

which is attributed to the intercession of Josemaría Escrivá, is for me, especially in the framework of the centennial of his birth, another cause for joy. For miracles are always a sign of God's mercy towards mankind.

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Interview in the weekly Alfa y Omega

A hundred years after his birth, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá continues to attract people by his fidelity to his mission. But he also continues to be misinterpreted by some for their own purposes. What features of Blessed Josemaría do people find most attractive today?

Yes, a hundred years after his birth Josemaría Escrivá is still close to us in time, and attracts us by his human and Christian vigor. History, specifically the history of the Church, teaches us that those who walk at Christ's pace are sowers of peace and joy, and also signs of contradiction. News reaches me every day, by word and writing, of many people who find the peace and joy of God when they grasp what he wants to tell us through those friends of his, the saints, among them, Blessed Josemaría.

Features that attract us? I think millions of people have been drawn by the joy of knowing themselves to be children of God. Amid so much stale and sad triviality, souls feel the need to have at their side the smile of

someone who lives as Christ's disciple, who serves others.

What is the main thing that Opus Dei hopes to see come about as a result of the centennial celebration?

Blessed Josemaría wrote and said often that "it is Christ that we have to speak about, and not ourselves." Therefore I hope that this celebration may awaken in many men and women the realization that Christ should be at the heart of our personal history, through a continual encounter with him in the ordinary circumstances of life. And also in our collective history, through peace, justice and forgiveness. The saddest calamity for a people is to marginalize Jesus Christ, as though He, who gave his life to save us, were an intruder. It would be a marvelous legacy of the centennial to discover once more, and help others discover, those horizons Blessed Josemaría opened to us: "To know Jesus Christ. To make him known. To bring him everywhere."

In addition, Christian commitment to others' needs, which Blessed Escrivá so urged us to undertake, is leading many people to begin new social and educational projects, both in third world countries and in impoverished areas of the developed countries. In Nigeria, for example, a professional school has recently been opened for young men in Lagos who have little possibility of obtaining work. And similar initiatives are being undertaken in various countries. I was very happy during the congress in Rome to see the eagerness of many men and women to begin new tasks aimed at great needs, from the Congo to Colombia, in Asia and in Europe.

From the juridical and pastoral point of view, has the personal prelature been definitively consolidated and accepted in the Church.

Opus Dei was erected as a personal prelature almost twenty years ago. I think that this is sufficient time to speak of the firm establishment of this canonical figure, which has shown itself perfectly suited to Opus Dei's theological and pastoral reality. From the practical point of view, Opus Dei's configuration as a personal prelature has better placed the Work in the Church's pastoral organism, both on the universal level and in regard to the local churches.

What would Blessed Escrivá have to say about the principal problems mankind is facing: terrorism, the family, bioethics...?

He never wanted to impose his own opinion on human problems, because of his refined respect for the freedom of those who came to receive his advice, drawn by his zeal as a good pastor. He only wanted to talk about God, the great love of his life. Precisely for this reason, he was very sensitive to detecting the presence or absence of a Christian spirit in events and situations. In the face of the burning questions of today, I think that Blessed Josemaría would once again remind us that without Christ's light we remain in darkness, and that without Christ's love we will never escape from our selfishness. He would invite us to consider the dignity of the person as a child of God. He would speak about the need to foster a stable peace among peoples, built on justice and solidarity, and the importance of

the family, founded on indissoluble marriage, both for society and for the Church. Later he would bless the upright solutions that each Christian brings to these questions, in accord with his personal criteria and his responsibility as a faithful of the Church and as a citizen.

Is the role of women within Opus Dei growing?

I think so, both inside and outside of it. From the very beginning of Opus Dei's activities for women on February 14, 1930, Blessed Josemaría saw the wide-ranging possibilities of this apostolate. The foundational message was addressed to both women and to men without any distinction. Therefore, leaving aside the ministerial priesthood, which by divine disposition is reserved in the Church for men, in Opus Dei women have had and have responsibilities of equal importance to those of men, neither more nor less. Each, in and through her professional work, tries to bring Christ's light to the environment around her. Undoubtedly women today face a great challenge, one that they are confronting eagerly, since each can, if she wishes, play a transcendental role in the life of the Church and society.

What is your relationship to the new movements and associations in the Church, and to the religious life?

When I pray the Creed, I like to savor each of the notes that define the Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The Church is intrinsically one, not a conglomerate of dispersed elements. It is an organism, a

body, the Mystical Body of Christ, in which all the members, with their enriching diversity, need one another. All of Opus Dei's value resides in the fact that it is part of the Church. If it were not "in the Church," Opus Dei would fall apart. Therefore, any light enkindled in the service of Jesus Christ seems to me something of my own, an expression of the initiative of the same Spirit, of the determination to announce Christ. On a practical plane, Opus Dei tries to maintain a fraternal relationship with all of the sectors in the Church. And it counts on the help of the prayer and the affection of so many persons. To mention only one example, more than five hundred contemplative communities are cooperators of Opus Dei.

What are Opus Dei's principal apostolic activities in Spain, in regard to the new evangelization?

As in other countries, I think the principal contribution of the faithful of Opus Dei to the new evangelization in Spain is their personal apostolate, the work that each of them carries out to make Christ known in his or her own environment. The Prelature's concern is to provide a Christian spiritual formation that is in tune with today's needs and challenges, and that furthers the goals set by the Pope for the new evangelization, and by my brother bishops in the particular churches. Each one tries to spread that message in his family, in his workplace, among his friends, in the associations he belongs to. The multiplying effect is great, and cannot be reduced to the already broad array of educational, social and charitable initiatives. God's action in a soul who

decides to follow Christ is what is truly fruitful. It would be easy to begin listing the different apostolic activities, but I think they are already sufficiently well known.

What should serve as the main points in the dialogue between faith and culture? What is the principal contribution of members of Opus Dei to the apostolate of the intellect?

Blessed Josemaría described the main points for this dialogue in one of his books:

- a breadth of vision and a deepening insight into the things that remain alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy;

- a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought in philosophy and the interpretation of history;

- a careful awareness of trends in science and contemporary thought;

- and a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living" (*Furrow*, no. 428).

I have very little to add to these ideas. A faith that doesn't become culture is dying out, and a culture without faith is soulless, providing no support for man or for society.

What do you consider more important: spirituality or its social repercussions?

It may be that a purely interior spirituality could exist without any

kind of repercussions on its surroundings. And social activity lacking any spiritual foundation might also be possible. But Christianity has nothing to do with either of these possibilities. In the Church even the most isolated forms of contemplative life have an immediate and very rich effect on others through the communion of saints. And any social initiative is necessarily inspired by faith, seeing Christ in the face of the needy. I don't see any split between spirit and social action. One or the other may be given more stress, but both are important, and necessary. Jesus Christ spent long periods retired in prayer, but he also worked for many years in Nazareth, he crisscrossed his country preaching, curing the sick, dining with friends... and always loving.

In a Spain schizophrenically split between faith and life, the ordinary life of some of Opus Dei's members has a notable social influence. How is this manifested?

I learned from Blessed Josemaría to value unity of life as a fundamental characteristic of Christian life. I agree with you in calling the split between faith and life an illness, and it's not an exclusively Spanish phenomenon. It's

not always easy to be consistent with one's faith. Thus neither is it strange that all of us run the risk of sometimes giving in to the enticements of power, or prestige, or simply comfort. But each person, and I include myself here, will one day have to give an account to God for the use we have made of his talents, for the effort we have put into transmitting the power of Christian faith and love to our surroundings.

I know that in Spain some people of Opus Dei are well known in the means of public opinion for trying to foster this Christian outlook. But it is not just a matter of a few people. Those who carry out a job without any public repercussion are also called to be Christ's leaven in their own environment, to infuse all human realities with a deep Christian spirit.

In the recent congress in Rome on the greatness of ordinary life, a number of well-known intellectuals referred to the marvelous truth that no job is small if it is done in union with Christ. This discovery is not reserved to exceptional people. I would say that God has spent centuries trying to help all men and women understand that he is very close to all of us.