

We ask the Blessed Virgin, our Mother, to give us the tone of a family; may she protect us also in this sense that the Work be, as our Father wanted, a small family, even if it is spread all over the world. You remember that our Father said that although we are spread all over the world, we can be a small family, because of love, affection, unity. And our Lord grants us this through our Lady, through our Mother, since the Mother is the one who gives unity.

Mary's total absence of sin led her to want to serve. The first thing that occurs to her after her *fiat*, when the incarnate God himself is in her womb, is to go and visit Elizabeth. The angel told her that she is expecting a child. And since our Lady knows that she is old, she realizes Elizabeth will need help. Help us, our Mother, to have the attitude that leads us to discover the needs of others, an immediate manifestation of your Immaculate being.

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Articles and Interviews

Interview with the Newspaper El Mercurio (Santiago de Chile), July 28, 2024

Opus Dei is often described with three adjectives: conservative, powerful, and secretive. Why is that, and what adjectives would you prefer to be used to describe Opus Dei and its work?

Everyone has their opinions and their reasons for perceiving things the way they do. If some people perceive it this way, it may be because there's something objective and/or subjective that creates that impression. In part, it is each member's task to make Opus Dei better known, to live their vocation authentically. It's something great and wonderful, though I understand that it requires a perspective of faith to grasp fully. Still, I think that, humanly, anyone who knows Opus Dei up close will see regular people, with virtues and flaws.

I'd like us to be known as joyful, simple, and serene people; peaceful people who are easy to befriend, open-minded, and understanding. I'd like people to recognize the diversity of Opus Dei's faithful, not only the few who gain public attention. They would see that each person strives to live their faith deeply, coexisting with their own shortcomings and trying to use their talents to serve their families, friends, and society.

What would you say is the primary contribution of Opus Dei to the life of the Church?

The main contribution of Opus Dei is to accompany laypeople (98% of its members) so that they can become protagonists in the Church's mission of evangelization in the world, one person at a time. Laypeople are not mere recipients or secondary actors; they are protagonists of evangelization, able to bring the warmth and friendship of Christ wherever it is most needed: to classrooms, neighborhoods, soccer fields, hospitals, offices, families, to the poor and the rich... everywhere. Laypeople form the vast majority of the Church, and it is to them that Opus Dei's evangelizing efforts are particularly directed.

It's a mission of spiritual accompaniment, of bringing Christian life to fullness, without interfering in their legitimate earthly choices. Their actions in society, their successes and their failures, are their responsibility, not that of the Church or Opus Dei. Attributing the political, business, or social initiatives of its members to Opus Dei would be clericalism.

You were born in 1944 in exile, in Paris. Today people remember the dramatic moments that Europe was going through then, which your family experienced in exile in France. Did this experience mark you in any way?

During the Spanish Civil War, my father served in the Republican army. This meant that, at the end of the war, he had to go into exile in Paris. He was a military veterinarian and had as a first job taking care of animals in a circus. Shortly after, he got a job in a laboratory and was able to bring his family with him. Thank God, the reprisals that, some years later, my father suffered when he returned to Spain were mild and he was able to develop a career in the field of animal biology research. I was a child and I lived through all that without being very aware of it. Even so, perhaps reflection on that experience

inoculated me against the seduction of any kind of violence and against the temptation to identify religion with certain political options.

You studied physics and then theology, an unusual combination. What aspects of physics have illuminated your religious path?

Both physics and theology are, each in their own way, knowledge of reality: not only are they not contradictory, they also complement one another. I cannot say that studying physics opened my eyes to the reality of God, as I was already a believer by my family's tradition and personal conviction. However, investigating physical reality helped me to see the world from a different perspective as created by God

In your youth, you lived alongside St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. In this everyday context, which of his traits stood out to you?

I arrived in Rome in 1967 and lived in the same place with him until his death in 1975; but there were about 200 of us living there. Despite the numbers, each of us felt very much loved, surrounded by his joy and affection. On one occasion, in front of many people, he asked me a question and immediately realized he had put me in a tight spot; without giving me time to respond, he added a side comment that made my answer unnecessary. These little details were repeated daily. Above all, I was struck by his union with God, which was evident when you heard him speak while preaching or in a family gathering. On a human level, I would emphasize his love for freedom and his good humor.

Pope Francis called for strengthening the essential charism of Opus Dei. How would you characterize that charism in a few words?

Summing it up in a few words, I would describe it as the search for God, the encounter with God, and helping many others to have this same encounter in ordinary life, at work, in the family, and on the street. In Pope Francis' words, it is about "spreading the call to holiness in the world, through the sanctification of work and family and social commitments."

This charism was shaped nearly a hundred years ago, in a very different world. Should it undergo updates and changes over time?

Society and the Church have evolved greatly in the last hundred years, and so has Opus Dei, because it is part of both. We are not indifferent to phe-

nomena like globalization, the advancement of women in the public sphere, new professional and family dynamics, and so on. As St. Josemaría said, ways of doing and expressing things change, but the essence, the spirit, remains. Knowing how to change, in this sense, is essential to remain faithful to our mission. The key is to shape any change around the essentials, around the core or charism that we cannot alter, because, like any charism, it is a gift from God.

Was Pope Francis' decision about the structure of Opus Dei a surprise?

The Holy Father notified us some time in advance of the *motu proprio Ad charisma tuendum*. The main changes in that document affect structural and organizational aspects, that the prelate should not be a bishop, among other things, but they do not touch the mission or substance of Opus Dei. The modification of the statutes is a response to the Pope's request. Right now, we are working on this with the Dicastery for the Clergy, in a climate of dialogue and trust.

Some people are struck by the youthfulness of some vocations to Opus Dei. Are 16-year-olds, for example, free to decide their vocation?

Freedom is an essential requirement for any vocation. Joining Opus Dei is only possible at 18, the age of majority. If someone feels they have a vocation, they can begin a process of discernment before that, but with the clear understanding that they are not yet part of Opus Dei, and only with the express permission of their parents.

From the time that someone requests admission to the Work until their definitive incorporation, there are several formational stages that last at least six or seven years. Each year, the person must express their desire to continue. It's not an automatic process, but a deep call to personal discernment and freedom, far deeper than most life decisions.

The activities of spiritual formation that Opus Dei offers for young people, with parental involvement, are seeds that help them to know and give witness to their faith, to love their family, to serve others, to be good friends, and to prepare to be good professionals and citizens. Most discover that their vocation is in marriage, some in lay celibacy, and perhaps others in the priesthood or religious life. As the Pope says, when addressing young people, it is a

matter of “discovering oneself in the light of God and helping one's own being to flourish.”

The Vatican is now asking for an annual report on the situation of Opus Dei, not every five years as before. Does this have to do with the need for greater transparency and control?

This change is a consequence of the change of Dicastery. Now, Opus Dei's immediate interlocutor is the Dicastery for the Clergy, and in that dicastery the reports are delivered every year, not every five years, as was the case in the Dicastery of the Bishops. Regardless of this, there is no doubt that the Church, and the Work as part of it, is improving in the way it makes known in a clear and understandable way the most relevant data of its activity, as well as its motivations.

Transparency, well understood and well applied, favors trust, which, as you point out, has been very much put into question by the cases of abuse. In this regard, since 2013 Opus Dei has had a protocol for the protection of minors and vulnerable people, which formalizes prudential measures that have been in place in the Work for decades and incorporates the most recent regulations of the Church. On the other hand, we are working on the creation of special channels of healing and resolution to welcome people who want to be heard.

Although to a lesser extent than other institutions, there have been allegations of abuse by members of Opus Dei, also in Chile. You have expressed your request for forgiveness for the “faults and sins of members of Opus Dei.” What are these faults and sins?

Each individual knows their own faults and sins. At the same time, we cannot ignore that some people who used to belong to Opus Dei or who have come into contact with the Work have felt hurt by certain approaches or have lost trust in those leading it or in the institution itself.

Taking into account that Opus Dei's mission is to travel the path of holiness and encounter with Christ, it causes me personal pain to consider that some people have not found happiness on this journey. It's an invitation to undertake a sincere examination to identify the causes, see how to make amends in each situation, and assess what can be improved. The reasons for these wounds vary greatly. What pains me the most is that we have not al-

ways been able to accompany people well in discerning their vocation, in spiritual guidance, or during a difficult family or personal situation.

Today there is a great call to give more space to women, who have often been given a second place throughout history. How does Opus Dei experience this?

Indeed, in recent decades, women have been expanding their space in public life, enriching it with their irreplaceable contribution. In the Church, their protagonism has grown at all levels, including appointments to positions of responsibility within the Vatican curia, for example. In Opus Dei, women have been in government alongside St. Josemaría and his successors from the beginning, and are autonomous with respect to men in the leadership of their apostolates. As the presence of women in the government of companies and institutions grows, more women of Opus Dei, like their contemporaries, are taking on positions of responsibility, and it is wonderful to see how much their service can provide.

Our country is experiencing changes in religious matters. The UC Bicentennial survey shows a significant drop in the adherence of young people to the Catholic religion. Should we assume that Catholics are becoming a minority group?

I don't live in Chile, and therefore I don't know the situation in depth. But I would dare to say that it would be a mistake to become entrenched in a defensive position, a natural reaction when one finds oneself in a minority. On the contrary, as disciples of Jesus, we should feel as our own the aspirations, needs and sufferings of all people and work side by side with them.

After the uproar caused by the abuse crisis, for example, many Catholics have taken the path of accompanying wounded people, and the Church in Chile has implemented measures of prevention and tried to foster an atmosphere of trust and freedom, which are essential to regain its vigor in society, and which are key so that these crimes do not happen again. A Church wounded in its members can transmit Christ and has much to contribute: to help, collaborate, heal, without seeking personal or institutional interest, nor hasty solutions. This is the path that I see the Church in Chile has taken, the way to recover credibility and above all to bring the closeness of Christ to many people.

Does the drop in vocations that the Catholic Church is experiencing also affect Opus Dei?

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?