yours?*

The University of the Holy Cross seeks to delve deeply into the intellectual and anthropological riches of the faith, opening up a dialogue with the challenges of contemporary culture.

The work that is carried out there strives to respond to the special situation of today’s world, with its light and shadows, helping to form men and women of faith, capable of dialoging with the modern world and offering people in a convincing way the light of Christ.

Without going into the specifics of each of its departments, I would say that—following the heritage of St. Josemaría—a special effort is made to harmonize professional and intellectual training with spiritual and theological formation.

Obviously these are challenges that we share with the rest of the universities and centers of study in Rome, with whom we want to collaborate and from whom we want to learn.

*What is your opinion of the image that is transmitted about Opus Dei by certain books and popular films, such as that of the American writer Dan Brown?*

I think sometimes there is no other remedy than to respond to these types of things with a smile and work so that the reality eventually emerges.

The main problem with that book was the frivolous and superficial way it depicted the Person of Christ. As a result, many Christians sought to take advantage of that outpouring of public interest, that need to carry out a
widespread catechesis on the true figure of Jesus and on the reality of the Church.

The caricature of Opus Dei was so far removed from reality that it was almost comical, even grotesque. Looking at all this with some perspective now, I can say that it may have helped to provide experience on how to make oneself better known to a much wider audience. And I give thanks to God for the thousands of people who have come closer to the Church through this apparent setback.

From the perspective of faith, criticisms and attacks have always spurred Christians to pray more, to be humble, and to seek to share with others the joy of a life lived in accord with the Gospel. The founder of Opus Dei used to say that these attacks and blows led to the seed of the Christian faith spreading throughout the whole world. Something similar happened with the misunderstandings and confusions generated by this book, although obviously I wouldn’t want anyone to have to go through a similar situation, which consumes so much time and energy to make the truth known.

Interview Granted to the Website of the Diocese of Malaga, Spain (July 3, 2017)

By Encarni Llamas Fortes

Last January, Pope Francis appointed Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz Braña (Paris, 1944) as Prelate of Opus Dei. He thus becomes the third successor of St. Josemaría at the head of the Prelature, after the death of Bishop Javier Echevarría, on December 12th.

You have become the third successor of St. Josemaría. You also worked with Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. What does it mean for you to succeed these two holy men?

It means a great responsibility that, at the same time, is accompanied by a lot of serenity. Responsibility, because this new ecclesial service, in
addition to the ordinary pastoral government, includes passing on the memory of holiness that we have received from them, and praying and working so that it takes root in each of our lives. Serenity, because I can rely on the intercession of St. Josemaría and his successors, and also on the prayers of so many people. At the same time, it gives me joy to see the strong desire of the people of the Prelature to be faithful to God and to loyally serve the Church and souls, both in Malaga and other places with a Christian tradition, as well as in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, to mention two countries where there are few Christians and where the stable apostolic work of Opus Dei is more recent.

Now you are the Father of a very large family of laity and priests all over the world. How do you see that fatherhood?

All fatherhood comes from God, who is Father of love and mercy. To every father in the Church you could apply Saint Josemaría’s words: striving to be a father “to the measure of the heart of Christ,” which truly has no measure. But God counts on human weakness and I have no doubt that he will grant me the necessary graces. As I said before, I find support especially in the prayer of all the people who love the Church and pray for Opus Dei. I know that I’m closely accompanied.

"Each generation of Christians has to sanctify its own time." Is this still the priority of Opus Dei?

This has been true from the Church’s beginnings. As St. Josemaría said in the words you just quoted, each generation of Christians needs to keep sanctifying, redeeming, its time, because they are not strangers to their own epoch, but rather a part of it. And they realize they are called to make Christ present there, by encouraging many people to meet him, showing the attractiveness of his face and the joy of encountering him.

It is true that redemption is finished, it is perfect; but it’s also true that Jesus wants to rely on each and every Christian to bring it to others. This is the missionary mandate that Christ gave to his Church: “Go out to all the world,” to all nations, to all professions and trades, to all families.... Go to all the peripheries of the earth, starting with the people who are closest!

Opus Dei is a small part of the Church, and also wishes to “go out” to every environment, as the Pope frequently says. The faithful of the
Prelature, in carrying out their profession, or in the heart of their families, should foster continuously this attitude of openness and self-giving towards others, sharing in the worries and sufferings of their peers, learning from other men and women (relatives, friends, work colleagues...), and trying to help each one find his or her own path to God.

Sanctifying one’s time means bringing one’s daily activities to God: offering to society our humble and well-done work, a life of service to others, infecting them with hope and an eagerness to “humanize” our world. Joy is a sincere bridge that unites people.

What do you see as the challenges we lay people face today?

Many modern thinkers say that in our society interpersonal relationships have become “liquid,” subject to the whims of what is immediate and superficial. Such relationships easily give rise to empty hearts. We Christians have to work for what is enduring, for beautiful and definitive ideals, and that’s why I think the most important challenge for the Church—and for society as a whole—is to give hope to each person, especially to young people, to families, and to those who suffer greater material or spiritual needs.

To meet this challenge, despite our own defects and shortcomings, we need to bring to many people the light of Jesus’ love: bringing Jesus to the environment in which we are immersed, while always respecting people’s freedom. This is the missionary task of Christians of all times. Offering this treasure will be more authentic if we are able to show empathy towards others, if we can enlarge our heart so that the needs and sorrows, the fears and sufferings of the women and men of our time find a place here, starting with those closest to us and the weakest.

In these first months as Prelate of Opus Dei, you will have received many messages. Is there one that has especially touched your heart?

I truly appreciate the words of affection and closeness that have come to me from different parts of the great family of the Church, including from this beloved diocese of Malaga. Pope Francis wrote to me expressing his affection and prayer, and I often go back to his words. I have also received letters that have moved me from bishops, priests, communities of men and women religious. I remember now one from a young boy suffering
from cancer, who sent me his support and prayer from the hospital. The countless messages that I received from the faithful of the Prelature have helped me a lot; they show a unity of prayer and intentions that moves me, and that without a doubt is a gift from God. I don’t want to ever get used to these gestures of affection. True love makes any responsibility easier to bear. I ask God, and Our Lady of Victory, to help me carry out this service with the generosity Bishop Javier Echevarría showed.

Messages

Christmas Message (December 22, 2017)

Seeing God become a child, truly being a child, shows us the simplicity of God, who becomes a child for us. Also in seeing the newborn child in Bethlehem we come to know God’s way of being. God who is love, love for us. Therefore faith in his Birth is also faith in God’s love for us, for each one of us, as St. John says in one of his letters: “We know and believe the love God has for us” (1 Jn 4:16).

All Christians are called to be Christ’s presence among others. St. Josemaría used to say that we should be ipse Christus, Christ himself. How? By following what he himself told us: “The Son of man came not to be served but to serve” (Mt 20:28). Service. And a big part of this service means being people who bring peace in this world so ravaged by conflicts, so many divisions in families, etc. May the first service be spreading peace, being people who spread peace, which is in addition one of the Beatitudes. In the Beatitudes our Lord unites “spreading peace” with “being God’s children”: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Mt 5:9). Serving others by spreading peace —with understanding— and then, praying for peace in the world, so greatly needed.
I would also like to remind you that in the upcoming year, in 2018, a special synod will be held. We need to pray for what the Pope has in mind in convoking this synod. We already know in broad terms what this involves, namely fostering a wider awareness of the Christian vocation and the various vocations of self-giving to God. It is a question of discovering what God wants from each person, but not seeing it only as a question of reflecting, of discovering, but also of wanting. By praying a lot for the Pope’s intentions we are preparing for this synod. And we should also pray for an ever-greater awareness of the reality that we all have a vocation to sanctity, that we all need to discover what God wants of us. Everything that God asks from us is a gift that he gives us. So let us pray especially for young people, for those who when they sense God’s call think it means “giving a lot,” so that they may realize they receive much more, that everything they give is in reality a gift from God. We see this in the Pope (how he gives himself continually!), and that is what we have to do too.

I would like to send my greetings to everyone, and to relive with you, to hear once again, the angel’s announcement to the shepherds at Bethlehem: “I bring you good news of a great joy... for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11). Let us try to make this the source of our joy during these feast days, a joy based on this great announcement that the Savior has been born for us.

November 1

All Saints Day is the feast of that quiet and simple sanctity —sanctity without any human splendor— which seems to leave no trace in history, but shines forth before God. It leaves behind in the world a sowing of Love from which nothing is lost. In thinking about so many men and women who have already traveled this path and now are enjoying God, I recalled some words from St. Josemaría’s prayer: “I ask myself many times each day: what will it be like when all the beauty, all the goodness, all the infinite marvel of God is poured into this poor vessel of clay that I am, that we all
are?... And then I understand what the Apostle said: ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard…’ (1 Cor 2:9). It is worthwhile my children, it is worthwhile.”

We are poor vessels of clay: fragile, easily broken. But God has created us to fill us with his happiness, forever. And now here on earth, he gives us his joy so that we may spread it to everyone. Yes, it is possible to be happy amid uncertainty, problems, worries. Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “True love is a love that causes us pain, that hurts, and yet brings us joy.” With our life and our prayer let us also accompany the deceased who, although they are suffering because their “vessel of clay” is not yet prepared for all of God’s beauty, already have the joy of knowing that he is waiting for them in heaven.

Rome, November 1, 2017

Fernando

October 10

The recent feasts on the 2nd and 6th of October, anniversaries of the founding of the Work and of St. Josemaría’s canonization, invite us once again to follow our path with gratitude and fidelity. “How good is our Lord, who has sought us out and taught us this holy way to be effective, to give our life with simplicity, to love all creatures in God, and to sow peace and joy among mankind! Jesus, how good you are, how good!” (Letter, March 11, 1940, no. 78).

Let us recall Don Javier’s prayer, in the final hours of his life, for the fidelity of everyone. A Christian’s fidelity should be a grateful fidelity, because we are not being faithful to an idea but to a Person: to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who (each of us can say) “loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Realizing that we are personally loved by God leads us, with his grace, to a faithful and persevering love, a love filled with hope for what God will do in the Church and in the world, through the life of each of us, even with our weakness.

Rome, October 10, 2017
After the Earthquake in Mexico City
(September 20, 2017)

I have been following closely the painful news of the quake that affected a large section of Mexico City yesterday at 1:14 pm. Together with the regional vicar of the Prelature in that country, who happened to be in Rome, we have tried to be closely united to the Mexican people, whose expressions of solidarity have moved me.

Through the motherly mediation of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I ask our Lord to welcome into his glory those who have lost their life. I am also asking him to console all those who are suffering from the effects of the earthquake. I feel very close to all of them. Besides asking for their prayer, I would like to thank the faithful, cooperators, and friends of Opus Dei who are generously helping, to the extent of their possibilities, those in need of assistance.

After the Terrorist Attack in Barcelona
(August 18, 2017)

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, was on a pastoral trip to Germany when he received the sad news of the terrorist attack in Barcelona, a city where he had been a few weeks earlier. Through the “Twitter” account of the Information Office of the Prelature, he wanted to share the following message: “Closeness, prayer, and affection for each of the victims of the tragic terrorist attack. Let us implore the gift of peace and fraternity from Our Lady of Ransom.” On Saturday, August 19, during the Mass he celebrated in the parish of St. Pantaleon in Cologne,
Germany, he especially remembered all the victims of terrorism and their families.

**August 15**

As you know, during these weeks — in Spain, Portugal, France, and now Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium — I am having the opportunity to be with many people of the Work, with their families, and with cooperators and friends. As I share their joys, their sorrows and, above all, their desire to bring Christ’s love to so many people, I recall those words that issued from the heart of St. Josemaría in thanksgiving to God: “I think about the Work and I am *dumbfounded*.”

Surely the same thing will happen to you, although at times the daily difficulties and problems can make it hard to see beyond the immediate task we have before us. I ask our Lady, on the feast of her Assumption, to help us always raise the eyes of our heart to God through whatever task we are doing; to care for the Work, which for us is the chief way we care for the Church. Opus Dei is not an accumulation of buildings and initiatives. It is much more: it is a family, and a family that isn’t closed in on itself, but that spreads a family atmosphere around it, opening its heart to the material and spiritual needs of everyone. In a family each person is important. So let us care for each one of them with our prayer, with our closeness, with our understanding, with our good humor.

Fernando

Solingen, August 15, 2017

**July 7**

While praying in Fatima with all of you, I was going over, in the presence of our Heavenly Mother, some of the challenges of this world of
ours—challenges that are both complex and exciting. What is our Lord expecting of us Christians today? He wants us to go out to meet people’s anxieties and needs, in order to bring the Gospel, in its original purity and radiant newness, to everyone. The dimensions of this task are outlined by two fishing scenes from the Sea of Tiberias, which offer a glimpse of the way Christians navigate through history. One is the Master’s forceful invitation to be daring, “Put out into the deep!” (Lk 5:4); and the other is the words of the Beloved Disciple, “It is the Lord!” (Jn 21:7), reflecting the attentive, perceptive faithfulness that enables us to recognize Jesus.

Sailing into the deep sea of this world does not mean adapting the message or the spirit to current events, because the Gospel has the capacity to shed its own light on all situations. Instead, it summons each of us, with our spiritual and intellectual resources, with our professional skills or life experiences, and also with our limitations and defects, to try and see how we can cooperate more and more in the huge task of setting Christ at the summit of all human activities. To do this we need in-depth knowledge of the time we live in, its dynamics and potential, and also of the limitations and injustices, sometimes serious ones, that afflict it. Above all, we need personal union with Jesus, in prayer and the sacraments. Then we will be able to remain open to the action of the Holy Spirit, in order to call, with charity, at the door of our contemporaries’ hearts.

Fernando

Enxomil, July 7, 2017
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
Other Publishing News

Books of St. Josemaría:


*Santo Rosario*, Minos, Mexico City, 2017, 32nd Mexican printing.


*Conversaciones con Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer*, Madrid, Rialp, 23rd printing.


*That all may be saved*, Bogotá, Procodes, 2017, first Colombian ed.

Books about St. Josemaría:


*Camino de liberación: últimas investigaciones sobre el paso de san Josemaría a través de los Pirineos y su estancia en Andorra*, [Path of liberation: latest research on the passage of St. Josemaría through the Pyrenees and his stay in Andorra], Piferrer i Deu, Jordi; Barcelona, Magic Print, 2017, 329 pages.


*Mentalidad y Prudencia Jurídicas en San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: Estudio del camino jurídico recorrido para llegar a la actual figura de la prelatura personal* [Legal Mentality and Prudence in St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer: A study of the juridical path traveled to become a personal
St. Josemaría in Peru: Chronicle of a Trip

The Center for Studies and Communication (CDSCO) published the book *San Josemaría en el Perú: crónica de un viaje* [St. Josemaría in Peru: chronicle of a trip], by Fr. Antonio Ducay Vela. Written in the style of a chronicle, the book recounts the highlights of the founder of Opus Dei’s stay in the Andean country from July 9 to August 1, 1974. The 17 chapters recount the meetings of St. Josemaría with farmers and rural development promoters in San Vicente de Cañete; his get-togethers with young people, families and priests; and his pastoral activities in the city of Lima. The book also narrates the beginnings of Opus Dei in Peru, based on the memories of Rev. Manuel Botas Cuervo who, together with Professor Vicente Rodríguez Casado, began the apostolic work of Opus Dei there in 1953.

Furrow and Holy Rosary in Arabic and Bahasa

The Lebanese publishing house Le Laurier published the first edition of *Furrow* in Arabic (*Khattu el Masira*), which became available on September 29. An initial printing was made of 2,000 copies.

In Indonesia, Murabai publishing house printed *Rosario Suci: Santa Perawan Maria*, the first edition of *Holy Rosary* in Bahasa. Up till then, *The Way* was the only book of St. Josemaría available in that language.
Dedication of a Parish in Lima, Peru

On Sunday, July 9, the Cardinal Archbishop of Lima, Juan Luis Cipriani, celebrated the Mass of dedication of the new parish church of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, located in the district of San Borja in the Peruvian capital.

During the homily, Archbishop Cipriani recalled that on this date 64 years ago the apostolic work of Opus Dei began in their country, and he thanked God for the work “of those who, following in St. Josemaría’s footsteps, have given their lives to the service of the Church in Peru.”

Participating in the ceremony were the auxiliary bishop of Lima, Bishop Raúl Chau; the bishop of the Prelature of Juli, Bishop José María Ortega; the regional vicar of Opus Dei in Peru, Rev. Emilio Arizmendi; the parish priest of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Rev. Rafael Sevilla; as well as several priests from the archdiocese of Lima and the Prelature of Opus Dei. The Archbishop of Lima had words of thanks for the benefactors and architects who made possible the construction of the new church, completed in March 2017.

Torna ai contenuti

Devotion Throughout the World

Relics in Longpont

(France)

The basilica of Notre-Dame de Bonne-Garde, in the French community of Longpont, now has relics of St. Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, since last June 25th. The relics were installed in a glass cabinet dedicated to all the saints who, during their lifetime, visited the diocese of Évry-Corbeil-Essonnes. St. Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro spent the month of August 1966 in the town of Avraineville, which is now part of that diocese.

In the Liturgical Calendar of Utrecht
In the month of September, the Archdiocese of Utrecht received approval from the Holy See to include the optional memorial of St. Josemaría in the liturgical calendar of the diocese.

Blessing of an image

in Valencia, Spain

On Sunday, October 1, the Archbishop of Valencia, Cardinal Antonio Cañizares, blessed the new mural paintings in the parish of the Holy Guardian Angel of the city, where St. Josemaría Escrivá and St. Manuel González are depicted. Attending the ceremony were the auxiliary bishop of Valencia, Most Rev. Javier Salinas; the vicar general, Vicente Fontestad; the episcopal vicar, Rafael Cerdá, and the vicar of Opus Dei for the Delegation of Valencia, Jorge Nava.

Founder’s Day, Kenya

From October 2 to 6, the University of Strathmore celebrated Founder's Day, a week of academic, cultural and sporting activities that included, among other things, reflections on some aspects of the message of St. Josemaría, inspirer of this educational center in Nairobi. The students, professors, alumni, staff, and friends of the University reflected, in this second edition of Founder’s Day, on “The greatness of ordinary life.”

Fiftieth Anniversary of the Homily Passionately Loving the World

On October 8, 1967, St. Josemaría delivered on the campus of the University of Navarra (Spain) the homily “Passionately Loving the World.” The text captures in a singular way the preaching of the founder of Opus Dei on holiness in ordinary life. Fifty years later, these words continue to inspire men and women around the world, encouraging them to find God in ordinary daily realities.
“The importance of this homily is above all in the fact that St. Josemaría expressed there the substance of the spirit of Opus Dei, what God had transmitted to him—the sanctification of ordinary life. He says it with words as beautiful and poetic as these: ‘Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives,’” the Prelate of Opus Dei said in an interactive special prepared for this 50th anniversary by the website of the Prelature.

Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz stressed that the central message of the homily is “the universal call to holiness that St. Josemaría preached right from the beginning. Everything can be a path to holiness, everything is an opportunity to find God: all work, all daily circumstances, are paths to an encounter with God, paths to holiness.” Therefore this message “is always relevant, because although circumstances may change, jobs, cities, and customs may alter, we will all have an ordinary daily life to live, maybe very different from our current one with the passage of time, but a life that can always be, and should always be, an opportunity and place to encounter God.” Msgr. Ocáriz also highlighted “the force” and “personal conviction” with which St. Josemaría presents this message: “One sees that he is not transmitting a theory but something that comes from his heart. And this gives his words special strength, the strength of personal testimony.”

In Dialogue with the Lord, Previously Unpublished Meditations and Talks of St. Josemaría

The St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute has published In Dialogue with the Lord (Rialp, 512 p.). This volume includes 25 previously unpublished texts of the founder of Opus Dei, dated between 1954 and 1975. This is a critical-historical edition of talks and meditations that St. Josemaría gave to the faithful of Opus Dei who lived in Rome. This oral preaching has been preserved either through audio recordings or very
complete notes. Between 1967 and 1975, Saint Josemaría reviewed this material and provided the editorial changes needed to convert what had been the spoken word into written texts. These texts were published in private collections for the formation of the faithful of Opus Dei, and are now made available to the general public.

The book includes a section of facsimiles, with the original outlines of three of the meditations that are now being published. Each text has a brief introduction, with an explanation of the context, a summary of the contents and an analysis of the sources.

The book has been prepared by Luis Cano and Francesc Castells, with the assistance of José Antonio Loarte. It opens with a prologue by Bishop Javier Echevarría (Prelate of Opus Dei from 1994 to December 2016), who read the draft of the book a few weeks before he died.

In Dialogue with the Lord is a new addition to the “Collection of the Complete Works of St. Josemaría” that the Institute is preparing. It is the first issue of a series dedicated to the oral preaching of the founder of Opus Dei. At present work is being done on classifying and ordering the unpublished material kept in the General Archive of the Prelature, with a view to other future publications.

The new publication joins the five critical-historical studies now available in Spanish: The Way (published in 2002), Holy Rosary (2010), Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer (2012), Christ Is Passing By (2013), and La Abadesa de las Huelgas (2016). All of these are included in the series “Published works of the founder.”

Content of the book

The preaching collected in In Dialogue with the Lord covers 21 years, from 1954 to 1975. Although these 25 oral texts are widely spaced in time, they contain a number of common themes, including the invitation to personally identify oneself with Christ, reflections on divine filiation, love for God and the Church, prayer and contemplative life, love for God and others in ordinary life, humility, and fraternal charity.

The first three texts, from the period 1954-1955, come from meditations that St. Josemaría gave to the students at the Roman College
of the Holy Cross, where young people from various countries were taking part in a period of special human and spiritual formation, close to the founder. The next meditations, between 1962 and 1967, were preached to his direct co-workers in the government of Opus Dei or to the vicars of the various regions gathered in Rome to work for some days with St. Josemaría. In the texts from 1969 to 1975, meditations alternate with a brief homily and several talks.

The authors of the volume

Luis Cano has a law degree from the University of Navarra and a doctorate in spiritual theology from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. He is secretary of the St. Josemaría Historical Institute and a professor of Church History in the Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose all'Apollinare, in Rome, where he has lived since 1989. His principal publications are about the life of St. Josemaría and the history of Opus Dei, and about the history of devotion in the Church to the Sacred Heart and to Christ the King.

Francesc Castells i Puig has a degree in history from the University of Barcelona and a doctorate in philosophy from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. A member of the St. Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute, he works in the General Archives of the Opus Dei Prelature. He has published a number of articles about St. Josemaría Escrivá and the history of Opus Dei.
News
Other Publications of Interest


*Montse Grases*, José Miguel Cejas; Parede, Lucerna Editora, 2017, 192 pages, 1st Portuguese ed. of *Montse Grases, biographia breve*.


*Zout en licht: Overwegingen over het christelijk leven*, Blessed Álvaro del Portillo; Amsterdam, De Boog, 2017, 272 pages, 1st Dutch ed. of *Like Salt and Like Light, Álvaro del Portillo* (Selection of his writings by José Antonio Loarte).

*A breve historia de Sofia Varvaro*, Vittorio Varvaro; São Paulo, Cultor de livros, 2017, 110 pages, 1st Brazilian ed. of *La breve storia di Sofia: Una ragazza dell’Opus Dei*.

“Would You Dare to Go to Chile?” A Profile of Adolfo Rodríguez Vidal

“Would you dare to go to Chile?” St. Josemaría asked a 29 year old Spanish priest, Adolfo Rodríguez Vidal, in 1950, suggesting the possibility of moving to Chile to start the apostolic work of Opus Dei in that country. A profile of his life, written by the priest Cristian Sahli, has this question as its title. The book was introduced on September 7 in the main auditorium of the University of the Andes.
The book covers the first steps of Opus Dei in Chile, seen through the life of Bishop Rodríguez Vidal, who was regional vicar from 1950 to 1959 and again from 1966 to 1988, the year when Saint John Paul II appointed him bishop of the diocese of Los Angeles in Chile. The publication is based on abundant written material, especially diaries and letters that the priest sent to St. Josemaría and to his parents and brothers and sisters.

The presentation of the book was attended by the vicar of the Prelature in Chile, Msgr. Sergio Boetsch, and Mónica Ruiz Tagle, one of the first faithful of Opus Dei in the country, who knew Fr. Adolfo Rodríguez personally and recounted stories about his apostolic work.

An audiovisual documentary by the Argentinean Juan Martín Ezratty was also shown. Entitled “He came to serve,” it provides accounts by 38 witnesses of Bishop Rodríguez Vidal’s service to the Church.

Conference on the First Women of Opus Dei

During the month of November, the historian Inmaculada Alva gave in several cities of Spain the conference “Women who broke barriers,” about the first women who, attracted by the message of finding God and serving others through one’s professional work, followed the spirit of St. Josemaría in the forties.

The decade of the forties began in Spain with bad news for women’s freedom. The new government restored the Civil Code of 1889, by which a woman was under the tutelage of her father or husband. With its marked protectionist character, a woman ran the danger of “becoming, in many ways, an eternal minor,” Alva pointed out.

However, even amid that context, many women managed to attain access to a profession and excelled in it. Some of them came in contact with the spirit of Opus Dei and felt especially attracted by it. Josemaría Escrivá was already speaking at that time about the importance of his “daughters” (as he called the women in the Work) being present in such activities as
Inmaculada Alva cited some writings of Josemaría Escrivá dating from those years that show a mentality in favor of women and full confidence in their abilities, in open contrast to the dominant ideas of the time. “St. Josemaría saw women as having a role that went beyond the creation of a home, bringing a specifically feminine contribution to work and civil occupations.” An example of his initiative was opening a university residence for women in the capital of Spain, when the index of women in Spanish universities was less than 14% of the student body, and encouraging them to start a publishing house especially aimed at women readers.

Among the women who followed him in Opus Dei were “philologists, chemists, doctors, historians, domestic employees, researchers, nurses, writers, trade unionists, who usually worked in a world of men.” Many of these women left Spain to carry the message of Opus Dei to France, England, Portugal, Italy, United States, Colombia, Mexico and other countries, in addition to many Spanish cities.

Alva briefly traced the trajectory of two of these pioneers, “who stood out in their area of specialty.” One of them, the Murcian, Piedad de la Cierva, began her chemistry studies in 1928 and graduated in 1932 with the highest honors. From Murcia she traveled to Denmark to work in the Niels Bohr Institute of Theoretical Physics, where she became acquainted with five Nobel prize winners. Piedad pioneered discoveries in artificial radiation, and in the industrialization of optical glass and devices for night vision. In 1945 the reading of a small book by St. Josemaría, *The Way*, responded to her deep spiritual concerns: “It made a great impression on me. I saw that this work, which I enjoyed and liked so much, could make me a saint.”

The second woman, Lourdes Díaz-Trechuelo, from Seville, was a professor of Latin American History and co-founder of the School of Hispanic American Studies in Seville. Inmaculada Alva said it was “her breadth of vision and strong professional vocation that led her to connect with Opus Dei when she encountered it.”
“These were women who broke barriers. Not because they did great things, though in some cases they did, but because upon discovering the novelty of Opus Dei’s message, they launched out on a path beyond what a woman of the 40s could imagine.”

The conference was held on November 15 at the Law Association of Malaga; on November 16 in the Assembly Hall of the Diputación of Almería; and on November 17 at the Architectural College of Granada.

Bishop Ignacio Carrasco Ordains 31 Faithful of Opus Dei as Deacons, St. Eugene’s Basilica (November 4, 2017)

On November 4, 31 faithful of Opus Dei received diaconal ordination in the Basilica of St. Eugene in Rome, at the hands of Bishop Ignacio Carrasco.

Bishop Carrasco, president emeritus of the Pontifical Academy for Life, centered his homily on the word “service,” which characterizes the tasks assigned to deacons: “In the language of Jesus of Nazareth, in the language of his Mother, Mary, and his relatives, friends and neighbors, the transitive verb ‘to serve’ did not mean anything to be proud of. It was the word defining the servant, the slave, the one to whom the lowest tasks, even the unpleasant ones were assigned; he was the one who occupied the last place in society’s eyes,” the bishop said.

“Nevertheless,” he added, “this was the word chosen by the apostles for those first seven collaborators that St. Luke speaks of in the Acts of the Apostles: 'men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.’” And turning to the 31 candidates, he said: “This will be the new identity you will take on in a few minutes, when I place my hands on you.”

The Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, took part in the ceremony from the presbytery, together with the vicar general, Msgr. Mariano Fazio, and the vicar central secretary, Rev. Antoni Pujals. Also
present at the ceremony were numerous family members and friends of the future priests.

The new deacons come from 15 different countries: Spain, Italy, Venezuela, Kenya, Argentina, Philippines, Uruguay, Slovakia, Uganda, Nigeria, France, Ivory Coast, Brazil, Colombia and Holland. They will receive priestly ordination in Rome on May 5, 2018.

Archbishop Jaume Pujol Confers Priestly Ordination on Two Deacons of the Prelature at the Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain (September 3, 2017)

Archbishop Jaume Pujol, of Tarragona, conferred the priesthood on Ginés José Pérez Almela and Arturo Garralón, two faithful of the Prelature. The ceremony took place on September 3 at the Shrine of Torreciudad, Spain.

Archbishop Pujol encouraged the new priests to “dedicate themselves to the service of all souls, making of their lives a complete self-giving.” With words of Saint Josemaría, he recalled that priests are ordained “to serve, not to command, not to shine,” but to give themselves “in an unbroken and divine silence, in service of all souls.”

The archbishop also exhorted them to be “good shepherds” and to “continue the saving mission of Christ,” aware that “a priest who gives little of himself, instead of being a mediator becomes little by little an intermediary, a manager,” as Pope Francis has said.

Archbishop Pujol asked those present to pray for priestly vocations throughout the world and for the fidelity of all sacred ministers. At the same time, he said “it is urgent that many lay people open themselves generously to their specific call to holiness.” The new priests were accompanied by the Prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, as well as by numerous relatives, friends, and former professional colleagues.
Arturo Garralón, of Guadalajara, Spain, graduated in economics and worked in banking for fifteen years. He carried out theological studies at the University of Navarra, where he is finishing a doctoral thesis on Friar Luis de León. He celebrated his first Solemn Mass on September 10 in the parish of Blessed Mary of Jesus of Guadalajara.

Ginés José Pérez, of Murcia, Spain, studied education and was a teacher for three decades. In 2012 he went to the School of Theology at the University of Navarra to complete his theological studies. He is currently working on a doctoral thesis on “Marriage, a vocation to holiness.”

Some Diocesan Assignments Received by Priests of Opus Dei

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New Centers of the Prelature

The vicars of the respective regions have established new centers of the Prelature in the following cities: Reus, Salamanca and Segovia in Spain, and Cologne in Germany.
INITIATIVES
Palma de Mallorca, Spain: A Conference for Business Leaders

On Saturday, October 28, the Ariany University Center organized the 24th Study Conference for Business Managers at the Llaüt secondary school. The sessions had as its connecting motif some words of Pope Francis: “The true business manager knows his workers because he works alongside them; the business manager must be above all else a worker.” The various presentations dealt with different aspects of the Church’s social teaching. The inaugural conference was given by the president of the University of the Balearic Islands, Llorenç Huguet.

Poland: Work Camps

A group of 20 Polish university students traveled to the city of Lvov in Ukraine to help in the construction of a house for disadvantaged young people and children from a district administered by the parish priest of Lvov Cathedral. Another group of 15 volunteers went to Lwowek Slaski in southwest Poland, to give special classes to boys in the village and to help provide a recreation area in the social center run by the Franciscan Fathers. They also provided assistance in a Caritas social center. These activities gave the students practical experience of giving their time to help more needy persons. The young men taking part received pastoral attention from a priest of the Prelature.

Rio de Janeiro: Cycle of Talks on The Humanities

The Itaporã Cultural Center organized a cycle of cultural activities entitled “Humanities,” aimed at fostering a debate about the human person and society. Topics such as relativism, feminism and gender theory were
discussed, with the goal of providing positive answers to help guide these debates and contribute to the resolution of some of the current problems in our society.

Chieti, Italy: Volunteering in the Lanciano Prison

A group of university women and young professionals who take part in activities at the Celimontano university residence make regular visits during the academic year to a group of prisoners in the Lanciano prison. Their experience has shown that this effort enables them to overcome their own prejudices and get to know these people. The students carry out various activities with the prisoners: storytelling, team games, reading workshops, singing songs, etc.

Madrid: A Benefit Concert For the Laguna Hospice

On Saturday, November 18, the Marine Orchestra of Madrid offered a Christmas concert in benefit of the new pediatric unit for advanced illnesses at the Laguna Hospice. This unit, the only one of its kind in Spain, will provide day care for children with advanced and incurable rare illnesses, who require specialized treatment.

Rome: The 2017 Antonio Jannone Prize

The School of Philosophy at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross awarded the Antonio Jannone International Prize in Philosophy to
Professor Alejandro Vigo, from the University of Navarra. An expert in Aristotle and the author of numerous books and articles, Professor Vigo received the prize on November 27, feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, patron saint of the School of Philosophy

**Santiago de Chile: A New Step In the Work With Priests**

In the presence of the Archbishop of Santiago, Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, a new center for activities of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in that city was inaugurated. It will provide diocesan priests with the possibility to attend means of formation, find spiritual accompaniment, and deepen in their studies, in the warmth of a family atmosphere.

**Montevideo, Uruguay: Computer Skills For Adults**

Teachers, alumni and students from the University of Montevideo have collaborated with the Dr. Luis Piñeyro del Campo Geriatric Hospital in a project of digital training aimed at people at risk of social exclusion. The program, which is part of a government action plan, involved a series of workshops with hospitalized people, especially those who suffer some type of physical or psychic impairment. The University of Montevideo developed the technology needed for those programs.

**Bogotá, Colombia: The Sabana Mission Assists 500 Families**
The Sabana Mission is a day of volunteering work carried out by students from the University of La Sabana, who help to alleviate various situations of need in communities close to the academic center. During the second half of the year, about 650 university students and 60 employees went to the municipality of Cogua. They distributed basic foodstuffs to some 500 families and tried to help solve the medical needs of a thousand people.

Cologne, Germany: 50 years of Campus Muengersdorf

The Campus Muengersdorf university residence celebrated its first half century. Some four thousand university women, from more than 80 countries, have benefited from the formational activities offered by the university residence during these fifty years. On the occasion of the anniversary, the archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Rainer Woelki, celebrated a Mass of thanksgiving. He stressed that the residence is dedicated to the service of the truth, and offers orientation to many young women in these times of uncertainty.

Eastlands College of Technology, Nairobi, Kenya

The Eastlands College of Technology (ECT) is an institute of technology located in Nariboi, Kenya. It began in 2003 with the goal of offering professional training in the fields of technology, electronics, and communications to disadvantaged youth and the unemployed from the capital’s poorest districts. More than 5,000 students have gone through its classrooms during the first 15 years, first at its original site in the Eastlands
district and, since last year, at its definitive site, which is still in the construction phase. In addition, some 500 businessmen have collaborated in a dual training program, making their businesses available so that students can combine work practice with the training received in the academic center.

In Kenya, young people make up 67% of the total unemployed population. Around 90% do not have the professional preparation needed to attain access to a job. A gap also exists between the skills that the market requires and the training that many teaching centers offer. Taking into account this reality, in 2007 Eastlands decided to specialize in training for the IT sector and communication technology. Several multinationals, including Microsoft and Samsung, have signed a cooperation agreement with the center. At present, courses are offered in electronics and electronic technology, mechanical engineering, solar installation and automotive engineering, among other courses. Three month courses are also offered to help young people who have not been able to continue their studies to find employment, as well as training courses for “micro-entrepreneurs.” The institute has exchange programs with other vocational training centers in several countries.

The college is a corporate work of the Opus Dei Prelature. Its students include Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Hindus. All the students receive classes in professional ethics and character formation, and those who wish can receive classes in the teachings of the Catholic Church.
Faithful of the Prelature Who Died in the Second Half of 2017

In the second half of 2017, 483 faithful of the Prelature died and, besides the priests incardinated in it, 17 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. Suffrages have been offered for all of 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—their pastoral ministry in the case of the priests—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.

In addition to the names of all who have died during this period, we have gathered a few biographical details about some of the deceased, which give an idea of the variety of circumstances and situations in which the faithful of Opus Dei live. For reasons of space, we are not including this data in the other cases, but we must not forget that we have a debt of gratitude towards all of them for the example of Christian fidelity they have left us. These brief sketches will help us live the Communion of Saints better with those who have preceded us to heaven.

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Torna ai contenuti
A STUDY
The World and the Human Condition in St. Josemaría Escrivá: Christian Keys to a Philosophy of the Social Sciences

Ana Marta González
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Abstract: This study explores some aspects of the teachings of St. Josemaría that, in the author’s opinion, illuminate from a theological perspective topics dealt with by modern social thought: hope, worldliness, liberation, religion and culture, work, responsibility for the created world, citizenship, freedom, secularity, formation. These are keys to his preaching that allow us to articulate a vision of Christian existence in the world, as well as a life-related theory of institutions and social change that can enter into dialogue with contemporary thought.

1. Introduction

To what extent can the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá be useful for the reflections of a philosopher, whether or not a Christian?

To fully grasp the context of the theological terms and concepts used by St. Josemaría to spread the message of the universal call to holiness, we may require a certain familiarity with the tradition of Christian thought in which he himself was formed. Nevertheless, the fact that people from a wide variety of human and educational backgrounds do not find any special difficulty in grasping the challenge presented by his message, suggests that the kind of familiarity needed is not necessarily achieved by a lot of study and erudition.

His preaching however is clearly relevant for new, specifically modern topics considered especially by the philosophy of the last two centuries: the world, work, time, history, vocation, culture, freedom, citizenship, unity of life... All of these concerns are closely related to what Heidegger[1] and Hannah Arendt[2] have called a “theory of secularity,” and in the preaching and life of St. Josemaría they are found articulated with unusual clarity and depth. This can be for us an invitation to consider how his message relates to philosophical and sociological reflections on these questions—an
invitation that is especially timely today when, from a philosophical and sociological point of view, religion is again coming into the foreground.\[3]\]

I am very aware that the methodological restrictions of contemporary social philosophy (often not incorporating strong anthropological presuppositions, which are always suspected of expressing particular points of view) could act as a deterrent when it comes to recognizing in the life and work of a Catholic priest contributions relevant to philosophical discourse.

However, to the extent that religious convictions, without losing their specific nature,\[4]\] incorporate cognitive contents, these limitations found in contemporary social philosophy can be overcome. This is especially so when the current philosophical and social discourse itself is mainly concerned with diagnosing the social pathologies stemming from experiences of oppression and injustice by ordinary people, far from the demands of consistency and erudition of theoretical discourses often linked to elitist positions.\[5]\] This concern, which aims to restore ethical legitimacy to ways of speaking that are often very abstract, could lead to the recognition of the relevance of a message that is welcomed by people of very diverse social and cultural backgrounds, and that for all of them becomes an eminently positive way of confronting oppression in very different forms. That this is fundamentally a religious message should not pose a problem, as long as the content of that message is articulated in a comprehensible manner that does not involve any confusion between what is known and what is believed.

But is it really legitimate to approach the texts and life of Josemaría Escrivá with the effort to identify the philosophical themes implicit in them, while ignoring the theological issues they raise? Moreover, is it even possible to do so? And what interest could this effort have? In what follows, I will directly address the first two questions. I think the best way to show the scope and limits of an endeavor of this kind is by putting it into practice. And certainly, as I pointed out earlier, unravelling the philosophical themes implicit in an author, who by no means intended to carry out philosophy, requires some familiarity with the sources and perspective from which he writes, which in this case are theological. But what sense does it make to discuss theology in order to make explicit the
philosophical dimensions of a body of thought? Isn’t this nonsensical? Doesn’t it mean completely reversing the medieval dictum, and making theology an *ancilla philosophiae*? Worse still, doesn’t it mean degrading a spiritual message, which in form and content is strongly focused on daily life, to the status of just one more theory, exposing it to the fate of any other theory?

Not in my opinion. Since, in my view, the preaching and life of St. Josemaría Escrivá entail a special way of being in the world, which does justice harmoniously to the various human dimensions, going deeper into that message, making explicit the thematic content contained there and placing it into relation with contemporary philosophical and sociological thought, can be of interest to these human sciences, and more generally to all those who seek to understand the structure and dynamism of human life in the world. Moreover, isn’t it only logical to expect that preaching aimed at stressing the sanctifying value of secular realities would have something to say to the human sciences that deal with those same secular realities?

2. A constitutive tension

In first place, at the heart of St. Josemaría’s message on sanctifying ordinary realities we find the exhortation to “be of the world without being worldly.”[6] This phrase gives voice to a tension that any philosopher who reflects on the human condition has to confront if one doesn’t want to unduly simplify the content of human experience. Throughout history, philosophers have expressed, consciously or unconsciously, this constitutive tension of human experience in quite different ways: as a compromise between contemplation and action (Aristotle); as a conflict between morality and happiness (Kant); as a discrepancy between long-term interests and short-term ones (Hume[7]), or between authentic and inauthentic existence (Heidegger). These and other tensions simply express a trait derived from our finite nature, which I like to call, metaphorically, our “constitutive wound.” This has nothing to do with the original fault, but rather is related to the opening to the infinite possible by our rationality. Thanks to this, the human being is both “horizon and limit” — in the expression of Thomas Aquinas[8] — a frontier being, in the words of Simmel,[9] irreducible to a unique function (Jaspers), but capable of transcendence.
It is precisely in this “constitutive tension” defining our condition as rational creatures where hope takes shape: a hope that can take on different forms, depending on how deeply this wound is seen as being. Thus the hope fueled by utopian thinking is undoubtedly very different from that nourished by the Christian faith, just as its vision of human dignity is less elevated. For St. Josemaría, human identity is defined by our status as children of God. And the hope that stems from the realization of this filiation is a hope that, to the extent that one experiences the reality of sin, as a forgetfulness of God in daily life, is a hope of a redemption that also embraces the world. For as St. John says, we are already children of God, but what we will be has not yet been manifested (see 1 Jn 3:2). And in the meantime, the world remains subject to vanity (see Rom 8:20).

This world that awaits the manifestation of the children of God (Rom 8:19) is subject to a vanity that is not the result of one man’s action, but of many individuals. What is the content of this vanity? In the end, it is the fact that human beings live enclosed in themselves, which gives rise in society to self-referential structures, opaque to transcendence. How relevant, in this sense, are the words of Pope Francis, when he warns us of the need to overcome set ways of acting and think about other models of development. The redemption of the world involves the transformation of these self-referential structures, fostering a way of life, both individual and collective, that is animated at its root by a different principle. “We have to work a lot on this earth and we must do our work well, since it is our daily tasks that we have to sanctify. But let us never forget to do everything for his sake. If we were to do it for ourselves, out of pride, we would produce nothing but leaves, and no matter how luxuriant they were, neither God nor our fellow men would find any good in them.”

As St. Augustine said, the love of self even to contempt of God is the founding principle of the earthly city; this is opposed to a very different city founded on love for God even to contempt of self. The message of St. Josemaría doesn’t focus on either contempt of self, nor of the world, but on the possibility of fostering a different appreciation of self and the world, an appreciation that refers to the approving gaze with which God contemplated his creation, and that is again made possible for us after
the redemption brought about by Christ. What St. Josemaría offers is a positive vision of the world and human realities[22] which ultimately stems from the awareness of our divine filiation. Here we find, for St. Josemaría, the key to confronting the constitutive tension of human existence.

All human realities, from the most spiritual to the most material, are free from vanity where, freed from inauthentic “routine,”[23] men and women live for God, as his sons and daughters, and not for the world, as its slaves. Then they can raise all these realities —their world— to a higher destiny, freeing them, with the freedom of the children of God: “It is understandable that the Apostle should write: ‘All things are yours, you are Christ’s and Christ is God’s’ (1 Cor 3:22-23). We have here an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, poured into our hearts, wants to call forth from the world, upwards to the glory of God. And to make it clear that everything in daily life is included here, even what seems most commonplace, St. Paul also wrote: ‘in eating, in drinking, do everything as for God’s glory’ (see 1 Cor 10:32).”[24]

This upward movement recapitulating all things in Christ is forcefully expressed in a sentence that appears in various places in St. Josemaría’s writings: “There are only two ways of living on earth: either one lives a supernatural life or an animal life.”[25]

This is a radical way of speaking, which at first glance seems to overlook the theoretical possibility of an intermediate human life between animal and supernatural life. However, we see here how St. Josemaría is addressing man in his real existence, who is never just a natural man, firmly set in what has already been achieved, but always in tension towards something more. And his message is that the value of what is human and the beauty of the world is preserved only when man lives for something higher than himself, in accord with God’s gift.

Formulated in these terms, this view is not entirely out of keeping with philosophical tradition. Aristotle already exhorted us to “not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but... so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with what is most divine in us” (Nichomachean Ethics, X, 7). While Kant in turn, after setting the limits to
the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, sees the need to refer to the ideals of reason, even as regulative ideals of our experience, without which everything, science included, would be deprived of meaning.\[26\] Hence striving to live exclusively according to human criteria drawn from our poor everyday experience, is not only human, but “too human” (not in the sense of Nietzsche, but in that of Aristotle).\[27\]

As Pascal points out, human experience entails some form of self-transcendence, which means that there is a self-limitation contrary to the dynamism of human life, because this self-transcendence claims to be an expression of the possibility of something greater than what our daily life usually entails. Aristotle viewed this “more” as a contemplative life that, in its perfect expression, was always out of human reach, and was a privilege of the gods. In any case, for him, this contemplative and divine way of living would seem to shelter man from the vicissitudes of human life. Modern philosophy has not generally continued along these lines. Rather it has accepted, at most, intra-worldly forms of transcendence, accessible in art or moral concerns.

In contrast, in a radically religious message such as that of St. Josemaría, the exhortation to lead a contemplative life and, in this sense, to live “above the human,” including those intra-worldly forms of transcendence, becomes surprisingly radical—not as any simply natural “self-transcendence,” nor according to any kind of simply human ideal of “contemplation,” but as an invitation to receive the gift of God. Thus “being a Christian means rising above petty objectives of personal prestige and ambition and even possibly nobler aims, like philanthropy and compassion for the misfortunes of others. It means setting our mind and heart on reaching the fullness of love which Jesus Christ showed by dying for us.”\[28\]

Implicit here is a special, strictly Christian way of conceiving the temporal dimension of existence. St. Josemaría refers frequently to the text of St. Paul: “Caritas Christi urget nos” (2 Cor 5:14), to illuminate the deep meaning that, for the Christian, the “good use of time involves. “A whole lifetime would be little, to expand the frontiers of your charity.”\[29\]
This conception of temporality, imbued with the urgency of charity, brings with it important and specific consequences for one's daily life. It means viewing one's ordinary life as above all correspondence to God's love manifested in Christ, and therefore striving for an active detachment from oneself, helping to free creation from the vanity to which it has been subjected by sin. "Being contemplatives" and "sanctifying earthly realities" are activities proper to the children of God that are open to all men and women without exception, because they are not grounded simply on the possibilities of human nature, but on the supernatural gift of God.

Therefore the exhortation to live a supernatural life does not mean advocating philosophical contemplation only for a privileged few; nor is it an expression of heroic virtue produced by purely human effort. Rather it aims to live in the world as children of God, in Christ, with the hopeful conviction that by living this way, accepting humbly the gift of God, and corresponding to him with all one's strength, redemption, the liberation of the world, is brought about.

3. The radical unity of worship and culture

Implicit in the above is a specifically Christian way of understanding culture, or rather, the original connection —today often forgotten— between worship and culture. It is true that St. Josemaría's explicit use of the term "culture" is closer to the classical and modern meaning (culture as something cultivated, as a civilization) than the more contemporary one (culture as an expression of subjectivity, as a way of life of a people, expressed in shared norms and symbols). Nevertheless, both senses are deeply intertwined in his message. For at the core of every culture there is cult, in the sense of worship. However, while in non-Christian religions that cult revolved around sacrificial rites, through which men showed their dependence on the divinity, in Christianity it is God himself who offers himself in sacrifice for men, to rescue them from evil and make them sharers in his own Life. And it is precisely this sacrifice that is called to become the center and root of a new culture, in which there is no room for more victims, and in which therefore a properly political space can emerge, not hijacked by "victimist" discourses.
More radically, that sacrificial act, revealing at the same time God’s love for man and the value of man in God’s eyes, makes Christians a single people, with a specific mission in the world, because it is the source of that other worship “in spirit and in truth” (Jn 4:23), whose protagonists are all Christians who, moved by the sacrifice of God in Christ, aspire to infuse the same spirit of Christ into all human activities. This is directly linked to St. Josemaría’s exhortation to sanctify all earthly realities, cultivating them according to their own logic and in conformity with and in prolongation of Eucharistic worship.[35]

All this entails the great importance of striving to acquire the virtues required by our place in the world, as well as professional rigor and competence.

The message of the sanctification of earthly realities invites us to deepen in the fact that the connection between worship and culture (already pointed to in the words of Genesis where it is said that man was created ut operaretur, to work,[36]) finds effective realization in ordinary life, when moral practice and the whole of social life are nourished by the experience of the Eucharistic mystery. Of course, that connection also takes place where the rigor of the intellectual work of each field of knowledge remains open to a sapiential horizon, which finds its final meaning in the search for God. It seems significant to me, however, that while recognizing the unique role of intellectuals in the configuration of culture, when it comes to focusing on the specific question of the sanctification of these tasks, St. Josemaría refers to them indiscriminately also as “work,” pointing out that the unity between faith and science, which the Christian recognizes as possible as a matter of principle, is not often easily achieved, without “hard work.”[37]

Human work is thus the fundamental category St. Josemaría makes use to channel the worship that the Christian is called to pay to God in the midst of the world, precisely at the same time that he or she is creating culture. In fact, that rational worship, pleasing to God, contains implicitly the search for truth, theoretical and practical, as an intrinsic requirement of a job well done: “Veritatem facientes in caritate” (Eph 4:15). And thus the worship by which the Christian pays tribute to God grounds his or her “unity of life,”[38] and also ultimately the unity of culture.[39]
4. The extraordinary in the ordinary

Thus the awareness that our deepest identity is our identity as children of God, was for St. Josemaría a source of hope that does not nullify the ordinary process—natural and historical, cultural and social—by which any person, in their specific “place” in life, acquires their own personality, with its characteristic features and loyalties. But, at the same time, the awareness of one’s divine filiation can guide this process in a higher direction, which leads to a deep feeling of solidarity with all men and women and responsibility for all creation: “What illuminates our conscience is faith in Christ, who has died and risen and is present in every moment of life. Faith moves us to play our full part in the changing situations and in the problems of human history. In this history, which began with the creation of the world and will reach its fulfillment at the end of time, the Christian is no expatriate. He is a citizen of the city of men, and his soul longs for God. While still on earth he has glimpses of God’s love and comes to recognize it as the goal to which all men on earth are called.”[40]

That such considerations are only possible from the viewpoint of faith does not make them totally alien or irrelevant to philosophical reflection. For philosophy the possibility of a life built on these convictions is enough to affirm that another world is possible and achievable, a world that, with the strength of the spirit, is willing to fight without rest the banality of a mediocre existence, redeeming time and challenging the “reification” of the structures that are the enemy of our person and freedom,[41] from the very interior of those structures.

Moreover “sharing with all one’s strength in the vicissitudes and problems of human history,” as St. Josemaría points out, means going beyond an accurate diagnosis of the problems that we find in our world; it means feeling personally challenged by these problems, and seeing, with new depth, the enormous transforming potential of human work, when animated by an authentically Christian spirit, a spirit of service that, as Pope Francis insists, is deployed for the benefit of others, especially the most needy.[42] The key to this challenge is offered by the much-cited point 301 of The Way: “A secret, an open secret: these world crises are crises of saints. God wants a handful of men ‘of his own’ in every human activity. Then... ‘pax Christi in regno Christi’ —the peace of Christ in the kingdom of
Christ."[43] This point expresses St. Josemaría’s confidence in the transforming force of freedom in history, when it opens itself to the action of God in one’s life. It also reflects, as Pedro Rodríguez observes in his commentary on this point, a vision of holiness and interior life “in strict and internal relationship with ‘human activity,’ with the problems of human society.” This invites us to reflect explicitly on what St. Josemaría once referred to as “Christian materialism” and which, in his own words, “is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit,[44] as well as to disembodied spiritualisms. Thus “Christian materialism” is, for St. Josemaría, a direct consequence of faith in the Incarnation of the Word. For this mystery contains the message that the world and history are not impervious to the manifestation of God, nor opaque to his presence. On the contrary, we can speak of a solidarity of destiny between the world and man, which does not endanger man’s reference to God. But the commensurability between the subject and the world is not perfect; the world is not correlative to human consciousness; it is also space for the manifestation and revelation of God, as well as space for human acts that have God, and not the world, as their ultimate goal.

Here we find another crucial aspect of the message of St. Josemaría: the appreciation for contingency as the privileged place for the manifestation of God, precisely because it is there, in that space of contingency, where man exercises his freedom. Both things are contained in St. Josemaría’s invitation to find the *quid divinum*[45] in daily life. This is not just a pious recommendation, but an indication of the *kairós*, the opportunity and the value of the present moment, in which the presence of God becomes material and in some way visible. Doing well the things that we have in our hands is not only an ethical requirement, stemming from our position in human society, but a specific opportunity that is offered to us to correspond to the gift of God and to “materialize” his presence in the world, making clear the transforming power of ordinary life.

Recognizing the transcendent horizon that the exercise of our freedom opens up in carrying out the most varied tasks, is part of the perfection of human life. Precisely because human affairs are subject to many contingencies, their perfection cannot be attained through rigid and pre-fixed channels, but rather it has to be entrusted to the responsible
discernment of those involved. Thus trust in the responsibility of individuals, which leads them to seek in each case for the answers that they consider best in conscience, is an inseparable aspect of the appreciation of secular realities, which St. Josemaría had especially present in his priestly work: “I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the demands of his life and to discover what God wants from him in particular—without in any way limiting that holy independence and blessed personal responsibility which are the features of a Christian conscience. This way of acting and this spirit are based on respect for the transcendence of revealed truth and on love for the freedom of the human person. I might add that they are also based on a realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects.”

5. A “vital” theory of institutions and social change

That same certainty of the indeterminacy of history explains another aspect that I see implicit in his way of facing secular realities and that, in the absence of a better expression, I would describe as a “vital” theory of institutions and social change.

Without a doubt, the very fact that he focuses the response to global crises on holiness, speaks to us first of all about the priority of the life of the spirit. But, as we pointed out above, this should not be understood in a “spiritualist” sense. The spiritual life, as he understands it, leads to involvement in secular realities in order to redeem them, which brings with it the endeavor to foster a more human world. Undoubtedly, this involves a negative moment, that of identifying inhuman situations. Normally St. Josemaría invites us to face these situations in the first person, with personal responsibility and “trying to drown evil in an abundance of good.” He urges us to cover over deficiencies and multiply the initiatives that reorient the possibilities implicit in the situation in need of improvement.

The key to all growth and development is found in “formation”: a formation that helps each person to take advantage of the talents received, and to become protagonists of their own progress and that of the world around them. Central here is work that is well done. The criteria with which he has encouraged innumerable health care and educational
Initiatives around the world reveal a professional way of fostering the practical development of the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, as well as a keen perception of the way in which work and a sense of human dignity are related.

However, the priority given to personal formation, and hence in some way to culture, does not mean that the structural aspects in society are ignored. St. Josemaría is aware that, in the social order, the development of the human realm to a large extent depends on the quality of institutions and the organization of work. He is far from advocating a static vision of the social order; quite the opposite, he warns in many ways that life precedes the norm, that the norm is at the service of the spirit, and that, on the level of action, one needs prudent foresight, but without trusting exclusively to organization.

To illustrate the importance he attaches to sound institutions for social life, we can refer to Conversations. Responding to a question about the politicization of the university, the founder of Opus Dei notes that, where institutional channels for the exercise of political freedom are lacking, legitimate human aspirations are channeled in other ways and the risk exists of denaturing the university. From this answer, I think, we can deduce the need to have a specifically political sphere, a sphere where citizens can speak out and participate in proposing solutions for the problems that refer to the common good. Something similar could be said about the economy. While recognizing the legitimate autonomy of economic activity, St. Josemaría points to its instrumental character, stressing that “apostolic works never fail to go forward because of lack of means; they fail to go forward because of a lack of spirit.”

In any case, recognizing the role of institutions in the configuration of the social order is far removed from a hyper-institutionalization that would drown out spontaneity in life and in initiatives fostering freedom. In the end, institutions are born as a requirement of man’s social nature, to shape the inclinations we experience towards certain goods, and to shape also the socializing impulse itself. But this assumes that life takes the lead in opening up the path, as Simmel says, seeking to provide a framework for the development of safe social bonds.
In this regard (the formation of safe bonds that foster trust and a climate of freedom), St. Josemaría offers valuable suggestions. His preaching and life make it abundantly clear how institutional norms and guidelines make sense to the extent that they further the expression and development of the spirit.\[55\]

In any case, the need we experience to organize our life socially explains how institutional crises can often give rise to disorder in the goods they protect, as well as to a loss of meaning in the corresponding human relationships.\[56\] This situation can easily result in conservative reactions, in which the risk exists of confusing the moral order and the social conventions that have long helped to preserve it. These crises can also be a sign of cultural sclerosis; the institution has crystallized in a set cultural form that does not do justice to the dynamism and ever new demands of life. Although here the opposite danger also exists: seeing the need for change can lead to an eagerness to adapt social forms to the times, without careful discernment of important human goods.

That is why the theory of institutions has to be complemented with a theory of social and cultural change, which takes into account the ambiguous quality of the liminal periods,\[57\] of cultural transition, and remains alert to identify in each case the goods that are at stake and the best way to preserve them. In this sense, it is possible to argue that human nature itself has a “liminal” character,\[58\] of which rites of passage and periods of cultural transition are a reflection. Precisely because the Christian message is addressed to all men and women, without “respect of persons,”\[59\] this message is particularly relevant in moments when the security of convention seems to be breaking down and people are questioning themselves in their uncertainty. The Gospel is addressed to all mankind, without discrimination,\[60\] and it asks of everyone conversion; a conversion that asks each person to freely set aside false securities, which are ordinarily associated with life in this world. For as St. Paul writes to the Corinthians. \textit{The appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the}
world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away (1 Cor 7:29-31).

I think these words describe a specific way of being in the world that coincides exactly with the radical demand of which St. Josemaría is a spokesman when he exhorts us “to live in the world without being worldly,” that is, without allowing the events of the world, regardless of how sad or joyful they may be, to determine the fundamental orientation of our life.[61] Certainly, St. Josemaría has not provided us with theoretical reflections on the specific way to conduct ourselves in periods of transition; but he has left us something more eloquent, his way of behaving during the civil war he experienced in his own life.[62] We see him living in a provisional situation as if it were not provisional: holding to a self-imposed plan, taking advantage of time, preparing for a humanly uncertain future, attentive to seeking God’s will at all times.[63] For him nothing is provisional; in the present moment we have at stake everything that is truly important in life.

From this emerges a unique way of facing the temporal dimension of life, with an urgency that is born of charity, and that leads in practice to the virtue of diligence.[64] “Taking good advantage of time” is implicitly a constructive way of focusing the question of social change, precisely through work, with which a person builds up both his or her own life and the world.

St. Josemaría’s conception of work —of sanctified work— as a source of progress and social cohesion makes his vision of society and institutions deeply dynamic: a dynamism that is linked to man’s action in the world, in the course of which he not only discovers new paths, but first of all, he forges himself. Hence St. Josemaría can be said to have a “vital” theory of institutions — one that is related to real life. Institutions find their starting point in life, and have to be measured in reference to the demands of life — in ultimate terms, the life of the spirit— and not simply in reference to any human conventions, customs, or traditions. For the spiritual life of human beings in the world is expressed in work.

It is true there is nothing new in seeing work as a source of social progress and change. To a large extent, modern philosophy and social theory have noticed the connection between the division of labor and social
progress. St. Josemaría’s special contribution, however, resides in rescuing a theological vision of work, rooted in the Bible, that does not reduce human work to its active dimension in transforming the world.\textsuperscript{[65]} Rather work is closely tied to contemplation: “Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love.”\textsuperscript{[66]} Love for God and neighbor is the source from which the dignifying power of work flows, and therefore any theory of social change open to the action of the Spirit in history, in often surprising ways, must start there.

St. Josemaría is not a social revolutionary. His message can be related to the classical authors in social theory who, in different ways, have recognized professional work as the privileged ethical enclave of modern societies.\textsuperscript{[67]} However, a spiritual message like his will certainly have practical repercussions regarding the shaping of lifestyles.

While finding the dignity of human work in the love with which it is carried out, St. Josemaría does not say anything specific about the social recognition received by different kinds of work. Once love is viewed as the key to the dignity of work, social forms of valuation are relativized, and the advance towards social recognition of every kind of honest human work becomes unstoppable. I am thinking, for example, of the specific case — dear to St. Josemaría’s heart— of the recognition of the dignity of domestic work. As Axel Honneth points out from the viewpoint of critical theory, the question of the relationship between work and recognition is being debated today on a society-wide level.\textsuperscript{[68]}

More generally, we can say that the message of sanctifying work brings with it an increasingly vivid awareness of the importance of work in human life, not only on the individual level but also in society as a whole. This awareness can lead to a wide variety of initiatives, especially those aimed at promoting decent conditions of life and work for all men and women. In this context, I would like to quote a passage from the Apostolic Exhortation \textit{Evangelii Gaudium}, where Pope Francis warns of a possible misinterpretation of the message of sanctifying work: “No one should say that he stays away from the poor because his life choices involve paying more attention to other issues. This is a frequent excuse in academic, business, professional, and even ecclesial circles. While it can be said in general that the vocation and the proper mission of the lay faithful is the
transformation of the different earthly realities so that all human activity is transformed by the Gospel, no one can feel exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice.”[69]

If we understand work in all its human depth, that is, not only as a factor in personal improvement but as structuring the social order, work will be seen in all its dimensions; not simply as a place for individual “self-realization,” but as a platform from which to deploy, in all its breadth and depth, human and Christian concern for others and for the social conditions that make their development possible.

As we have already seen above, work for St. Josemaría “is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love.”[70] Here lies its greatest dignity. And precisely because he sees the source of human dignity in the freedom to love God, he does not hesitate to present himself as a “rebel”[71] and to describe religion as “the greatest rebellion of man, who refuses to be a beast.” Therefore, when the need arose, he could also speak in a legitimate, holy, way of rebelliousness, when what is at stake is the freedom of consciences, the freedom that determines the destiny of every human being. The freedom by which men and women pay tribute to their Creator cannot be subjected to any human authority. Hence his refusal to interpret religion, the demands of the human spirit, through the lens of simply political categories. When once asked about the role of fundamentalist and progressive tendencies in the life of the Church at the end of the Second Vatican Council, he answered: “As regards the tendencies which you call ‘integrist’ and ‘progressive,’ I find it difficult to give an opinion on the role which they can play at the present moment, because I have always rejected the suitability and even the possibility of making classifications or simplifications of this sort. This division is, at times, taken to great extremes and perpetuated as if theologians (and the faithful in general) were destined always to be circling these opposite poles. As far as I can see, it seems to derive ultimately from the belief that progress in the doctrine and in the life of the People of God is the result of a perpetual dialectical tension. I, on the other hand, prefer to believe wholeheartedly in the action of the Holy Spirit, who breathes where he will and upon whom he will.”[72]
St. Josemaría was always attentive to signs of God’s providential action. Perhaps that is why he was so often able to rise above the prejudices of his own day and age. For example, we can mention here his positive view of the role of women and their co-responsibility with men in constructing culture.[73] I think that in this question, which today seems almost common sense, St. Josemaría was able to overcome the inertia and conventions of his time simply because he let himself be guided by the Spirit of God.[74]

If we remember that this was often not the case even with the most eminent philosophers, who remained subject to the inertia of their time, we will understand why the saint is particularly intriguing for philosophers. He shows them their own limitations, and a different way of transcending them.


[4] As Hans Joas observes, religious convictions are distinguished from purely rational arguments because they incorporate elements that deeply affect one’s identity. Therefore they do not conform to the same parameters that govern purely intellectual discussions. However, that does not mean that they are exempt from all rational criticism. A clear way of talking about faith and setting out its contents is needed, in order to analyze them and make them understandable, without intellectualizing them. See Hans Joas, “Einleitung,” in *Was sind religiöse Überzeugungen? [What are Religious Convictions]* Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen, 2003, pp. 9-17.


Despite the psychological immanentism that marks his work (“We never really advance a step beyond ourselves.” *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part II, Section VI), Hume reflects this tension in the practical order.

“Et inde est quod anima intellectualis dicitur esse quasi quidam horizon et confinium corporeorum et incorporeorum, inquantum est substantia incorporea, corporis tamen forma.” Thomas Aquinas, ScG, lib. 2 ch. 68 no. 6


The tension that Aristotle perceives between complete happiness (which is purely contemplative) and “human” happiness (a mixture of contemplation and action) is reinterpreted by St. Thomas as perfect and imperfect happiness. Rationality brings with it the possibility of opening oneself to the gift of God: first of all, the gift of divine filiation. See *S.Tb.* I.II.q. 5, a. 5, ad 1, where Thomas Aquinas asks: can man achieve happiness by his natural abilities? And he answers no, saying, however, that he can nevertheless turn to God to receive happiness from him. The interesting thing is that in order to argue this point, he quotes Aristotle: “What we can do for our friends is as if we could do it for ourselves’ (*Nichomachean Ethics*, III, 3, 1112b 27-28).


On awareness of one’s divine filiation in St. Josemaría, see Ernst Burkhart — Javier López, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de San Josemaría. Estudio de teología espiritual*, vol. II, p. 3.
This can be related to the frequent exhortation of St. Josemaría to avoid routine in one’s life of piety. Avoiding routine means seeking a personal relationship, not a formal one, with God. It is a way of preventing what Heidegger would call an “inauthentic” life where the impersonal “self” takes control of our life. Heidegger refers to this precisely in terms of a “fall” (See Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, & 38).

“Once we recognize the insignificant and contingent nature of our earthly endeavors, the way is then open for true hope, a hope which upgrades all human work and turns it into a meeting point with God... But if we transform our temporal projects into ends in themselves and blot out from our horizon our eternal dwelling place and the end for which we have been created, which is to love and praise the Lord and then to possess him forever in Heaven, then our most brilliant endeavors turn traitor, and can even become a means of degrading our fellow creatures... Only those things that bear the imprint of God can display the indelible sign of eternity and have lasting value. Therefore, far from separating me from the things of this earth, hope draws me closer to these realities in a new way, a Christian way, which seeks to discover in everything the relation between our fallen nature and God, our Creator and Redeemer.” Friends of God, no. 208.

See St. Josemaría, The Forge, no. 1: “We are children of God, bearers of the only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed or overshadowed.

The Lord uses us as torches, to make that light shine out. Much depends on us; if we respond many people will remain in darkness no longer, but will walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life.”

This idea finds an echo in modern reflections on the origin of culture. Specifically, we can see a connection with the observation of Kant—and earlier with that of Rousseau—according to which the “vices of culture” are especially linked to the unfolding of social life (see Immanuel Kant, Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone, 6: 27).

“Many things, whether they be material, technical, economic, social, political or cultural, when left to themselves, or left in the hands of those who lack the light of the faith, become formidable obstacles to the
supernatural life. They form a sort of closed preserve that is hostile to the Church.

“You, as a Christian and, perhaps, as a research worker, writer, scientist, politician or laborer, have the duty to sanctify those things. Remember that the whole universe—as the Apostle says—is groaning as in the pangs of labor, awaiting the liberation of the children of God.” See St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 311.


[20] St. Josemaría,


[21] “I have taught this constantly using words from holy Scripture. The world is not evil, because it has come from God’s hands, because it is His creation, because ‘Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good’ (cf. *Gen* 1:7 ff). We ourselves, mankind, make it evil and ugly with our sins and infidelities. Have no doubt: any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God.” St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 114. (*Edición critico-histórica preparada bajo la dirección de Jose Luis Illanes*, Rialp, Madrid, 2012).


[25] “Let us try to become more humble. For only a truly humble faith will allow us to see things from a supernatural point of view. We have no other alternative. There are only two possible ways of living on this earth: either we live a supernatural life, or else an animal life.” St. Josemaría, “Life of Faith,” *Friends of God*, no. 200. “Let us never forget that for all men, and therefore for each and every one of us, there are only two ways of living on this earth: either we lead a divine life, striving to please God; or we set him aside and live an animal-like existence, guided to a greater or lesser degree by human enlightenment.” St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 206.
“The final goal to which the speculation of reason ultimately points in its transcendental use refers to three objects: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God.” (See _Critique of Pure Reason_, A 797/B825; A 798/B826).

Indeed, for Nietzsche the “too human” refers to the need for another as reference for the will, while for Aristotle it would be “too human”—merely human—to give up cultivating the most divine element in us. Thus he says: “It is unworthy of man not to seek out the science offered to him” (_Metaphysics_ I, 982 b30)—although it be a science as divine as metaphysics. And in the _Nicomachean Ethics_, as already mentioned, while recognizing that the contemplative life exceeds human strength, he argues that “we must not have, as some advise us, human thoughts since we are men, nor mortal thoughts because we are mortal, but to the extent possible we should strive to immortalize ourselves and do all in our power to live according to the most excellent that there is in us” (_Nicomachean Ethics_ X, 7, 1177 b 32-35).

St. Josemaría, _Christ Is Passing By_, no. 98.

St. Josemaría, _Friends of God_, no. 43.

For example, Christians have to be diligent; he or she should not have “preoccupations” but only “occupations,” which is also a way to abandon oneself to divine Providence. They need to organize their time so that they can calmly and serenely carry out their duties (including to rest), and assist their brothers and sisters, which involves having a schedule.

See Pedro Rodríguez, _Vocación, trabajo, contemplación_, Eunsa, Pamplona, 1986.

St. Josemaría speaks clearly of the fact that culture is a means and not an end (see _The Way_, no. 345). But he also speaks of “making the day into a Mass” (Notes taken from his preaching, March 19, 1968, cited in Javier Echevarría, _Vivir la Santa Misa_, Madrid 2010, p. 17). Thus we can see the relationship between worship (cult) and culture. He also comments on one occasion on the text from _Rom_ 12 where St. Paul speaks of “rational worship.” Culture is thus a means and symbol, but detached from the cult that gives it meaning, it ends up fragmenting into a thousand pieces. To highlight the continuity with modern themes, I will point out that the
explicit use that Kant makes of the term “culture” is above all that of a “perfection,” and, more generally, that of mediation, in which its symbolic element can be intuited (see Ana Marta González, *Culture as mediation. Kant on nature, culture, and morality*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 2011, p. 361).


[36] “As I have been preaching since 1928, work is not a curse; nor is it a punishment for sin. Genesis had already spoken about the fact of work before ever Adam rebelled against God (see Gen 2:15). According to Our Lord’s plans work was to be a permanent feature of man who, through work, would cooperate in the immense task of creation.” St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 81.

[37] “If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness and given him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to uncover the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be attained only by dint of hard work. And with the light of faith, we also can perceive their supernatural purpose, resulting from the elevation of the natural order to the higher order of grace. We can never be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at truth. And Christ has said, ‘I am the truth.’

“The Christian must have a hunger to know. Everything, from the most abstract knowledge to manual techniques, can and should lead to God. For there is no human undertaking which cannot be sanctified,
which cannot be an opportunity to sanctify ourselves and to cooperate with God in the sanctification of the people with whom we work... To work in this way is to pray. To study thus is likewise prayer. Research done with this spirit is prayer too... Any honorable work can be prayer and all prayerful work is apostolate. In this way the soul develops a unity of life, which is both simple and strong.” St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 10.

[38] Ibid.

[39] It has sometimes been pointed out that this concept —unity of life— is one of St. Josemaría’s most original contributions to the ascetic vocabulary. However, I would like to stress that this contribution far transcends the ascetic plane, from the moment we see it projected on the horizon of culture. For a panoramic view of this concept, see Ignacio Celaya, subject heading “Unity of life,” in José Luis Illanes (coord.) Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Monte Carmelo–Historical Institute San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Burgos–Rome, 2015 (3rd ed) pp.1217-1223.

[40] St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, no. 99.


[43] St. Josemaría, The Way, no. 301. See the explanation offered by Pedro Rodríguez in his critical edition, where the close connection with Jn 12:32 is noted along with the proper way to interpret the reference to the “Kingdom of Christ.”


[45] “Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.” St. Josemaría, Conversations, no. 114.
If in a country there was not the slightest political freedom, there might be a distortion of the university that, ceasing to be a common home, would become a battlefield of opposing factions. I think, however, that it would be preferable to dedicate those years to a serious preparation, to form a social mentality, so that those who then are in charge —those who are now studying— do not fall into that aversion to personal freedom, which is truly pathological. If the university becomes a place where concrete political problems are debated and decided, it is easy to miss the academic serenity and have students formed in a spirit of partisanship; in that way, the University and the country will always be dragged into that chronic evil of totalitarianism, of whatever kind it may be.” St. Josemaría, Conversations, nos. 77a and b.


In guiding these works, he stressed the need to combine responsibility (seeking economic help, etc.) and poverty (caring for the instruments) with magnanimity and trust in Providence: “Spend what you need to, although what you spend is owed.” [A play on words in Spanish “Se gasta lo que se deba, aunque se deba lo que se gasta.”]


For a theory about the distinction between safe and insecure social links see Thomas J. Scheff, Emotions, the Social Bond, and Human Reality, Part/Whole Analysis, Cambridge University Press, 1997.
I think this is shown in a striking way in how he focuses the relationship between sexuality, maturity in love, and personality development. When speaking about sexuality, St. Josemaría often says that this question usually doesn’t occupy first place in a person’s concerns. And when it is presented, it should be seen in relation with attaining maturity in a person’s love. What at the beginning is only an impulse, a feeling, has to become a freely chosen love and pass the test of time to become true love for another person. This vision, which is in no way exclusively Christian (cf. Karl Jaspers, *Ambiente espiritual de nuestro tiempo*, Labor, Barcelona, 1933, p. 186), forms the moral core of the institution of marriage. With its requirement of reciprocal fidelity, it expresses the specific quality of mature human love, enabling it to grow in human depth until reaching the totality of the person.

This is clear in the case of political and economic institutions. When confidence in institutions decays, individuals close in on themselves and renounce far-reaching projects. Something similar also happens in other fields. Thus the deregulation of affective-sexual life, not only harms the development of the personality, hindering the maturing of personal love, but indirectly introduces into social life a factor of uncertainty that distorts the development of normal human relationships of friendship, trust, etc., with the consequent impoverishment of social and professional life.


In this regard, see Karl Jaspers, *Ambiente espiritual de nuestro tiempo*, p. 175.

“A son of God cannot entertain class prejudice, for he is interested in the problems of all men. And he tries to help solve them with the justice and charity of Our Redeemer. The Apostle already pointed it out when he wrote that the Lord is no respecter of persons. I have not hesitated to translate his words thus: there is only one race of men, the race of the children of God.” St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 303.
See Gal 3:27-29, 1 Cor 12:13, Rom 10:12. “The Apostle wrote that ‘there is no more Gentile and Jew, no more circumcised and uncircumcised; no one is barbarian or Scythian, no one is a slave or a free man; there is nothing but Christ in any of us.’ Those words are as valid today as they were then. Before the Lord there is no difference of nation, race, class, state... Each one of us has been born in Christ to be a new creature, a son of God. We are all brothers, and we have to behave fraternally towards one another.” St. Josemaría, Furrow, no. 317.

I don’t want to fail to point out the relationship between this conviction and the importance that St. Josemaría gives to a seemingly minor topic such as fashion. Far from reducing this issue to simply a moral question (as was frequent among some Fathers of the Church), I think he was very aware that right discernment in this area is closely related to ways of correctly understanding secularity: how to be of the world without being worldly.

War is characteristically one of the periods that can be designated as “liminal.” See Victor Turner, “Entre lo uno y lo otro: el periodo liminar en los rites de passage,” in La selva de los símbolos, p. 105.


Diligence leads to using one’s time well and calmly fulfilling the duties of one’s own state in life, and helping those who are overburdened in their work. See St. Josemaría, Friends of God, nos. 41 and 44

The possibility of discovering a truly human meaning in work is also pointed out by Jaspers in Ambiente spiritual de nuestro tiempo, p. 186. But in the writings of St. Josemaría, this vision is raised to a much higher level.

St. Josemaría, Christ Is Passing By, n. 48.

For a discussion of the views of Weber and Durkheim on this question, see Fernando Múgica, La profesión: enclave ético de la moderna sociedad diferenciada, Notebooks on Business and Humanism, University of Navarra, 1998.
“From the historical point of view, the fact that bringing up young children and domestic chores have not been valued up to now as perfectly valid types of work in society can only be explained with reference to the social disdain that has been shown within the framework of a culture determined by male values. From the psychological point of view, this also leads to the fact that, under the traditional distribution of roles, women can count on few possibilities to find in society the degree of social recognition that forms the necessary condition for a positive self-definition.” Axel Honneth, *La sociedad del desprecio*, pp. 143-144.

Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 201.


The rebellion against whatever dwarfs the human spirit, in the name of nobility understood as authenticity, is a theme often present in existentialist philosophers (see Karl Jaspers, *Spiritual environment of our time*, p. 189). But the authenticity that Jaspers thinks he finds in “philosophical life” is found by St. Josemaría in holiness, in the fullness of divine filiation that is nothing other than identification with Jesus Christ.

St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 23.

For St. Josemaría, women are first of all daughters of God, called, like men, to assume freely and responsibly the direction of their lives before God, and to find self-fulfillment in the gift of self out of love along the various paths of human life (marriage, apostolic celibacy, etc.). He also stresses the need for women to acquire a sound education and training, and their human dignity in being able to take up and develop a professional vocation and participate in public life.