

Two decades ago, our first Chancellor, the beloved Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, in the homily at a Mass for the inauguration of the academic year, exhorted us: “Dear friends, this period of study is meant to provide intellectual light; but it is also a time to grow in one’s life of faith. It would be sad if the academic training were at the expense of one’s life of piety and apostolic zeal.”⁸

A university’s success is due precisely to the combined and persevering effort of everyone. Faith has an important role also in the administrative and technical tasks. What is this role? These words of St. Josemaría, contained in a homily on work, can guide us: “I give you my word that if we make a daily effort to see our personal duties in this light, that is, as a divine summons, we will learn to carry them through to completion with the greatest human and supernatural perfection of which we are capable.”⁹

As he said in another context: “Work is born of love; it is a manifestation of love and is directed toward love. We see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, In eating, in drinking, in all that you do, do everything for God’s glory” (1 Cor 10:31).¹⁰

If we truly strive to unite our faith and our intellect, we will act with the unity of life proper to the children of God, both on days that are more serene, and on those that are more “agitated,” when it seems that everything is going wrong. If we always realize that we are guided by the loving hand of our Father in heaven, and that He is very close to each one of us, we will know how to smile and spread around us an atmosphere of peace that makes everyone’s work pleasant, although our work requires great effort and tires us out.

Let us often look with love at the images of our Lady, Mother of God and our Mother, that are so easy to find in this building. And then it will be even easier for us to spread around us the joy and peace that we all desire.

With this wish for all, I declare the 2010–2011 academic year opened.

Poland November 14, 2010

*Interview granted to the
weekly Przewodnik
Katolicki*

1. *Opus Dei is a personal prelature—still the only one—of the Catholic Church. What is its uniqueness and how should its structure be*

8. Álvaro del Portillo, Homily, October 23, 1989, in *Romana 5* (1989), 246.

9. St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, 57.

10. St. Josemaría, *Christ Is Passing By*, 48.

understood? Is it necessary for today's Church?

The Second Vatican Council created this new pastoral structure, the personal prelature, to give a greater dynamism to the Church's work of evangelization. Opus Dei, formed by a Prelate, his presbyterate and lay faithful, men and women, makes its apostolic contribution—in communion with the Pope and bishops—by carrying out its proper mission: reminding people that all have been called by God to sanctity and to help them to respond to that call in the world, in their professional work and daily duties.

Opus Dei carries out this task throughout the world, and is universal in scope. But it is not an alternative to the work carried out in the dioceses. Quite the contrary, it works in conjunction with the particular Churches. The fruit of the evangelizing work of those in the Prelature remains in the dioceses themselves. On the one hand because they themselves are faithful of the diocese in which they live; but also because, when they strive to increase the faith and spiritual life of their relatives and friends, when they spread the knowledge of Catholic doctrine, when they try to work with human perfection, they are participating directly in the task of evangelization of the particular Church in which they find themselves.

As regards the second part of your question. I can tell you that the Founder, St. Josemaría, used to say that Opus Dei was born in spite

of himself. Personally he did not want to found anything. He was very clear that the initiative came from God. And when God brings forth a new path in the Church, he has his own plans. He counts on that path, as on so many others, to help many people find him in the middle of the world, through the Church. I often heard St. Josemaría say: "If Opus Dei weren't here to serve the Church, it would be better to dissolve it. I would have no use for it!"

2. Opus Dei is now almost 82 years old and is closely united to the life and work of St. Josemaría Escrivá. Can you tell us about him? Your Excellency knew him personally. What was his path to sanctity like?

I can assure you that having lived close to him for twenty-five years was for me a great gift. To describe his personality and all that I learned from him would take a long time. I tried to do so, although very inadequately, in the book *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá*. I can tell you succinctly, nevertheless, that his life was characterized by the desire to fulfill God's will at every moment and in every activity. He desired not only to follow God's indications, but also to maintain a continuous dialogue with him. He was, he liked to say, a contemplative in the middle of the world. He tried to put into practice what he said and wrote, from his youth, to the young workers and university students whom he directed spiritually: "May you seek Christ. May you find Christ. May you love Christ." He sought God in his daily

activities and while acting in an ordinary way, because to love and serve God, he used to say, we don't have to do strange things. He advised us, for example, that from the place where we worked, we should let our heart escape to the nearest Tabernacle, to say a few words of affection to our Lord, and that we shouldn't be afraid to call him "my Jesus," and to frequently show our love for him.

3. *I'd like to follow up on that idea. St. Josemaría once said: "Since God wants the majority of Christians to remain in secular activities and to sanctify the world from within, the purpose of Opus Dei is to help them discover their divine mission, showing them that their human vocation—their professional, family, and social vocation—is not opposed to their supernatural vocation. On the contrary, it is an integral part of it" (Conversations, 60). This is a demanding piece of advice.*

Benedict XVI reminded us recently that Christianity is not a comfortable path, but rather a difficult climb, illumined by Christ's light and by the great hope that is born of him. The program that Christ presents to us in the Gospel entails living justice, loving everyone, pardoning those who offend us, fulfilling the commandments.... Christians are called to be exemplary citizens, exemplary professionals, whether working as a farmer, a craftsman, a journalist, or a Wall Street financier. At the same time, it is clear that we don't become saints by our own strength, but because God helps us with his

grace and often makes use of our own interests and longings to show us the divine value that these have if we season them with love for God.

4. *How can one attain personal sanctity in this day and age?*

It is a matter of allowing God to work and act in the soul of each and every person. Little by little our days begin to be filled with acts of love for God, acts of thanksgiving, asking him for forgiveness; and we find the strength to treat those around us with charity, to foster a climate of unity, to put great care into the small details of our professional work. To attain this goal we have to dedicate some time each day exclusively to God, coming to see how much we need him to make up for our own weakness. Holy Mass, confession and prayer are, therefore, absolutely necessary in our struggle to attain sanctity, because while increasing our desires to reach heaven, they confer on us the grace to accomplish it. Holiness is a gift, a task, and a goal. God wants us to be happy, very happy, not only in heaven, but also here on earth.

5. *Being a member of Opus Dei also means sanctifying one's work, doing apostolate, praying, and living a Eucharistic life. That's quite a bit. What, in your opinion, does holiness in daily life come down to?*

I will sum it up with this expression from St. Josemaría: "to struggle for love right till the last moment." People often asked him:

And what can you say to those of us who are married? To those who work on a farm? To widows? And to young people? He would answer that he had only one serving pot, and remind them that Jesus preached the Gospel for all men and women, without any distinctions. As he once said: "He calls each and every one to holiness; he asks each and every one to love him: young and old, single and married, healthy and sick, learned and unlearned, no matter where they work, or where they are. There is only one way to become more familiar with God, to increase our trust in him. We must come to know him through prayer; we must speak to him and show him, through a heart to heart conversation, that we love him" (Homily "Towards Holiness" in *Friends of God*, 294).

6. *Today, Opus Dei is made up of members from dozens of different countries. Does this path continue to be an attractive one for the people of today who seem to have lost their way?*

What is attractive is to know Christ; Opus Dei is only an instrument. Today there are many good people, many more than we might imagine. We priests, as well as many men and women who endeavor to spread the Gospel, discover every day, in so many countries, the joy that is born in people when they come to know Christ, when they receive the gift of conversion. Our work as Christians is to show them by our example and friendship the beauty of the Christ-

ian life and the possibility of living it in the ordinary circumstances of each day: at work, in one's family, through social relationships.

In this regard, St. Josemaría wrote: "I often feel like crying out to so many men and women in offices and shops, in the world of the media and in the law courts, in schools, on the factory floor, in mines and on farms and telling them that, with the backing of an interior life and by means of the Communion of Saints, they ought to be bringing God into all these different environments, according to that teaching of the Apostle: Glorify God by making your bodies the shrines of his presence" (*The Forge*, no. 945).

7. *I have had the opportunity to meet various members of Opus Dei in Poland and others who moved here from Madrid. They are wonderful people who always live with a great hope...*

The faithful of Opus Dei realize very clearly, as I have often said, we are not better than others nor "at the head of the class." Each knows his or her own defects and tries to struggle to correct them. At the same time, I'm grateful for what you just told me, and want you to know that I too often give thanks to God for the witness of Christian consistency that I receive from faithful of the Prelature as well as from so many cooperators and friends.

In our effort to follow Christ in the middle of the world we are not

alone: we count on the help of so many people who pray for the Prelature's apostolates throughout the whole world, and also of numerous cloistered religious who without being part of *Opus Dei*—which is characterized by secularity—offer us this marvelous help. Therefore I now dare to ask you and all who read these words of mine to remember to pray for the faithful of the Work and for the fruit of each one's apostolic efforts.

8. *Who can be a member of Opus Dei?*

There is room for everyone in *Opus Dei*: priests and laity, men and women; the married, single, and widows; healthy and sick; poor people and the rich; all those who, sensing the divine call to seek holiness amid earthly realities, are determined to fulfill God's will. We love the religious with our whole heart, but we don't draw them away from their path.

9. *The diocese of Bydgoszcz is one of the newest in Poland. We are happy that Opus Dei is blossoming here slowly from the divine seed. How does your Excellency see the future of this community in our country and what challenges does it face in Poland and in the world?*

A sign of our Founder's great faith was to ask many of the first faithful of the Work, if they freely wanted to, to go to work in various countries of the world, in order to begin—with their professional work and through that work—spreading the spirit of *Opus Dei* in

those places. I say a sign of his faith, in the first place, because he felt sure that the fruit would come, but also because he sent those people without any financial means—since he didn't have any. He could only offer them his blessing and an image of our Lady. I tell you this because the apostolate of *Opus Dei* has always begun small and with few resources. Thanks be to God in this land of Poland the apostolic work is spreading. I ask God, through the intercession of the Venerable Servant of God John Paul II, who so strongly encouraged Don Álvaro del Portillo to begin working for souls in this country, that Poland may continue giving witness to its faith, also in the middle of the world. I am convinced that with the passage of time, many Polish men and women will also be those who begin the work of *Opus Dei* in other countries, just as people from other places have done recently in Indonesia, Romania, and Korea.

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Interview granted to the Alumni Review of the Montevideo Business School (Instituto de Estudios Empresariales de Montevideo—IEEM)

Why did Opus Dei want to start a business school? And specifically, why