

Review of a new biography of Opus Dei's founder

Vazquez de Prada, A., *The Founder of Opus Dei, Vol. I, Lord, That I May See!* Rialp, Madrid, 1997.

The year 1997 saw the publication of the first volume of a new biography of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei, written by Andrés Vázquez de Prada.

In the 22 years since the death of Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá, many works, including biographical ones, have been published.¹ But the new biography by Vázquez de Prada represents a major breakthrough.

Andrés Vázquez de Prada, who was born in 1923 and who spent time with the founder of Opus Dei on many occasions beginning in 1942, is the author of a number of studies in the fields of history and literature. A law professor and cultural attaché of the Spanish Embassy in London, he has shown a special interest in eminent figures of modern and contemporary history, especially Thomas More and John Henry Newman. In his earlier work, *El Fundador del Opus Dei* (1983), he attempted a preliminary sketch of the figure of Blessed Josemaría. In his new biography, he has once again employed this title, but within a much more ambitious project.

Vázquez de Prada's new biography will comprise several volumes, of which the one just published is the first. This volume is divided into eight chapters covering a period of 34 years, from Blessed Josemaría's birth in 1902 to 1936, the beginning of the Spanish civil war.

The four first chapters detail the years in Barbastro (1902-1915); the Logroño years (1915-1920); the Zaragoza period (1920-1925); and his life as a young priest (1925-1927). All the events in Blessed Josemaría's life are seen in the context of his search for God's will, leading up to the foundation of Opus Dei on October 2, 1928.

In the remaining four chapters, the chronological distribution becomes more flexible. In the almost ten years covered by these chapters, the event that took place on October 2, 1928, becomes the unifying thread in the progressive manifestation of God's will to the founder. These chapters are entitled: Foundation of Opus Dei; Intimate Notes; The Work's Gestation; First Centers of Opus Dei.

The volume closes with 15 documentary appendices and an index of names.

The story told in these pages is the fruit of a rigorous investigation by the author into the abundant existing documentation. The numerous sources used substantiate every affirmation in the 638 pages of the text.

1. Cf. ORLANDIS, J., "Biografías del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Reseña de las publicadas entre los años 1976 y 1995" in *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia*, 6 (1997), 675-684.

The author has clearly made an effort to let the sources speak for themselves. Those used are all of great interest, including the founder's writings (especially his personal notes), and the summaries of the respective processes carried out with a view to his beatification, both in Madrid and in Rome.

Reading this biography has given rise to many impressions. In this brief review I'll limit myself to only two.

The first is the maturing process, both human and spiritual, in Blessed Josemaría's life that is reflected in these pages. The second, related to the first, is the light shed on the development of Opus Dei. As the author explains in his prologue: "The main thread running through the biography is the gestation of Opus Dei, which is followed step by step until it is fully developed. Blessed Josemaría devoted his whole existence to this enterprise. The charism he had received was acting within his soul during all these years, identifying his very self with Opus Dei—becoming himself Opus Dei. This is the other face of the biogra-

phy." Thus one can see why the book's title is appropriate.

Without emphasizing in any way the supernatural interventions in the life of Opus Dei, the book leads one to an awareness of the supernatural character of its birth and development, which, by God's will, counted on Blessed Josemaría as the instrument for bringing it about.

Far from being the last word on Blessed Josemaría's life and work, this new biography opens up a long and exciting path for all who want to fully understand the founder's life. The author himself, in his prologue, tells us that he has had to overlook a number of important topics, including the origins of the spirituality of Opus Dei, the cultural and social panorama in Spain during these years, and several other topics, all of which will require further studies.

Federico M. Requena
Institute of Church History
University of Navarre
Pamplona, Spain