

joyful task of service to the truth that characterizes the work of a university. We ask this gift of the divine Paraclete through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, Mother of Fairest Love, *Sedes Sapientiae*, Seat of Wisdom.

Rome April 1, 1998

Address given at the academic convocation on the Apostolic Constitution, Ut Sit, held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

Your excellencies, most esteemed rector, professors and students of the Atheneum of the Holy Cross, ladies and gentlemen:

As we conclude this academic convocation on the fifteenth anniversary of the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, I feel impelled to address the Most Holy Trinity with the words that the Holy Spirit inspired in the Blessed Virgin Mary: "My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."¹ These words of our Lady seem the best way to manifest my acknowledgment to God for the gift He has granted to the Church, in answer to Blessed Josemaría's constant supplication to God right from the moment he began to feel the first intimations of the divine Will in the years 1916 or 1917, up to his departure to his home in heaven in 1975.

Indeed, the pontifical act by which the Prelature was established

on November 28, 1982, with the bull executed on March 19, 1983, was simply the realization of what Blessed Josemaría, together with countless persons from all environments, and in a special way in the early years the poor and the sick, had for so long been beseeching from the Blessed Trinity. He was seeking to ensure the efficacy of the pastoral and apostolic service that *Opus Dei*, by divine will, was called to carry out in the Church. This fact was emphasized by the Roman Pontiff when he began the text of the Apostolic Constitution with the words *ut sit*, words that the founder of *Opus Dei* over the course of many years addressed daily to our Lady: "*Domina, ut sit!*"

In the early moments of the life of *Opus Dei*, Blessed Josemaría was in no hurry to request from Church authorities a canonical statute for the child that God had brought to life in his soul on October 2, 1928. Certainly, from the first moment he had the blessing of Madrid's bishop, the unforgettable Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, whom our founder kept constantly informed of the development of his apostolic work. At the same time, however, our founder's keen juridical sense led him to see that none of the existing canonical clothing would fit *Opus Dei* properly. He preferred to wait, filling the years of waiting with prayer, expiation and work.

This way of acting is shown clearly by words he spoke to us during a family gathering in Rome in October 1966. A few months earlier, Pope Paul VI had promulgated the *Motu Proprio Ecclesiae Sanctae*,

1. Lk 1:46.

which established, by applying several decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the juridical figure of personal prelatures *ad peculiaria opera pastoralia perficienda*. This had been foreseen by the Council decrees *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 10, and *Ad Gentes*, no. 20. Msgr. Escrivá pointed out that "first comes life; then, the juridical norms." And he added, referring expressly to the juridical path of Opus Dei: "I did not sit in a corner thinking *a priori* about what kind of clothes to provide for Opus Dei. When the child was born, then we dressed it; like Jesus who began to do and to teach (*Acts* 1:1), first he did and then he taught. We found ourselves with the water, and then we designed the channel. Never for a moment did we think of opening an irrigation ditch before the water arrived. In Opus Dei, life has always preceded the juridical form. Therefore the juridical form has to be like a tailored suit."²

Seventeen years after he spoke these words, with the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, this tailored suit arrived, by the mercy of God and through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. But as far back as 1935, when the growth of the apostolic work brought a yearning to reach other cities and countries, Blessed Josemaría was convinced that an adequate juridical solution to the ecclesial reality of Opus Dei would be found in the ambit of personal jurisdiction. This was pointed out by my predecessor,

Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, in the letter that he wrote to the faithful of the Prelature in November 1982. There he cites the testimony of Msgr. Pedro Casciaro, one of the first faithful of Opus Dei, who heard the founder speak about it.³

The canonical path was a long one. The journey had to traverse unexplored territory, since there was no road fully suited to the charism Opus Dei's founder had received. How surprised he was by the comment of a high member of the Curia in Rome, when Fr. Álvaro del Portillo arrived there in 1946 at the founder's request to help speed up Opus Dei's pontifical approval. You have arrived a century too early, that person told Fr. Álvaro. But it was impossible to wait any longer. Years later, recalling those moments, Blessed Josemaría wrote: "The Work seemed, to the Church and to the world, to be a novelty. The canonical solution that it sought seemed impossible. But, my daughters and sons, I couldn't wait until things were possible. . . . I had to attempt the impossible. I was urged on by the thousands of souls who had given themselves to God in his Work, with the fullness of our dedication, seeking to do apostolate in the midst of the world."⁴

As the fruit of Blessed Josemaría's priestly activity, thousands of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and without changing their

2. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Words in a family gathering, Oct. 24, 1966.

3. Cf. Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, "Carta pastoral sobre la transformación del Opus Dei en Prelatura personal de ámbito internacional," November 28, 1982, no. 28; published in *Rendere amabile la verità. Raccolta di scritti di Mons. Álvaro del Portillo*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Rome, 1995. The text cited is found on pages 64-65.

4. Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, *Letter*, January 25, 1961; no. 19.

state in life, felt themselves called by God to live the Christian vocation in all its radical demands. They saw themselves called to seek identification with Jesus and to spread the universal call to holiness and apostolate among people of all social classes. And they were to do so with a specific spirit, which God had communicated to the founder of Opus Dei on October 2, 1928, a spirit that teaches one to seek Christ, to find him, to deal with him and to make him known in the common circumstances of daily life, specifically in one's professional work and in the fulfillment of one's ordinary duties.

Today the conviction that all the faithful are called to the perfection of charity has come to the fore in the Church's consciousness. But back in the 1930s and 1940s this was not clearly understood. The message of Opus Dei's founder encountered obstacles in the canonical teaching then current, which reflected the prevailing mindset. The days of the Second Vatican Council were still far off. But the supernatural intuition of Blessed Josemaría was grounded in the Church's authentic tradition, because it was embodied in the Gospel. It came to tell the ordinary faithful, the laity and secular priests: there, in your place, without leaving your environment, God is calling you to live the Christian vocation fully. By your professional work, by fulfilling the duties of your state, you are helping to fill all of society with the light and fragrance of Christ. An ordinary life, offered to God, always bears fruit.

Blessed Josemaría's spirit and message are today, and have been for some years, a living reality in the Church and in the lives of many Christians, who through their efforts to spread it and put it into practice are contributing to the evangelization of society. The establishment of Opus Dei as a prelature of international scope some 15 years ago has helped to reinforce this reality. Let us give fervent thanks to God the Holy Spirit, who, as the Guide and Soul of the Church, knows how to bring forth from the Gospel treasures *nova et vetera*,⁵ things new and old for the good of Christ's beloved spouse. I feel a filial debt to express, in the name of all the Prelature's faithful as well as in my own, our profound gratitude to the Holy Father Pope John Paul II for his understanding and vigilant care as good shepherd, which has made possible a proper institutional solution for Opus Dei.

In this commemoration it is logical that we also remember the successor to Blessed Josemaría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, who had the happiness and responsibility, *onus et honor*, of bringing the desires of our founder to a happy conclusion in the form of a canonical figure especially suited to its charism and original inspiration. As the Holy Father pointed out in the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, "From the time when the Second Vatican Council introduced into the legislation of the Church . . . the figure of the personal prelatures, to carry out specific pastoral activities, it was seen clearly that this juridical figure was perfectly suited

5. Cf. Mt 13:52.

to Opus Dei as an apostolic organism made up of priests and laity, both men and women, which is at the same time organic and undivided—that is to say, as an institution endowed with a unity of spirit, of aims, of government, and of formation.”⁶ We don’t have time now to go into details that show the fidelity with which Fr. Álvaro carried out the founder’s instructions and wishes, the fortitude with which he defended the specific nature of Opus Dei, the constancy and patience he showed in carrying out such a difficult task.

To conclude let me once again invoke the help of the Blessed Vir-

gin, Mother of the Church and Mother of Opus Dei. We ask holy Mary that she keep protecting with her intercession this portion of the People of God, so that it may continue to serve souls faithfully and effectively through a refined fidelity to the spirit Blessed Josemaría received from God. Thus the Church’s hope will not be deceived. As we read in the preamble to the Apostolic Constitution *Ut Sit*, the Church “directs its attention and maternal care to Opus Dei . . . so that it may always be an apt and effective instrument for the salvific mission which the Church carries out for the life of the world.”⁷

Articles and Interviews

El Pais (Montevideo) January 11, 1998

Complete text of the interview granted to the newspaper El Pais of Montevideo, Uruguay. Published under the headline “Being Pessimistic is a Mistake, It Shows a Lack of Faith.”

1. Christianity is about to celebrate 2,000 years of existence. Humanly speaking this is a long time. But when we look at the world, we might be tempted to become discouraged. The Gospel’s teachings don’t seem to have eliminated suffering, violence and evil from history. Is it a mistake to be pes-

simistic? What is your reading of history as a bishop of the Catholic Church and a guide to thousands of believers in many countries?

Yes, it would be a mistake to be a pessimist. In a Christian this would show a lack of faith in divine providence. Jesus, who came to earth to bring us salvation, is the Lord of time as well as of eternity. All the struggles of history, no matter how discouraging or disillusioning they might appear, have a positive dimension. God’s victory over evil and sin has already been won by Christ’s death on the Cross. And this is also a victory for all who live in Christ, redeemed by him and sharing in his divine mis-

6. Pope John Paul II, Apost. Const. *Ut Sit*, Nov. 28, 1982, *proemio* (AAS 75 [1~3] 423).

7. *Ibid.*