

Interview with the Newspaper El 9 Nou (Vic, Spain), September 24, 2024

What would you highlight from your formative years in Catalonia?

In the sixties I experienced a broader vision of a different kind of Spain, which was Catalonia. Those were very important formative years. I remember very well the classes in the central building of the University of Barcelona. and specifically the famous professor Teixidó, who had great prestige. But his course was a “brick,” as people used to say. He taught a very modern form of mathematics that was difficult to understand.

How did you get to know Vic?

It all started at the Monterols university residence, where I met many people from different parts of Catalonia and Spain. At that time it was a formation center only for young people of Opus Dei. Now it is open to all types of students. From Monterols I had the opportunity to go several times to Vic to help out in the apostolic work that was beginning to develop there. This was between 1964 and 1967. I realized how important Vic was in Catalonia and I came to understand Catalan without any problems. Then came the militias in the Talarn camp: two summers of three months and an internship as an ensign of four months also there, in the camp.

St. Josemaría said in Rome in 1971: “Barcelona will produce a lot of fruit because it has suffered a lot,” alluding to the turbulent 1940s marked by misunderstandings about the Work. Could Montse Grases, the young Barcelona-born member of the Work who died of cancer at the age of 17, become the first woman canonized in Opus Dei?

Montse Grases was proclaimed Venerable in 2016. In order to be beatified, the extraordinary character of a favor obtained through her intercession needs to be demonstrated. The office of postulation and the website of the Work receive many stories of favors connected with people’s daily life and plans. Devotion to her is more widespread among young people. I remember that in 2022, on the 80th anniversary of her birth, a group of young people brought 80 white roses to her tomb, in the crypt of the oratory of Santa

Maria de Bonaigua, in Barcelona, to thank her for favors received through her intercession. Some interesting cases are being studied, but we are still in the early stages of collecting documentation.

Whether or not she is the first woman to be canonized, she is undoubtedly a good intercessor for the apostolates of the whole Church with young people, in the beloved city of Barcelona, in this region of Osona where she spent her summer holidays, in Catalonia and throughout the world.

How is Opus Dei preparing for the approaching centenary of its birth?

In the years that remain until the centenary, we want to reflect on the needs and challenges of the Church and the world. We also want to deepen our own identity with a view to the future and to study how the Work can contribute to the sanctification of ordinary life through its charism. Therefore during this time we will look outward towards both the larger picture (the Church and the world) and inward (towards the Work), with the hope that these efforts will converge in a moment of grace.

When I think of the centenary of Opus Dei, a prayer that Blessed Alvaro addressed personally to God comes to mind: “Thank you, forgive me, help me more.” In a way, it is a time to live this aspiration also from the perspective of the needs of the entire Church and the world.

In your opinion, what have been the lights and shadows over these nearly one hundred years of its history?

Opus Dei has been, and continues to be, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Ad charisma tuendum*. I see the Work as a light that inspires many people to discover Christ in the ordinary tasks of daily life: in work, family, social relationships. I would say these are the main lights, with God as the protagonist intervening in history.

Among these lights, I would like to recall so many members of the Work who have walked this earth striving to do good, with their virtues and shortcomings. Today, around a thousand members of Opus Dei pass away each year. In most cases, they are simple, ordinary, anonymous people who have tried to sow peace and joy around them, sometimes in difficult situations.

At other times, these individuals have been publicly recognized as examples for the faithful, like Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, the first lay faith-

ful of Opus Dei to be beatified, a chemist who carried out a wide-ranging apostolate of friendship in Spain, Mexico, and Italy. Or, more recently, the Guatemalan pediatrician Ernesto Cofiño, a doctor and father of a family who was declared Venerable by the Church in December 2023. Among other things, Dr. Cofiño dedicated himself to helping malnourished children and impoverished families in his country, creating numerous dining facilities and aid centers, and engaging in a wide-reaching evangelization effort among his relatives, colleagues, and friends.

At the same time, the history of Opus Dei also includes shadows and mistakes, because it is made up of fallible human beings. Good intentions do not save us from mistakes, and we need to accept the possibility of error with humility. In particular, it pains us to know of people who have been in contact with the prelature and have been hurt by a lack of charity or justice: situations of insufficient emotional support, mistakes in the process of incorporation, neglect in accompanying people who left Opus Dei, and so on. We must learn from these errors and continue improving, with God's help.

What has remained constant, and what has changed within Opus Dei over time?

Within Opus Dei, there is an unchanging core, an important message about holiness in the midst of the world. At the same time, right from the beginning, the founder, St. Josemaría, was clear about the need to keep this spirit intact, while also recognizing that forms can and should change over time. In the last hundred years, both society and the Church have evolved significantly, and Opus Dei has evolved as well, as part of both the Church and society. Knowing how to adapt, and shaping any change around the essentials, is necessary in order to remain faithful to our mission.

For various reasons, changes have occurred over these years in the legal framework, in certain apostolic methods, and in many other perhaps less visible but important aspects. For example, there has been a clear emphasis on the separation between governance and spiritual direction, measures have been adopted to better ensure full freedom and voluntariness in the incorporation processes, and practical ways of expressing the call to live the virtue of poverty within the world have been updated.

What have been the most important milestones in the institutional development of Opus Dei and where is it headed in the 21st century?

I would say that the most important milestones are the less visible ones: the grace of God at work in thousands of people who respond affirmatively to the call to follow Christ in the middle of the world. And so many stories of repentance, of conversion in people of the Work and in others who take part in its apostolates.

On the institutional level, I would point to the canonization of the founder on October 6, 2002. Before the huge crowd in Rome, St. John Paul II referred to Josemaría Escrivá as “the saint of ordinary life.” This expression is also a guide for Opus Dei in the future, about which you are asking: what is fundamental are not activities, structures or numbers, but helping a great many people, with God’s grace, to encounter God in the street, in the factory, in the hospital, etc.. Or as our founder said, to “transform daily prose into heroic verse.”

What is the status of the cause for the canonization of Blessed Alvaro? Have any new miracles been documented?

After his beatification in 2014, numerous accounts of extraordinary favors attributed to the intercession of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo have reached the office of postulation. One of them refers to a serious car accident in Mexico in 2015. The doctors who followed the case considered the recovery from severe cranioencephalic trauma with no neurological or psychological damage to be extraordinary. At the end of last year the diocesan investigation was concluded and the documentation is now under study at the Holy See. Other cases are also being examined, including one in Germany. On the other hand, other more common favors, related to family, friends, etc., frequently arrive. Don Alvaro was truly close to people and it is a joy to see that many families go to him asking for the kind of help one would ask of a good father or a good brother.

What is your travel schedule for the upcoming months?

The most extensive trip was the one I made this summer to South America: to Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. The goal was to help, encourage and give clear ideas to people, but also, at the same time, to learn

from them. I always keep in mind something I heard St. Josemaría say: “Any person we meet can tell us things that enrich us a lot.”

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Interview in The Pillar (United States) November 2, 2024

One of the main themes of the current Synod on Synodality is the role of the laity in the Church. What does Opus Dei have to contribute to these reflections, given the centrality of the laity in its message, mission, and spirituality?

The laity’s role in the Church is not primarily to hold positions in ecclesiastical structures; there will naturally be few of them (and some may be necessary) in comparison to the whole. This idea, which has come up in synodal conversations, is very present in the charism of Opus Dei: enabling each of the lay faithful – each baptized man and woman – to realize the greatness and beauty of their mission. Just as with the early Christians, the responsibility for the future of evangelization today lies especially with the laity, united to and in communion with the pastors.

The Church is not mainly the temples or structures, but the people incorporated into Christ through baptism. A layperson carrying Jesus Christ in their heart and lifestyle will be a vibrant and open presence of the Church in their neighborhoods and communities, among family and friends, among believers and non-believers, in the world of sports and entertainment, and in various professional, social, cultural, scientific, political, and commercial fields.

In his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis speaks of the centrality of the laity when he invites us to discover the “holiness found in our next-door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence.” From its beginnings, the Work has tried to go in that direction: it reminds us that people, with their virtues and defects, can become God’s hand outstretched to many others, even those who might never step into a church.

For this reason, I would say that dedicating time and care to forming and spiritually accompanying ordinary Christians, true apostles in their own