

niques or abilities. Communicating an experience of faith requires, to some degree, knowing oneself to be an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and thus being docile to his inspirations. We need to pay attention to the Holy Spirit's voice and suggestions, with a sincere and authentic life of piety, leaving the fruit of our work in God's

hands, and with the joy of knowing ourselves to be a child of God.

In the hope that the sessions of this symposium will shed new light in benefit of a more efficacious work in communicating the faith, I wish all of you a fruitful stay at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

Articles and Interviews

El Imparcial, Hermosillo February 11, 1999

The complete text of the interview granted to the newspaper "El Imparcial" in Hermosillo, Mexico, published under the title "Is America the hope for the new Millennium?"

This is the first time that a Pope has convoked Synods of Bishops for the various continents. Why do you think he did so?

Obviously, all of the Synods, including the continental ones, have an apostolic purpose, and the Holy Father, as you know, is constantly encouraging evangelization. This spirit of bringing Christ everywhere requires taking into consideration the history, culture, traditions, etc., of the different continents.

Thus the continental Synods serve to identify and to initiate the ways of evangelizing appropriate to

the particular circumstances of each time and place. They are an instrument of unity and renewal of the Church's apostolic spirit.

In the case of the Synod for the Americas, the Pope pointed out three principle aims: a new evangelization, solidarity between the particular churches, and the casting of a Christian light on the problems of justice and the economic relations among the nations of the Americas.

The sessions held in Rome in the months of November and December 1997 were a prelude to the intense dialogues that took place throughout 1998. The most pressing topics for the Americas were tackled: the drug problem, corruption, the religious sects, and attacks against the family. All of these are a cause for concern because they affect the work of the Church and people's spiritual life. There was also detailed discussion of "a new evangelization."

Can you explain to us in a general way the nature of your participation in the sessions that took place in Rome?

During the sessions, the synod fathers and the experts reflect together on the topics that have been proposed. They study, they listen to the contributions of the others, they pray (this is very important) and, when it's their turn, they intervene. In my intervention I tried to stress the laity's responsibility in carrying out the Church's mission through their daily work, without forgetting their role in helping the most needy members of society, not only through social work but above all by striving to bring it about that social structures reflect Christ's justice and charity.

Why did you take part in the Synod?

I was one of the members designated by the Pope. In the words of Blessed Josemaría, Opus Dei is a small portion of the Church. The Prelature is headed by a bishop who, in union with the Holy Father and his fellow bishops, tries to help the faithful of Opus Dei sanctify their daily life and to carry out an extensive apostolate in their family, professional and social environment. Opus Dei has been present in America for fifty years and there are many faithful of the Prelature in the New World.

Among the topics dealt with in the working sessions we find, among others, the spread of the sects, popular devotion, growing urbanization, etc. Are these problems dealt with because they are particularly acute in America or are they universal problems that are also present here?

As you say, these are widespread problems that are also present in America, although it is true that some of these situations are particularly pressing in

the countries of the American continents. What is important is to find solutions that really address the problems as they exist: "American solutions," if you will allow me to use this expression. Americans have to work with others to come up with realistic solutions adapted to local circumstances, which all of us are interested in even though we live on other continents. For example, the problem of the spread of the sects is a manifestation of the hunger to know God that exists in America. When we fail to present the figure of Jesus Christ adequately, people seek other paths. The Synod has consequently encouraged Catholics in the Americas to proclaim Christ with more courage. Every day that goes by increases my conviction that the Church has great reasons for hope in these countries.

I understand that the Pope participates in all the meetings of the synods. How does the Pope take part in these meetings?

In many ways. But what stands out above all is one activity: John Paul II listens. Over the last few days the Pope has been listening attentively to the interventions of those present. And one also realizes that he is praying while he is listening and that he loves those who participate. I think we all too frequently forget this aspect of the Holy Father's activity. We only speak of his writings or his trips. But the Pope listens a great deal and he takes a true interest in people and in nations, in their problems and in their joys; and he prays a great deal for their intentions. I am sure that during the days of the Synod he had frequent recourse to Our Lady of Guadalupe, the great patroness of America.

The solutions offered focused on the work of the ordinary, common Christians who are in the very heart of the social structures and who have to face the challenges to a healthy family life.

What are the greatest challenges facing the Church in America as it enters the new millennium?

In his homily during the Mass that he celebrated on the last day of the Synod, John Paul II pointed out some of these challenges. Among the issues that he raised, I would call to mind his insistence on the need for a catechesis that is both faithful to the Gospel and suited to the requirements of the times. Everything that has to do with education has a great transcendence. America is a continent with a great patrimony: its people, its resources, its faith. There are many other places in the world where people do not yet know Christ. Here, the faith is deeply rooted and very widespread. But it must be grasped more deeply, known more fully, lived in a more consistent way and made to bear fruit. Formation is the key way to achieve this. This is an obligation for everyone in the Church, whether here, or in Europe, or in Asia, or in Africa, everywhere.

Opus Dei, the institution that you head, is a social phenomenon of great interest to any concerned journalist. We know that this institution of the Church works in many countries on the American continent. What is the role of Opus Dei with respect to the issues that were addressed in the Synod?

As a part of the Church, Opus Dei participates in the evangelizing

objectives set forth by the Synod. It also fully embraces the conclusions highlighted by the Holy Father. In particular, united to other Catholics, the faithful of Opus Dei will try to implement these conclusions in the many sectors of the world of work in which they are engaged. As everyone knows, the faithful of Opus Dei are ordinary Christians who want to sanctify their daily work and their ordinary life.

We know that the founder of Opus Dei, Blessed Josemaría, chose Mexico to be the first country where Opus Dei would begin on the American continent. Why did he choose Mexico?

Many circumstances were involved in this choice. I think some important elements included this country's hospitality, its cordial welcome and openness to a message that was both old and new at the same time, and the faith of the Mexican people.

In studying the beginnings of Opus Dei in Spain one finds that the founder had recourse to the poor, to the sick in the hospitals, etc. But how did Opus Dei begin in Mexico?

Since it is made up of ordinary Christian faithful, Opus Dei reflects the social structure of the countries where it is present. Mexico is no exception. Here farm workers, business people, professors, domestic workers and the like, both men and women, belong to Opus Dei. In Opus Dei there is no discrimination based on race, nationality, social level, title or the amount in your bank account. There is room for everyone who sincerely wishes to live his Christian vocation to the full in his work, whatever that be.

There are people who understand Opus Dei, while others don't seem to understand it very well. How do you explain this?

It seems very normal to me. It would be strange if the contrary were to occur. I don't know of any institution, topic or project that garners unanimous support or condemnation. Opus Dei is well loved. I find it very satisfying to see the appreciation that so many people have for it. Of course, we are also criticized from time to time. Like other Catholics, we try to respect everyone, without discrimination. And I am happy to point out that we also try to learn from them.

Your predecessor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, was the son of a Mexican mother. How did his Mexican blood come out in his way of acting and working?

Rather than showing any particular Mexican characteristic, I think he felt he was a Mexican. It was a legacy of which he was proud. Those who lived with him heard him tell Mexican stories, sing Mexican songs and pray Mexican prayers. Personally, I think his cheerfulness and affability were very Mexican. One had a great time at his side. An interesting point is that when he visited Mexico he would recall Mexican idioms and spontaneously use them during his visit.

The last question. One can see that you are happy. Why did you join Opus Dei? What has your experience been?

Your question calls to mind so many things, things which are perhaps too personal. So you will excuse me if I don't answer at length. I joined

Opus Dei because I understood that it was the path that God had prepared for me, my personal way of living the Christian vocation. As for my experience, it seems impossible to summarize it. In a word, I think that there is nothing better than dedicating one's life to the service of God and others, following the path that God has chosen for each one. I also think that a life is not enough time to repay God for all that he gives to each of his children.

Tertium Millennium, Rome June, 1999

Translation from the original Italian of the article "The Parable of the Prodigal Son, Icon of all Hope," published in Tertium Millennium, (the periodical of the Central Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000).

Only a few months remain before the opening of the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. Peter. Jubilee celebrations are a reminder to us of basic truths of our faith. Pope John Paul II invites us particularly to meditate on and put into practice one of the most demanding teachings of the Our Father: we have to ask God for forgiveness, while forgiving with all our heart anyone who has caused us harm. To learn to forgive and to ask for forgiveness both stem from a Christian's hope and joy, and reinforce these two virtues, forming a patrimony that all men and women can attain.