

overflows spontaneously with a deep joy and peace stronger than any storm. This experience always accompanies those who strive to follow Jesus' call. The Christian vocation has room for many paths, as we have already said, but these invariably converge on one point: knowing and sensing ourselves to be God's beloved children. Children of God who, in Christ and under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, seek to advance rapidly towards the final goal: eternal life with the Trinity, of which the Holy Eucharist is a pledge hidden under the veil of the sacramental signs.

The happiest people on earth are true Christians. In the prayer after communion, we address the following plea to our heavenly Father: *Father... may this sacrament we have received in memory of Blessed Josemaria, strengthen in us the spirit of adoption as*

children of God, and fulfilling your will, may we walk joyfully on the path of our vocation.

In conclusion, I would like to remind you of some words from the Pope's Apostolic Letter for the new millennium: "On this journey we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin Mary." We entrust ourselves to Mary, Mother of Jesus and our Mother, "Star of the New Evangelization." Today in particular, we beseech her to watch over the apostolic trip of John Paul II to the Ukraine. May our Lady "the radiant dawn and sure guide for our steps,"⁹ smooth the path to Christian unity and bring about a period rich in fruit for the Church. I invite you to invoke her with an aspiration that Blessed Josemaria's heart poured out fifty years ago now: *Cor Mariae dulcissimum, iter para tutum!* Amen.

Interviews

Montreal January 21, 2001

"Opus Dei: a lay pathway to correspond to Christ", interview by Michèle Boulva published in Le Nouvel Informateur Catholique.

"The hour of the laity has struck!"... It is hard to say things much clearer. On

the occasion of the Jubilee of the lay apostolate, that is how John Paul II expressed the great message of Vatican Council II on the universal call to holiness and the responsibility of all baptized persons to collaborate in building Jesus' project of love for humanity.

In 1928, a young Spanish priest saw himself entrusted by God with the immense task of reminding people of this reality within the very heart of the Church. The generous response of Blessed

9. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, no. 30.

Josemaria Escriva would bring forth the Prelature of Opus Dei.

Monsignor Javier Echevarría is the current prelate. We met him in Rome last October, and he readily agreed to answer the questions of the NIC.

How did your founder receive the mission that God wanted to entrust to him?

Opus Dei was founded on October 2, 1928. Blessed Josemaria Escriva was making a retreat. That day, while he was in his room after having celebrated Mass, he reviewed some notes he had written during the previous months. Those notes reflected some of the promptings that the Lord had been placing in his soul for some years.

Suddenly, while he meditated on those notes, he *saw* Opus Dei: that is how he always described it. Thanks to a supernatural light, infused in his heart by our Lord, he understood what God expected of him.

Some time later, in his personal writings, Blessed Josemaria recalled that he had knelt down, baffled by this divine burden and yet ready to carry it out.

The founder of Opus Dei received his mission with faith and humility, very much aware of his personal unworthiness. He used to say he was "an inept and deaf instrument" in God's hands.

At the same time, he had a gigantic faith, fully convinced that the Work of God would be carried out exactly as he had seen it that October morning of 1928, despite the total

lack of human means. How many times he repeated that he then possessed nothing but "26 years, the grace of God, and good humor"!

Decisive influence

You knew Blessed Josemaria: what was your relationship with him like? What special memories do you have of his personality?

I had the grace to live close to our founder for many years, from 1950, the year of my arrival in Rome, until 1975, when God called him to His presence. My relationship was that of a son with his father. From the very beginning of my vocation to Opus Dei, I really felt like a son. As for Blessed Josemaria, he was truly a father for the members of the Work and for many people who, without belonging to Opus Dei, considered themselves children of his spirit.

Logically, as soon as I began to serve Blessed Josemaria as his personal secretary, my relationship with him became closer without ceasing to be filial. My role was to care for all that had to do with the material aspects of his life: physical health, professional schedule, rest, etc. I must say that he always followed my suggestions promptly, even though I was much younger than he.

After having been at the side of Blessed Josemaria for so many years, my memories are obviously innumerable. I have gathered them in a book that was recently published. In line with what I have just mentioned, I would stress Blessed Josemaria's docility. He was very cultured, pos-

sessed a remarkable intelligence and a deep interior life, but was in fact extraordinarily simple and docile.

He trusted in God as a young child trusts his father or mother when cradled in their arms. At the same time, he had a forceful character and a moral energy capable of instilling enthusiasm in people and winning over crowds.

Blessed Josemaria was unfailingly tenacious, and yet he was always ready to rectify his opinions or judgments whenever he was presented with new data. He was an open-minded man, never enslaved by his own viewpoint. He was always eager to listen to those around him and to learn from them.

What impact did he have on you and your vocation?

He had a decisive influence. If I had not met Opus Dei and its founder, I would not have discovered for my own life the vast horizons of holiness and service to humanity. I witnessed the life of a saint firsthand, with his struggles, his constant dedication to others, his heroic generosity in corresponding to grace. This was and still is to me a shining example and a constant encouragement in my desire to follow that path, even though I do so only from a great distance back.

Children of God

What are the central points of Opus Dei's spirit?

A keen awareness of the fact that we are children of God by virtue of

our incorporation in Christ through both Baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit. This is an essential element of the Christian faith. The faithful of Opus Dei seek to permeate their being and their behaviour with this conviction, so that it becomes a constant point of reference in any circumstance of life one may find oneself.

Members of the Work thus strive to work as children of God. They seek to carry out their work perfectly on the human level and with an upright intention, by seeking only the glory of God and service to others. Whenever they pray, they address God as an affectionate Father to whom they open their hearts with trust, constantly and everywhere.

When resting or during moments of leisure, they are aware of always being under the loving gaze of their Father in Heaven, and thus avoid anything that could displease Him. In short, they try, by struggling against their shortcomings and defects, to fulfill their personal and social duties, both civil and religious. And they try to do this with the joy that comes from knowing that they are children of God in Christ.

It is from this perspective that the Prelature of Opus Dei constantly orients the doctrinal, spiritual and apostolic formation it offers its faithful.

How does the spirit of Opus Dei respond to the needs of today's Church?

As our founder wrote, the spirit of Opus Dei encourages the faithful of the Prelature to be present "at the

very beginning of any upright changes that occur in the life of society" and to make their own "the progress of each epoch." In this way, their mentality and their undertakings "will always fully meet the demands and needs likely to arise throughout the centuries."

On the other hand, Christians will always need to seek holiness, because that is the fundamental commitment contracted in Baptism. Since the vast majority of people must sanctify themselves precisely in the fulfillment of their family, professional and social duties, the spirit of Opus Dei will always be up to date. It is a concrete and practical path to answer the universal call to holiness and apostolate.

Evangelization

What is the current status of Opus Dei: its extension in the five continents; the number of its members; the next steps; challenges tied to enculturation?

Opus Dei was born in 1928 with a "catholic" scope, which means a universal scope. For many years now, it has also been in fact a universal reality within the Church. When our founder died, there were 56,000 faithful of Opus Dei on the five continents. Since then, with the grace of God, it has not stopped growing: today there are Centers in 60 countries.

During the last six years, Opus Dei has begun its apostolate in Estonia, Lithuania, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Uganda, South Africa and Panama. As for the number of faithful, there are 81,854 lay members of

the Prelature and 1,734 priests incardinated within it. All this is indicated in the Pontifical Yearbook for the year 2000.

The next steps? In addition to the consolidation of the apostolate everywhere, especially where we have recently arrived, a great desire motivates all the faithful of Opus Dei. It comes down to spreading this spirit of sanctification of daily work and the fulfillment of the ordinary duties of a Christian. When going to new countries in Asia and Africa, where Catholics are still very few, the idea is to collaborate there in the evangelizing mission of the Church. With regards to enculturation, it should be noted that the faithful Opus Dei are already in same environment as the other citizens, their peers. Like them, they contribute to the conception and the development of changes of their own society, each of which has its own characteristics.

The spirit of the Work impels them to sanctify their daily work and their ordinary duties. This is why the Prelature offers them the continuing formation that I just mentioned. It helps them to act as Christian leaven in the mass of humanity, to permeate their very diverse professional environments with the light and salt of Jesus Christ. Also to learn from their families, their colleagues, their friends, etc.

Without any vainglory, I am happy to repeat that there are millions of people all over the world who love the apostolates of the Prelature, who attend the means of formation it offers and are grateful for them. If I say

this without vainglory, it is because what is important is that people come closer to God: that is the goal.

Marriage and family

What place does the family have in the Work?

From its very beginnings, Opus Dei as such has not had any specific apostolic specializations such as the family, young people, those who are marginalized, influential people... The secular character of everyday life intrinsically marks its message and its spirit. And “everyday life” does not mean “worldly life.”

At the same time, as Blessed Josemaría often pointed out, Opus Dei has all the specializations, for it addresses any person who aspires to holiness in the midst of the occupations of this world: professional work, studies, family and social relations. That is the forum for the effort to strive for holiness and the field for apostolic activity.

It goes without saying that evangelization and the Christian promotion of the family represent one of the priorities of the pastoral work of Opus Dei. That is explained by the fact that the family is the basic cell of society and that it is impossible to permeate human activities with a Christian meaning without intensely seeking at the same time the formation of truly Christian families.

It should be kept in mind that most of the faithful of the Prelature are married people who seek their sanctification through the faithful

fulfillment of all their duties, especially those duties that derive from their state in life.

Today's society often ridicules marriage and the family. In your opinion, what should be done?

I think it is extremely urgent that everyone, regardless of his or her religion, rediscover the sacred character of the marital bond. Marriage is not simply a civil institution, even if it obviously has important civil effects that the law must protect. It is in fact an institution established by God from the moment of the creation of man and woman, and marked by its essential properties of unity and indissolubility. Marriage is a covenant of love founded on the personal self-giving of the spouses: a gift that is mutual, irrevocable and open to life.

Christians should know and understand the significance of Christ's raising marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament of the New Covenant. This implies that it is a channel of divine grace and a living sign of Christ's spousal love for the Church. If these basic points are well transmitted through catechesis, future generations will be well prepared for marriage and they will form truly Christian families. Within these families, the children will mature in the faith, the very same faith lived by their parents. And they will be able to exert a positive, Christian influence on all of society.

Young and generous

Why do so many young people refuse to follow the teachings of the Church?

I think that is a stereotype that is a bit too easily spread about. What characterizes young people is a big, generous heart full of ambitious projects, and that has not changed in the young men and women of our time.

At the same time, and this will always be the case, every Christian without exception needs to receive formation and to grow in one's relationship with God. This is what happens with young people. Look at the World Youth Days: two million young people who walk for kilometres under a blazing sun, facing tiredness, often thirsty, sleeping on the ground, and yet without a lament or a complaint, smiling.

All that for what? To listen to a noble elderly man? No, I would say rather that they came to meet the Vicar of Christ on earth, the Pope. John Paul II shows them the demanding way of the faith. He gives witness to them of Jesus' love for them in the hope brought to us by the Word that was made flesh and dwelt among us, to use the words of Saint John that were the theme of those days.

No one can deny the thousands of confessions, innumerable conversions and many new vocations. Those who try to manipulate young people are still open-mouthed about it. I insist that young people are eager to follow the message of the Church. This is the time of generous commitment and personal effort, but also of the splendid experience of God's loving mercy.

Rome February 14, 2001

"Christian joy stems from pardon—not sinlessness," interview published by the Agency Zenit.

Opus Dei's prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarría, has just published a book, "Itinerarios de vida cristiana" ("Planeta+Testimonio"). In it, he offers reflections on who Christians are and what they are called to do. He also addresses themes relevant to both the Church and the contemporary world, including the family crisis, responsible parenthood, and the meaning and value of the human body. Echevarría (Madrid, 1932) is the second successor to Blessed Josemaría Escrivá to head the personal Prelature, founded on October 2, 1928. According to the latest Anuario Pontificio, some 84,000 people form part of Opus Dei (Latin for "Work of God"). In the following interview the Prelate talks about what it means to be a Christian in "an environment where the main concern is one's good image, success and power... where people get depressed over a failure or a financial setback, even by wrinkles on their face."

How do you size up our age?

I think it's obvious that we're living in complex times, even paradoxical ones. Alongside undeniable shadows we find sources of light. It would be easy to list examples of human progress and decline, of conquests and defeats. But, beyond all this, we can't forget that we're living in the fullness of time. Now is the