

Articles and Interviews

An Interview Granted to *Vida Nueva*, Spain, (March 3, 2018)

Interview by Darío Menor

What do you see as the most important decisions you have made at the head of Opus Dei since you were elected Prelate last January? And the biggest difficulties you have faced?

A large part of the work has involved tackling the priorities set forth by the General Congress of Opus Dei for the upcoming years: above all, evangelization in the areas of the family and young people. Here there are many challenges that all of us in the Church face. Our society needs engaged couples and married people who show others the beauty of an authentic love, giving testimony to a happy and fulfilled life in the commitment of marriage. We also need to care for our young people, going out to meet them in their yearnings and concerns.

At the same time, we cannot forget the needy: the sick, immigrants, the unemployed, the poor, etc. They hold a privileged place in Jesus' heart, as they should also in ours. How do we tackle all these challenges? Starting from the per-

sonal encounter with Christ, in prayer and the sacraments. It is the encounter with Christ that spurs us to start moving.

You asked me about the biggest difficulties I have faced... Thanks be to God, in these months spent as Prelate, I haven't encountered any special difficulties. I rely a lot on the strength of the prayer of so many people.

What is your leadership style? Do you have any model you intend to follow?

I would like to follow in the footsteps of St. Josemaría, who poured out his life for everyone. Thanks be to God, the government in Opus Dei is collegial, and that means there are other people who help me with this task. Every mission of government, of leadership, must be a mission of service. In my case, of service to the Church, to the Pope, and to all the priests and laity entrusted to me in the Prelature of Opus Dei.

How is your relationship with the Pope? Do you speak often with each other?

It is a relationship of affection. I am grateful to the Holy Father for his signs of affection towards the Prelature of Opus Dei, and also towards myself, on the occasion of the death of the previous Prelate,

Bishop Javier Echevarría, and of my appointment to succeed him. And in the following months I have continued to experience his fatherly affection when I have spoken with him personally and when we have communicated in writing.

In the audience he granted you last March, Francis asked Opus Dei to give priority to the peripheries and to be present among the middle class, the professional world and intellectuals distanced from God. What has been done so far to follow his recommendation?

In that audience, the Pope encouraged us to bring God's love to the existential peripheries of the middle classes, to make God present in the immense panorama of professional work. This requires that each of us through our behavior strives to make Christ present to others. Hopefully each person in the Work will be a consistent witness to the Gospel in their family, at work, and in the other sectors of society.

With regard to physical peripheries, some initiatives brought forward by faithful of the Prelature that I have been able to visit this summer come to mind. For example, in the Raval neighborhood, in Barcelona, I visited the Braval and Terra associations. There, over 300 volunteers carry out educational, sports, and formational programs for immigrants in that city. In Madrid, I visited the Laguna palliative care center, where people are accompanied in the delicate mo-

ments of their final stretches in life. In Cologne, Germany, I met with volunteers and priests from the parish of St. Pantaleon, entrusted to the Prelature. There they are assisting 30 Syrian families in a building built in collaboration with the diocese and the local government. Families can spend six months there. They receive a lot of help to integrate themselves into the country, so that they can be autonomous.

Thanks be to God, welfare institutions have arisen in many parts of the world. For example, in Kinshasa, capital of the world's third poorest country, Monkole Hospital provides medical care for many people.

But as I was saying, the real revolution would be that everyone, despite our limitations and defects, would decide to act as good Samaritans in our home and at work, listening to others, offering spiritual and material help. I have met courageous business people, like that person in the Philippines who, with the profits from his three hotels, decided to start an orphanage for 50 abandoned children. He has now expanded it and offers assistance to about 100 children. There are also financial experts who dream of building a fairer world, far removed from an exclusionary economy; and prestigious doctors who pour themselves out for their patients. In Opus Dei we all have to keep making an effort in this area and learn from so many others in the Church.

Were those words an implicit criticism for having been too concerned in the past about the “elites”?

I didn't get that impression. The Pope's words seemed to me rather to be an invitation to bring the joy of the Gospel to the great field for apostolic sowing that is the middle class, where most people find themselves in many countries and also in Opus Dei.

What would you say to those who view Opus Dei as a closed and sectarian group with an ultraconservative ideology?

In first place, that those in Opus Dei—as is obvious—aren't perfect, that we have defects and make mistakes. At the same time, I would invite them to get to know the reality at first hand, without being taken in by clichés. It is always a good practice in life to be open to the truth! Look, back in the 60s we had the opposite problem: quite a few people said that Opus Dei was a dangerous innovation. Faithfully conserving the faith received in the Church doesn't make you ultraconservative. And progressing in the mission of spreading Christ's light, attentive to the needs of each age, doesn't make you a follower of the ideology of progressivism.

How can young people sanctify their work today, as Opus Dei urges, when their job is often insecure, poorly paid, and intermittent?

Prolonged unemployment or a job that isn't secure can lead to a painful situation that seriously harms young people. This also clearly harms society as a whole because it is a waste of human potential, results in marriages being delayed, and is a source of insecurity for families. Those in these painful situations have the job, so to speak, of looking for work, which they can sanctify, as they can also sanctify the effort to obtain more training in order to find a better job. Obviously, this is not a solution for specific problems, but neither is it simply facile consolation.

For a Christian, adversity is a call to foster hope, above all in our goal which is Heaven. But it is also a call for our present life, in which with God's help we are called to serve others and strive for the common good, especially through our work. Christian hope spurs us to do all we can to solve the problems around us.

Given the situation you describe, I think that those of us who are less young can and should help with our prayer, and lend a hand to those who are beginning their professional path by passing on to them our experience and knowledge, and helping them acquire the virtues needed to work well. And also, by seeking and proposing solutions to the problem of youth unemployment and job insecurity that afflicts so many young people.

What do you see as Pope Francis' greatest achievement up to now in his pontificate?

You can already see some effects of his evangelizing impulse. Francis is urging the Church to reflect, in an ever-clearer way, the reality that she is the incarnation of divine mercy. He is a shepherd who is guiding his flock with his word and example: with the coherence between what he says and what he does. Also quite frequently he encourages people to have recourse to the sacrament of reconciliation. The results can already be seen in parishes. The Pope is also calling us to a more joyful and enthusiastic pastoral effort. He is providing support to families in their struggles, assuring them of our Lord's assistance, despite all the difficulties and deficiencies.

What is your reaction to the criticism a certain sector in the Church is directing to the Pope regarding the apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia?

It's very painful. A son or daughter of the Church should never utter a word of destructive criticism towards anyone, much less towards the Pope. Pope Francis once said that he understands this commotion, especially regarding *Amoris laetitia*. With this apostolic exhortation, the Pope — among many other things — is urging us to draw close to people who are in difficult situations, and to do

so with greater availability. But Francis himself expressly said that doctrine doesn't change. It is, in my opinion, aimed at getting priests to dedicate more time to people who are going through difficulties, accompanying them in a process—sometimes long—that helps them understand better their personal situation and overcome it with God's grace.

What memories do you have of your relationship with the Pope Emeritus? Do you ever talk with him or go to visit him? How do you think he will be remembered by the Church?

My relationship with Benedict XVI dates back to 1986, when I began working as a consultant to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, of which he was then prefect. That job gave me many opportunities for personal contact. I remember how he listened to each one with a sincere and unhurried interest, despite his many occupations. He was very interested in others' opinion and was eager for a dialogue in search of the truth. After his resignation, I have visited him several times.

As Pope, he will be remembered for his rich teaching, found in his three encyclicals and his apostolic exhortations, and also in his abundant preaching. His homilies and addresses are filled with light, and many of them are grouped around specific themes: on the Church, the Apostles, the Fathers of the Church, prayer....

In addition, as a theologian, he holds a prominent place in contemporary theology, with important contributions in various fields, including central questions of fundamental theology and aspects of social and political morality.

An Interview Granted to the Website of *Strathmore University* (May 15, 2018)

Strathmore University congratulates you on your election as Prelate of Opus Dei and, thereby also as Chancellor of this Academic Center. What was the vision of Saint Josemaría for Africa and specifically Kenya when he sent the first members of Opus Dei who started the Strathmore A-Level College in 1961?

Kenya was the first country in Africa to receive faithful of Opus Dei, in 1958. That is why Saint Josemaría always looked at your nation with great affection. He prayed a lot for Kenyans and for Strathmore. He hoped that his daughters and sons, who had arrived there to carry out their professional work, would become good citizens of the land that had welcomed them. He wanted Strathmore College to be interracial: in the management team, in the faculty and in the student body. “Because there is only one race,” he

liked to say, “the race of the children of God.” That is why Strathmore is, in a way, a place where one has to learn to live like this, as children of God.

What are your expectations for Strathmore University as we celebrate 10 years since it was awarded its charter?

I hope that this anniversary will be an opportunity to open up to a yearning for truth. This is an attitude very much in keeping with the university spirit and is what Saint Josemaría wanted – and later Don Alvaro and Don Javier – for people who work in this field. Being open to the whole world, eager to serve and share the best you have.

Strathmore’s charter was awarded in 2008, at a time when Kenya was greatly divided after the 2007 post-election violence in the country. What is your take on the University’s Christian orientation and foundational values that emphasize charity and unity, as is clearly spelt out in its motto “Ut omnes unum sint”?

Unity is not improvised. It is an asset, a great good based on the willingness to help others and avoid making a big deal about differences, no matter what they are. This motto, therefore, is a basis for further work and also a goal to be reached. Unity is a daily conquest: a struggle to appreciate and respect differences and to learn how to ask