

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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.”<sup>7</sup>

## 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.*

sion. Optimism is a distinctive sign of the believer. In sickness, poverty, injustice, persecution, as well as in health and well-being, we Christians must always try to maintain our peace and joy, knowing we are God's children. Pessimism shows a failure to understand what true happiness is for a disciple of Christ. Jesus taught us: happy are the poor, the meek, those who weep, who hunger and thirst for justice. . . . But this should not lead us to become complacent. Instead, we have to see it as a personal call to be generous with God and with all mankind, our brothers and sisters.

*2. Let's talk about Opus Dei. As we said, it was 20 centuries ago that 12 men received the mission to bring the message of Jesus Christ to the whole world. The Church, in continuing this task, has seen political, social and cultural changes of all types. What is Opus Dei's new contribution to this great panorama?*

The founder of Opus Dei, when preaching about the virtue of charity, pointed out that Christ's "new commandment"—to love our neighbor as He has loved us—is still "new." In spite of the two thousand years that have gone by, for many it is practically unheard of, and of course all of us can and should grow in our love for others and the service we render them. In the same way, reminding ourselves that all the baptized are called to be saints is only repeating what Jesus taught. But it is still a "new" message because each generation of Christians has to take it to heart. In practice, many people still think that holiness is only for a minority of Christians, and unattainable for anyone living

in the world. Opus Dei, being a part of the Church as it is, echoes God's call to all the Christian faithful: to people who work, who live with their families, who feel at home in the midst of the world, knowing that the world was created by God and that they can encounter Christ and identify themselves with him there, bringing his light and charity to all mankind.

*3. Although perhaps less common today, many people still consider Opus Dei an elitist organization, and there are accounts and articles that paint it in almost sinister terms. Why would a Christian institution arouse such controversy?*

The Church as a whole and all Christians, not just Opus Dei, if we wish to follow Jesus' footsteps and work to extend his kingdom in this world, have to expect to be a "sign of contradiction." It's inevitable that controversy will arise. Perhaps the worst thing that could happen to Christians would be to be paralyzed by fear of opposition. Thank God, these calumnies about elitism have not stopped us. Sociologically, Opus Dei—like the Church of which it is part, I would stress—is open to all, because its apostolic work is open to and in fact reaches all types of persons: men and women, young and old, rich and poor. The get-togethers that I had in August in the Palacio Gaston Guelfi, which you may have attended, gave a good picture of the great social diversity in Opus Dei. I was moved by the time I spent, unfortunately too short, among the people who attend the farm-school Los Nogales and the CADI, where farm

workers and people in the poor area known as "Barrio Borro" are taken care of and offered classes.

*4. Opus Dei fosters the search for holiness in everyday work and in each person's ordinary daily activities. What does this message consist of in practice, and how can it be made compatible with an intense and competitive professional life?*

To sanctify oneself in work it is necessary, first of all, to sanctify one's work, that is to say, to carry it out with the spirit of Christ, with a transcendent purpose. One has to work out of love for God, and, for him, in order to love and serve others, without selfishness. At the same time it means to work well, with competence and intensity, because only then will professional work, whatever we do, be something worthy of being offered to God. The intense and competitive work that you speak of, so common in today's world, is no obstacle to sanctifying these tasks, but rather a stimulus to work well from both the human and Christian points of view. A person who seeks sanctity in his work—regardless, I repeat, of whether it is manual or intellectual—is not anxious for success. Success will logically come if one carries out one's work well and honestly. But his deepest aspiration is a keen desire to please and praise God and to serve mankind. And this is not merely an interior disposition; it shows itself externally: in disinterested help offered to one's colleagues, in moral uprightness in one's profession, in the peace that comes from seeing those around us not as competitors but as persons whom we strive to understand and love.

*5. Does Opus Dei direct, or intervene in, the professional life of its members?*

No. Opus Dei only nourishes the Christian life of its members and encourages the personal efforts of each one to love God and neighbor with deeds. In all the rest—professional life, politics, economic decisions, etc.—no one receives the slightest suggestion from the Prelature, and therefore, each is free and responsible for his temporal choices. As far as political options are concerned, each obeys the indications that the Church gives for all the faithful.

*6. Today's society recognizes tolerance as one of its greatest values, and in regard to the many human problems that are being debated, many people take the view that there should be complete freedom of conscience to decide what is good and what is bad. Can you reconcile this position with the defense of the truths of the faith taught by the Church?*

It seems right to me that society should recognize tolerance as one of the pillars of a community's life, if we understand by tolerance respect for the opinions of others. But frequently this term is used to legitimize an ethical relativism that tries to make subjective and arbitrary decisions about what is good and bad. This second position is incompatible with the Church's faith and with the human person's intrinsic dignity. Nor is it a valid foundation for a democratic and just state.

*7. You live in Rome, and you have a very close relationship with the Pope and frequent contact with him. Could you tell us what are the Pope's main concerns and desires?*

Cardinal Ratzinger recently told a journalist (and I have also experienced this) that you only have to be near John Paul II for a short time to realize that he is very much a man of God. His deepest desire is to struggle untiringly to be holy and to bring many souls to God. At the same time, the Pope is very aware that, having been placed by our Lord at the head of the Church, he can and should do everything possible to foster peace and justice in the world and respect for the dignity of man, and he dedicates himself unreservedly to these ideals as well. I would also like to say that he transmits peace to those around him and is contagiously cheerful.

8. *You also lived very close to Blessed Josemaría Escrivá for many years. What can you tell us about the daily life of the founder of Opus Dei, a person who is venerated as a saint but who also knew periods of criticism and opposition?*

Initially, what struck one most about Blessed Josemaría Escrivá was his humble charity and his good humor. Later, when one dealt with him a bit more, one soon noticed that these dispositions were not autonomous, but rather that they formed part of a strong unity of life, rooted in a deep sense of divine filiation. Actually they were the external manifestation of something much deeper: the constant search for holiness, a love for God that overflowed into love for others. This was true both when things were going well and when undergoing tiredness and setbacks, because Blessed Josemaría strove to make his life a continuous

encounter with God, from whom, as Scripture tells us, rivers of living water flow. Therefore, he began his day by offering to God everything he was going to do that day, and he ended it by making an examination of conscience and asking God's pardon for any faults he might have committed. In between there were many other encounters with God (the Mass, times of prayer, the typical devotions of Christian families, etc.) and many hours of intense work that didn't interrupt his intimacy with God.

9. *When talking about the difficulties of adhering to the Catholic faith, many claim that its teaching should adapt itself to social realities. One hears criticisms of its position on divorce, abortion, methods of artificial fertilization... Can we expect changes in these positions?*

The Church's teaching is that of Christ, which includes the natural truth about man. If—though this is impossible—it were to change, it would betray the Gospel and lose its reason for being. I think, rather, that you have to formulate the question in the opposite way. It is society that should look to the Church's teaching about man to find the truly human configuration for civil society. This is the case in many areas. We cannot reduce the "social situation" to its negative aspects, such as the crisis of the family or the plague of abortion. Our society also has many positive values. As in all periods of history, a desire for the truth exists in the hearts of men, a desire which the Church cannot and will not disappoint. Christ's message is not "modern." It is much more: it is always "new." To accommodate it to a

current lifestyle would turn it into something "old," without the capacity of being salt and light for all peoples. This is the great Christian adventure: to courageously maintain its original newness throughout the centuries. Jesus is and will always be what is permanent, and man will always turn his eyes towards Him when seeking a true and just social and personal order.

10. *In the course of your visit, you reminded Uruguayans of Pope John Paul II's reference to the Catholic roots of our country and the need to make the Christian viewpoint a reality in our society. Doesn't this message clash with a society profoundly marked by a secular tradition?*

The secular tradition of Uruguay that you refer to is well known, but clearly the Christian roots of this country are much older and deeper. I have seen evidence during my trip that, thank God, these roots have remained alive and active, and that a generation is arising that recognizes its identity in these Christian roots. And I have also seen the fruit that these Christian roots are producing.

11. *During your visit to Uruguay, we know that you had a chance to speak with people from all strata of society, with many different occupations. Uruguayans have the reputation of being friendly and respectful but also somewhat distant in regard to religious themes. Did you find Uruguayans concerned about their spiritual life, or do you feel that they relegate it to a "secondary level" in their lives?*

I don't know if all Uruguayans are like this, but those that I spoke with, people of all social classes, live their faith very well and act in accord with it,

or at least they are sincerely searching for God. If there are also Uruguayans whose faith has become lethargic or passive, I encourage them to learn from those who are seeking God with their whole heart. I am sure that, if they truly seek him, they will find him. Their life will acquire a transcendent meaning. Though seemingly the same as before, it will take on a very distinct savor and focus. They will find themselves more optimistic and enterprising, with greater interest in their family, their country and the world. I have learned a lot from the people I have seen here.

## *Avvenire* (Milan) February 1, 1998

*"The Redemption of Europe by Christian Culture," an interview published in the newspaper Avvenire, of Milan, Italy.*

1. *Why is an honorary doctorate being given to Cardinal Ratzinger?*

He is an eminent figure in the Church. The work that he carries out makes him a privileged witness of the theological progress that constantly enriches the life of the Church, and through her, the entire world. Nor can we forget, of course, his own impressive theological output, which I won't go into here.

2. *A pharmacologist, an economist and a cardinal-theologian simultaneously receive an honorary doctorate from one of the most prestigious Catholic universities in the world. Does this fact have any significance?*