

Our aim is to help all men and women see that, if they want, they can strive to be a saint.”

Italy November 29, 2008

Interview granted to Il Tempo

Bishop Echevarría: On October 2, 1928, 80 years ago, Josemaría Escrivá founded Opus Dei. The Christian as a “traveling contemplative”: this seems to be the decisive factor, the charisma that has permitted the Work to enter the third millennium with a vigorous step.

On that day, some 80 years ago, St. Josemaría received an intellectual light about what would be from then on Opus Dei: a multitude of ordinary people, of all races, professions and social conditions, who struggle to live their Christianity fully. Faithful who want to turn ordinary realities into an opportunity for an encounter with God. A “contemplative in the midst of the world” is someone who, with God’s help, and despite his or her weaknesses, seeks to find Jesus in each moment of their life.

“Don’t let your life be sterile,” we read in the Founder’s book, *The Way*. “Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love. With your apostolic life, wipe out the slimy and filthy mark left by the impure sowers of hatred. And light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart.”

Jesus spent his life on earth totally dedicated to communicating the message of salvation through his example, his deeds, his untiring service to those around him, right up to his death on the Cross. This is the ideal that wins over every true Christian. As the Founder of Opus Dei used to say, for a person who is in love with Jesus, every moment is a marvelous opportunity to make life more pleasant for others.

The faithful of the Work are viewed by some as “elegantly dressed mystics.” In recent times, an international campaign of surprising violence has accused Opus Dei of being a “lay Catholic elite,” a “fanaticism that needs a radical reform,” etc. What has been the impact of those poisonous criticisms.

People often say (although I don’t believe it’s true) that half the world is dedicated to criticizing the other half. One shouldn’t give importance to falsehoods. One has to respond with charity and with the consistency of one’s own life. In many cases, the mistaken or slanderous information provides an opportunity to spread correct information. As is the case with all Christian realities, the Work cannot be understood except after a personal encounter with the light of the faith. When one enters into contact with the faithful of Opus Dei (diocesan priests and simple lay people), the suspicions, prejudices and mistaken views vanish. St. Josemaría prayed every day for these friends of his: that’s how he considered them.

How much Opus Dei is there in the future of the Catholic Church?

The future is in the hands of God, who promised the Church his presence and assistance. The Work will continue to strive, in union with the other members of the Church, to bring to everyone the message of salvation contained in the Gospel. It will do this by showing the world that holiness is what God expects of each of us "here and now." I am happy to tell you that so many people all over the world are filled with joy when they discover this possibility: that of being saints in the world.

Does Josemaría Escrivá's undertaking have repercussions for secular society?

Work, understood as the sum total of one's daily activities, is the place where each person can encounter God. All honest tasks can be made holy; everything that is human can—or better, should—have a relationship with God. This intuition, proclaimed solemnly by the Second Vatican Council, is a silent revolution: a multitude of persons, made up of students, professionals, hard-working laborers, faithful husbands and wives, citizens committed to obtaining the good of everyone. This certainly has relevance for secular society, since Christian life helps to humanize society and improve it.

The waves of "moral and doctrinal relativism" seem quite threatening. You have your hand on the pulse of the situation through the priests of the Work, who work all over the world. What are you most concerned about?

Moral relativism is a sign of the interior unrest in those who have not

yet found God. The greatest service that priests can provide is to bring souls to God, to help them take part in the immense good of the Eucharist and to find reconciliation with God through the Sacrament of Penance. What peace they find when they return to friendship with our Lord! The message of the Gospel shows that God wants our happiness. Among the many priorities, I would say the most urgent is the holiness of those who seek to lead others to Christ. They must be men and women of prayer and correct doctrine, leading a life of virtue and self-giving to all.

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross is now underway. And recently the Campus Bio-Medico was started. Education and biotechnology seem to be the new frontiers for Opus Dei.

The first frontier for Opus Dei's work is personal apostolate. But St. Josemaría encouraged the faithful of the Work to begin educational and social assistance activities to help solve the specific problems of society. This is the aim of the Campus Bio-Medico: to be both a university and a hospital, where the professional competence of the doctors is accompanied by a great humanity. It is the same with Centro Elis, also in Rome, where they try to teach boys to be good professionals and men of principal. And the University of the Holy Cross gives formation to many priests, religious and lay people in theology, canon law, philosophy and institutional communication. These works try to provide a small example of what society might be if it were

imbued with Christian values.

We don't hear you spoken of very much. Perhaps you have chosen to remain in the background, working quietly. Are there men and women who still knock at the door of Opus Dei, who want to embrace the ideal of life presented by St. Josemaría Escrivá?

Those who come to the Work do so because they are seeking God. Opus Dei has no other goal than to help ordinary faithful to raise the spiritual temperature in their lives, so that they grow in faith and in love for the Church.

John Paul II erected the Work as a "Prelature," and Opus Dei reflected the ideal of the great Pope, who is now gone, of a Catholic Church in solidarity with all men and women, and an undisputed teacher of the truth. Is this atmosphere kept alive with Pope Benedict XVI?

The union of the faithful with the Roman Pontiff is an essential characteristic of the Church, and therefore of the Work. When St. Josemaría arrived in Rome, he spent a whole night in prayer while looking at the window of the Pope's apartment. And he taught us, his children, to have a filial devotion towards the Pope. Benedict XVI, in full continuity with John Paul II, is an exemplary pastor. For all Catholics he is an example of authentic Christianity.

November 28 was the 25th anniversary of the establishment of Opus Dei as a Personal Prelature. How did you celebrate this anniversary?

It was an opportunity to rediscover a great truth that St. Josemaría expressed in this way: many great things depend—don't forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants.

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You have been the Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei since 1994 and before that you lived for many years close to the Founder, St. Josemaría... Can you tell us what the message of Opus Dei is? What panorama does Opus Dei offer people today?

The core of Opus Dei's message is the universal call to holiness. God wants us all to be holy, every one of us: men and women, single and married, young and not so young, healthy and sick, intellectuals and manual workers, we are all called to the fullness of Christian life in the midst of the ordinary circumstances of our life. On October 2, 1928, St. Josemaría "saw" (this was how he always put it) that God was asking him to remind all people of the reality of this call. This is how God wanted the Work to be born, this "little portion" of the Church, which tries to remind people of that vocation.

St. Josemaría used to say that the message of the Work is as old and as new as the Gospel. This means that it is always up to date.

We have to find and stay close to God in the midst of the most diverse