

What do you make of the international situation since the terrorist attacks of September 11?

Like everyone else, I felt great sorrow at these attacks. I was deeply moved by those words of the Pope—I am now speaking from memory—of the hopes for peace, long desired and suddenly wounded by these thorns. I have thought too about the tragedies of our time, like those of Africa, which have occurred far from the television cameras, and which also cry out to heaven. These profound crises demand radical solutions, perhaps new forms of relationship among peoples, in which not the logic of violence, power and money but that of dialogue prevails. It seems that more concrete means of fostering justice must be found.

There are some who say that it is a question of a real conflict of cultures. How does Opus Dei see relations with Islam?

I would rather not look at the situation as a planetary conflict. A terrible terrorist act, carried out by a group of fanatics, cannot taint at one stroke the history and culture of dozens of countries, even though it is for everyone a warning cry.

What do you believe would be the reaction of Blessed Josemaría, if he were to see the present-day situation, in which one can foresee even the possibility of cloning human beings?

Humanity has always had a genius for bringing torments upon itself. Cloning is like a nightmare: man has become drunk with the power of

science and uses it without moderation, sowing fear and distrust around him. It is precisely this disdain for ethics and morality that could lead one to justify even the worst forms of barbarism of the twentieth century, which wreaked such havoc. I have no doubt that this misuse of science would cause Blessed Josemaría great pain. But in today's world there are also many positive advances that he would admire and rejoice at.

Do you think that he would be satisfied with the evolution of his Work?

I think so. It seems to me that one of his great achievements was encouraging Christians to see themselves as "sowers of peace and joy." Josemaría Escrivá had great admiration for saints who possessed, according to their contemporaries, a good sense of humor, such as Thomas More, Philip Neri, St. Teresa or Don Bosco. This is why he always had a good rapport with young people.

Vatican City January 9, 2002

Article in L'Osservatore Romano, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

On January 9, 1902, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born in a small city in Spain. A faithful picture of his fruitful passage on earth is the point with which he began *The Way*: "Don't let your life be barren. Be use-

ful. Leave a mark. Shine forth with the light of your faith and your love... —And set aflame all the paths of the earth with the fire of Christ that you bear in your heart.”

Yes, he was completely in love with Christ, with a undying love. Therefore the centennial we are now preparing to celebrate is not merely a memorial of the past. If we give in to the temptation to simply commemorate the past, we will have lost the lesson of humility given us by the founder of Opus Dei, who had no use for praise and who always worked without making noise. When the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination arrived, and everyone saw him as a teacher of interior life, he said he felt “like a babbling child.” He also used to say that, on receiving a letter, one throws out the envelope and pays attention only to the message. He was convinced that he was the envelop. The important thing was the message, the spirit of sanctifying ordinary life that God had entrusted to him.

This centennial should direct our eyes to the future. It is not a nostalgic look back, but a proposal to be carried out, a hope, a sincere desire to make progress in love for God and neighbor. We are at the threshold of a new century. The times require an open mind, a readiness to take up unprecedented challenges. They invite us, as the Holy Father wrote in his apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, to “remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look to the future with confidence” (no. 1).

The message given to the Church through the founder of Opus

Dei has an internal dynamism that, as the Pope said in the decree proclaiming the heroic virtues of Blessed Josemaría, is “destined to endure as an inexhaustible source of spiritual light regardless of changing epochs and situations.” This spiritual light teaches us that no one is excluded from God’s call, and that (employing an image from one of his homilies) heaven and earth meet not only on the horizon, but also in the heart of the children of God who daringly commit themselves to seeking Christ present in all earthly realities.

Blessed Josemaría put himself entirely at the service of the mission he had received from God. Everything in his life that referred to himself was left aside. One might say that he lived solely to give birth to and consolidate the institution needed to spread that message, to recall to Christians who live in the middle of the world that God was calling them in and through the occupations of their daily life. “There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it,” he wrote (*Conversations*, no. 114). And he poured all of his energies into the service of this ideal, an ideal both great and very ordinary. So many Christians have learned from him to discover, in the supernatural dimension of ordinary life (where others see only pieces of broken glass), pure gold, emeralds, rubies. Thus even routine, banality, daily monotony are transfigured.

The fruitfulness of his life stems from his total commitment to the role in the Church God had assigned to

him. A supernatural logic demands that all the room be given to God, that one be humble. But not with the humility of pulling back, but rather giving oneself entirely, not keeping back for oneself the smallest iota of one's capacities. Therefore I would like to remind everyone today, first of all myself, that in order to develop all the potentialities contained in Blessed Josemaría's message, we have to be ready to give ourselves as he gave himself.

This is a good moment to grasp more fully that work is service. "How I like that word: service!" the founder of Opus Dei wrote. "To serve my King and, through him, all those who have been redeemed by his Blood. I really wish we Christians knew how to serve" (*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 182). To serve means to give oneself, ensuring that ours is a love that prefers deeds to words. Solidarity is born here, as well as the humble virtues in which true charity is wrapped: a smile, patience, the art of looking out for others' concerns, knowing how to be quiet, how to wait. Both what is small and what is great are found in a true spirit of service, which combines humility with charity. In the soul of a Christian there is no place for mediocrity. We have Christ's eloquent example: "He has done all things well" (*Mk* 7:37), was the astonished comment of those who met him, both during his childhood days and during his years spent working in Nazareth. To take part in the epic of the redemption means combining the highest ambition, the search for holiness, with care for little things.

But in order to serve we have to truly renounce ourselves, our own excellence and success, and seek instead the glory of God: "No one can serve two masters" (*Mt* 6:24). The logic of service also means acquiring a solid professional prestige, based not on appearances but on the capacity to place oneself at the service of the real needs of one's neighbor. To work in the service of God and of man means to take responsibility, to give good example with one's own work, to make the talents one has received productive for the common good. And this cannot be attained without a serious effort to exercise virtue while we are working, putting into play one's own professional competence for a purpose that transcends the immediate result of the activity itself. When one works in this way, the deep motivation, love for God, is evident. Therefore the person who truly works in order to serve has as a goal, beyond that of personal recognition, the search for God's will in the thousand vicissitudes of daily life. And as a consequence he does not lose his calm in the face of life's setbacks or unexpected events.

A spirit of service, then, radically changes the hierarchy of values upon which society is usually built up: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," says Mary in her eagerness to serve (*Lk* 1:38). It restores to the Christian a right sense of reality, since it makes him understand what are the true and overriding ideals and goals: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all" (*Mk* 10:43-44).

Blessed Josemaría's example helps us to find in the Gospel the strength to transform the world, to which all Christians are called. The saints bear witness to the reality that the Gospel is always up-to-date. Through them we understand that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (*Heb 13:8*).

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Prelate of Opus Dei

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Interview published in the newspaper La Repubblica, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá

Bishop Echevarría, this has to be a great moment for Opus Dei, since soon its founder will be raised to the altars.

When that takes place, it will mean that the Church will have definitively recognized the holiness of a man who reached the fullness of charity, perfect union with God. Christian holiness consists in the ability to love God above all things and to transmit that love to others. I can assure you that Blessed Josemaría had a huge heart, amply capable of suffering with whoever suffered and of rejoicing with whoever rejoiced. And he did so whether the affected party was an entire nation, a group of people, a friend or a stranger.

Some have said that Escrivá was hard to get along with, that he was temperamental.

I don't think that one can say that, although he himself wasn't bashful in saying that he had a forceful character. God made use of his strong character to open a path for Opus Dei in the world, in the Church, in so many places. He knew how to say the right things, at times energetically, but without leaving resentments. And if he realized he'd made a mistake, he would immediately apologize.

Opus Dei has covered a lot of ground: more than 80,000 members all over the world, close to 2,000 priests, so many undertakings in all six continents. What would you say to a young person today to encourage him to join?

Let me clarify that I wouldn't urge anyone to join Opus Dei. To follow our Lord in the Work, there is one pre-condition: a freedom that is exercised each day. One should do what God wants, telling him: I do so because I want to. I'd only advise such a person: Be attentive to God's voice and do whatever he tells you.

And if someone wishes to leave Opus Dei? Is there any pressure?

None at all. Never.

But weren't there some unpleasant instances in the past?

No, never. The doors are wide open for whoever wishes to leave, yet whoever wishes to enter needs to do a lot of pushing and shoving. If you