

grimaces to Czestochowa. The first one was with Bishop del Portillo in 1979 and the last one I made, as the prelate of Opus Dei, was on the feast of Our Lady of Jasna Gora, August 26, 2005. I am convinced that John Paul II has given a lot to the world and to the Church. Without any doubt, he gave a lot to Opus Dei, thanks to his spiritual fatherhood.

Many people were surprised that the Prelature's response to the slanders contained in Dan Brown's book, while unequivocal, was also tempered: you did not initiate a lawsuit against him or seek any compensation. Why did the Prelature react in this way?

Bishop Javier Echevarría: I would like to point out the fact that the most unfortunate aspect of Brown's book is not what he says about Opus Dei but the falsified image of Christ and his Church that he presents to his readers. Opus Dei, which is a part of the Church, is a young, vibrant and beautiful reality. A writer's inventions can obscure this beauty, and this is sad. However, we realise that the beauty of the Church, which includes Opus Dei, is revealed in its fullness when we show the love of Christ and do not yield to hurt feelings. In this perspective love is the best way to present the figure of Jesus Christ and the reality of the Church. This is why our reaction, which was decisive but also courteous, was a manifestation of our sense of responsibility. Let us not forget that love is Christ's commandment and in fact his most important commandment.

I'll repeat once again: what is most painful about *The Da Vinci*

Code is the way in which the author attempts to trivialize the Person of Christ. It is good to see that Pope Benedict XVI's new book established, at the center of cultural dialogue, the historical reality—human and divine—of Jesus Christ. This is a wonderful occasion for Christians and all people to get to know Jesus and deepen their relationship with the Son of God who became man.

The 80th anniversary of Opus Dei falls next year. How are you preparing for this event?

Bishop Javier Echevarría: First of all, each of us is preparing for it through a personal conversion. We must ask ourselves before God: How are we serving the Church, the Pope and others?

As far as the Prelature is concerned it will be an opportunity to explain what Opus Dei is. Just now, as the 80th anniversary of Opus Dei draws near, Opus Dei is beginning its work in Russia, and soon we will also be present in Romania.

Italy

November 28, 2007

*Interview granted to
Avvenire, Milan
(by Francesco Ognibene)*

Opus Dei is the first and, up till now, the only personal prelate in the Catholic Church. What has this step, taken in 1982, meant for the Work?

John Paul II, with the apostolic constitution *Ut Sit*, erected Opus Dei, founded by St. Josemaría Escrivá on October 2, 1928, as a personal prelature. This canonical form, foreseen by the Second Vatican Council, is adapted to the spirit and reality of Opus Dei and facilitates the carrying out of the Work's mission in the Church and for the Church, in union with all the bishops of the various dioceses. It helps make the prayer of the Prelature's faithful, both priests and laity, more fruitful and its evangelizing efforts more incisive. Thus it can offer the Church a solid contribution to the urgent task of evangelizing present-day society.

Why did the Founder, St. Josemaría, desire so strongly this type of juridical form?

Because in that way the canonical norm is aligned with the theological reality desired by our Lord. Opus Dei was founded by divine inspiration, as the apostolic constitution *Ut Sit* states, and thus has a foundational charism. It is now an ecclesiastical circumscription of a hierarchical nature—as John Paul II said—made up of priests and laity, with a Prelate at its head, who is appointed by the Pope with the task of directing it, in communion with all the bishops. Opus Dei shares in the marvelous mission of the whole Church. To use an expression of St. Augustine with Pauline echoes, it shares in the mission of reconciling the world with God. Love for God and the love for the world are inseparable in the

teaching of St. Josemaría, for in the world we encounter the Creator's presence and mercy. As the Founder said, the Church is Christ present among us.

What is the relationship between the Prelature's faithful and the specific dioceses to which they belong?

The Prelature of Opus Dei, with its 46 circumscriptions, is working in more than 60 countries and serves the Church in approximately 350 dioceses. Opus Dei's first service to the dioceses, to the Church, is that of being very faithful to its message, proclaiming the universal call to sanctity in ordinary life and especially in the exercise of professional work. This, in turn, with God's grace, fosters the growth of Christian life and brings about conversions; it can help increase attendance at Sunday Mass in the parishes and commitment to charitable works, among many other things. In addition, most of the priests of the Prelature provide other direct services to the local Churches, for example, helping out in the parishes, working in hospitals and schools, etc. Moreover, the Prelature always initiates its activities in a diocese with the local bishop's permission.

Could you describe the members of Opus Dei? What are they trying to achieve? How do they differ from other Catholics?

The faithful of the Work are ordinary Catholics who through a spe-

cific vocation commit themselves to bringing Christ's light to their family, social and professional settings. Using a comparison that is perhaps a bit simplistic, one could say that the music is the same for all Catholics, but in the orchestra each one plays a different instrument. The essential thing is the breath of the Holy Spirit. Those who draw close to Opus Dei receive Christian formation and spiritual guidance adapted to their particular circumstances, to help them live their Christian commitments in their ordinary life, each with one's own responsibility. We don't consider ourselves better or different from others; nevertheless, we see an obligation to live a radical commitment to our faith at each moment.

In these past 25 years, how has the Prelature helped to form lay people able to confront the complex challenges we are facing today?

To answer this question, I would like to tell you about my recent trip to Kazakhstan. A few days ago, I spent some time with the faithful of Opus Dei who are living in a country where Catholics are a tiny minority. They are working filled with joy and hope in the place in society where they find themselves. And the first fruits are starting to appear. The number of men and women interested in the Catholic faith is increasing. They are dreaming of a future when the faith will set down strong roots in Central Asia. The same spirit is animating so many people, ordinary Christians, all over the world: the desire to bring Christ

to those around them through the testimony of their own lives, in ordinary everyday things, through their example and their capacity to love and serve others. This is what St. Josemaría called an apostolate of sincere and disinterested friendship, as in the times of the early Christians. If one truly loves others, a reciprocal trust and mutual understanding will arise, that soon becomes true fraternity.

Spain

October 6, 2007

*"The Splendor of Charity,"
an article Published in
ABC, Madrid*

Five years ago, on October 6, 2002, before a large crowd of people from every race and corner of the world, John Paul II proclaimed Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, a saint. On the following day, in the audience held in St. Peter's Square for those attending the canonization, he described St. Josemaría as the saint of the ordinary. With this expression he summed up the core of the message preached by this faithful priest. Our daily activities—one's family life, professional work, social relationships—are a path leading to heaven, if one walks with one's eyes fixed on God and with a desire to help one's neighbor.

I had the good fortune (I see it as God's gift) of being a direct witness, for a quarter of a century, to St. Josemaría's concern to help