

In more secularized countries, we share the same challenges as the rest of the Church. In places where the Church is growing (I think of Nigeria, Brazil, the United States...), Opus Dei is also growing. Specifically, we see an increase in lay men and women who, inspired by St. Josemaría, wish to seek holiness and are open to forming a family. On the other hand, fewer people are embracing celibacy, a gift from God that perhaps is less understood today, though it enriches the Church greatly. Now over 1,000 members of Opus Dei pass away each year; even so, thanks to God, we see a small increase in total numbers. But in the context of the Church's life, what matters is union with God, not numbers or structures.

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Interview with Semana Magazine (Bogota, Colombia), August 17, 2024

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of St. Josemaría's catechesis in Latin America, you are revisiting this region. Do you think the reality of Opus Dei in Latin America aligns with what Escrivá dreamed of at that time?

When St. Josemaría was in America, he encouraged dreaming of great adventures in Christian service. Without overlooking the difficulties and human errors, I thank God for the development of Opus Dei in Colombia and throughout the continent. At the same time, God's logic allows us to view human results, numbers, and external successes or failures with greater perspective, since what is really essential is facilitating encounters with Christ in many people's hearts, and that is something only God can truly see.

What do you envision for Opus Dei in the next 50 years?

Looking to the future, I would like Opus Dei to be a source of friendship, of faith expressed through action, and of freedom of spirit and creativity to carry out the Church's mission of evangelization and contribute to building a more just society.

What does the service that a member of Opus Dei can provide to the Church consist of?

The specific vocation of members of Opus Dei – overwhelmingly laypeople, with only 2% priests – calls them to a personal encounter with Christ in their family, work, social relationships, knowing that the pursuit of holiness is not for supermen or women but for real people, who have strengths and weaknesses. The holiness “in the middle of the street” that St. Josemaría preached spurs us to seek dignified solutions to the problems of each setting and time.

What is or should be the role of the laity in the Church?

As the Second Vatican Council emphasized, laypeople are entrusted by their very vocation with the task of bringing Christian vitality to temporal matters: work, family, business, culture, and so on. Their role is to contribute to sanctifying the world by reflecting a bit of Christ’s love in every place and circumstance; and here, much remains to be done. I’m thinking, for instance, about the formation of laypeople in bioethics and social justice, their awareness of being protagonists in evangelization, their ethical responsibility at work, in peacebuilding, education, and finance. The mission of the laity is not limited to “occupying positions” in Church structures.

When St. Josemaría sought Opus Dei’s legal approval in 1946, the response was that the Work was ahead of its time by a century. Now that Opus Dei is nearing its centenary, do you think the reform of its Statutes requested by the Holy See relates to that response given to the founder?

In 1946, Opus Dei was present in only four countries, but today it’s in 70. At that time, a message directed primarily to laypeople about the pursuit of holiness in the world seemed anticipatory, even though it’s deeply rooted in the Gospel. I can assure you that the current modification of the statutes requested by the Holy Father is being carried out precisely with this fundamental criterion of aligning with the charism, which today is better understood and shared. Law, essential as it is, follows life and the embodied message, to provide support and continuity.

Opus Dei consists mainly of women, most of whom are married. How can greater value be placed on those who decide to give their lives to God through marriage?

Marriage is a path to holiness; in Opus Dei, all members (married, single or celibate) share the same vocation, mission, and responsibility. Those who

are married live with the awareness that their love for God is expressed through their family, friendships, and work in the world. This has an enormous transformative potential for service. With regard to women (who, as you noted, form the majority), St. Josemaría understood that the Work would be incomplete without them. This makes sense, because we could not understand Opus Dei without their irreplaceable contribution, just as we could not understand family, work, or social life without them.

Pope Francis has described the crisis or decline in vocations as a “hemorrhage for the Church.” You gave your life to God from your youth, and later chose to become a priest. Why is it more difficult today for people to consider the vocation to apostolic celibacy?

The world today faces the challenge of believing once more in commitment, in a lifelong love that brings joy and freedom. Many people see commitment as a limitation, but in reality God always opens luminous horizons before us. I would say that it is essential to recover the virtue of hope.

“There is room in the Church for everyone, everyone,” Pope Francis stated at WYD 2023 in Lisbon. What exactly does this openness in the Church mean, and how can Opus Dei help convey this message?

Saint Paul writes that God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The Church’s message of salvation is an invitation to all without exception, and the Pope has highlighted this universality as a central axis of his teaching. Saint Josemaría spoke to his spiritual children of having open arms for everyone. In a time of polarization, divisions, and walls, followers of Christ have a very clear path to follow.

Opus Dei includes people of all ages. As father and as prelate, how can you encourage intergenerational cooperation within the Work?

In my home, in Rome, we have a range of ages: from a 102-year-old to someone still in his 30s. Among many things, the older ones bring experience, and the younger ones enthusiasm and vitality. We should approach intergenerational life with affection, aware that it sometimes involves sacrifices on both sides.

Some people express gratitude to members of Opus Dei for their contributions to society, such as schools, universities, and social works. However, the institution

also faces negative narratives. Why do you think these narratives arise, and how can they be countered?

Sometimes, I think these narratives you mention help us to avoid the temptation of thinking we don't have anything to correct, and even more, they keep us from feeling self-satisfied or special because things go well. Like everyone else, we need to reflect on the good we wish to accomplish and on what we actually do. In fact, our founder reminded us that the Work should live "without human glory."

On the other hand, it's natural for there to be different perspectives because there are many ways of doing and understanding things. Opposing views can be helpful when they are sincere; they allow us to seek forgiveness and to make improvements. I'd like anyone who visits these activities to see that they aim to sow peace and joy.

Personally, I am pleased to see that almost every day of the year, we receive a request for admission from people who were previously part of Opus Dei but, for one reason or another, had distanced themselves. News like this is a blessing from God, which in some way overcomes certain excessively polarized narratives.

The Jubilee of Youth will be celebrated in Rome next year. What do you think is the biggest challenge young people face today in seeing a life close to God as an attractive ideal?

Christ is the only answer to the deep questions young people carry in their hearts, and it is God the Father's love, when they open themselves to it, that can heal their wounds and frailties. Perhaps we adults should ask ourselves whether we are truly able to understand young people, accompany them closely and lovingly, and make the Christian message comprehensible, taking into account each individual's circumstances and mindset. Naturally, the witness of a coherent life is also essential in showing the beauty of a life with Christ.