

Very timely are the words that the founder of the university spoke at an academic ceremony in 1972: "The university does not turn its back on any uncertainty, any unrest, any need of mankind. Its mission is not to offer immediate solutions. But studying problems with scientific depth will also move hearts, spur on the passive, awake sleeping powers, and form citizens ready to construct a more just society. It thus contributes with its universal work to removing barriers that make it difficult for men to understand one another; it alleviates fear of an uncertain future; and it fosters, through its love for truth, justice and freedom, the true peace and concord of persons and nations."

A wonderful task of generous and demanding service awaits us. We will carry it out more effectively if we commend our work to the intercession of Blessed Josemaría and place it under the protection of our Lady, Mother of Fair Love, who presides over us from the campus shrine.

## Madrid, Spain January 8, 2002

*Newspaper interview published in El País, on the eve of the centennial of the birth of Opus Dei's founder*

*What is the present situation of the Work?*

At this moment Opus Dei has 85,000 faithful, in 60 countries. They

try to spread the message of Christ to their friends, without considering themselves in any way better than others, from whom they too can learn. The true measure of Opus Dei's situation is whether each member is faithful to Jesus Christ. And on this issue the Prelature's faithful examine themselves at the end of each day.

*The Work has organized various celebrations, but the most important will be the canonization of Blessed Josemaría. Taking into account the controversy that was stirred up by his beatification in 1992, do you fear that the criticisms will be repeated?*

I don't know the date of the canonization. That depends on the Holy Father. Dates for canonizations are usually made public during Consistories. How could we fail to be grateful for the increase of devotion to Blessed Josemaría in so many corners of the world since 1975? I don't fear controversy, and this is not just wishful thinking: articles and letters I have read during the past months confirm this.

*Opus Dei enjoys a great reputation with the present Pope, who granted it the canonical status of a personal prelature in 1982. To what extent has it been important to the Work to be able to count on the Pope's support?*

I think a Catholic should love the Pope, every Pope, with the same affection and veneration. Love for the Roman Pontiff is born of faith, not of preference, because in him we see the Vicar of Jesus Christ among men. And I venture to affirm that the Pope does not make distinctions. He is the father of all Catholics and he treats all

with the same charity. Given this premise, being able to count upon his support is encouraging, an invitation to unity, a motive for thanksgiving and responsibility. The decision to establish Opus Dei as a prelature was based on serious theological and juridical studies. The Second Vatican Council, with the sanction of Pope Paul VI, had laid the groundwork for this. Certainly, John Paul II put his seal on the final document, but the decision was arrived at through a broad agreement; and, at the request of the Pope, the bishops of the countries where Opus Dei was carrying out its apostolate gave their opinions on it.

*Opus Dei and the Society of Jesus are Spanish religious initiatives with their own personality within the Church. The Jesuits are considered liberal and Opus Dei conservative. How are their relations?*

If you will allow me to make a clarifying statement, I would like to say that I discovered Opus Dei in 1948 and have been one of its many faithful ever since, but I have never seen it as something Spanish rather than universal. It was born in Spain, but it was planned by God for the whole world. Additionally, some words that are useful for simplifying matters—such as conservative or liberal—must be used carefully, because many people, for fear of being labeled or pigeonholed, may not say what they truly think. What do I think? That the Society of Jesus has had and continues to have a great mission in the Church and in the world. The Society and the Prelature are different in nature and arose from different

charisms. I would not interpret them with terms that are alien to their deepest ecclesial reality, nor would I dare to compare them. Josemaría Escrivá had a great devotion to St. Ignatius Loyola. What a big embrace they must have given each other in heaven!

*The Vatican appreciates the capacity of Opus Dei to bring together big crowds for the ceremonies of the Pope. But what has been, and is, the principal contribution of Opus Dei to the Catholic Church?*

I don't feel comfortable speaking of Opus Dei's contribution to the Church, because all the riches of Opus Dei's spirit come from the Church. Likewise, Blessed Josemaría said: "It is Christ we have to speak about, not ourselves." If I ask myself what the kernel of Opus Dei's message and mission is, I would sum it up in the universal call to holiness, the possibility of transforming the ordinary lives of the faithful into a path of holiness through the sanctification of work and of family and social duties.

*Both you and your predecessor at the head of the Prelature, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, had been direct collaborators with Blessed Josemaría. You were his personal secretary for 25 years. Couldn't one say that there has been too much inbreeding in the succession to the leadership of the Prelature?*

I consider the 25 years that I spent close to Opus Dei's founder as an undeserved privilege and a constant call to responsibility. I can never thank God enough for this gift. And I can say the same of the time that I

worked with Bishop Del Portillo. Inbreeding? It is very normal for the choice of prelates of the Church's hierarchical structures to fall upon persons already working in them.

*Josemaría Escrivá lived almost his whole adult life in Rome. Why was this? Was it a high priority for him to obtain a canonical status for Opus Dei?*

Rome is the see of Peter, the capital of the Church, the symbol of its universality. Opus Dei was born in Madrid, but with an essentially universal dimension, and therefore it was natural for it to be based in Rome. The canonical status of Opus Dei reflects that original character. Blessed Josemaría had a profound feeling for the law, and he sought a juridical status that would give form to its charism and guarantee its future in the Church. Therefore he used all possible means to find a canonical configuration that would reflect the essential features of Opus Dei.

*You said in 1994 that the criticism of Opus Dei proceeded from a Spanish minority. Nevertheless, in Italy in the eighties there was an attempt in the Italian parliament to have Opus Dei considered as a sect or cult. What is it about Opus Dei that bothers people?*

First of all, Opus Dei is held in esteem by very many people. In fact, the accusations that you mention were investigated and found to be baseless. In regard to your question, I think that Opus Dei could bother only a person who does not know or is bothered by the Catholic Church itself. Sometimes stereotypes have been formed that have little to do

with the reality of the life of the Prelature's faithful, and which create a picture as disagreeable as it is false. It could also be that some might be bothered by defects or mistakes they have seen in some of the faithful of Opus Dei. Isn't it an undue generalization to project those personal failings on the Prelature? There are also people possibly bothered by seeing intellectuals, politicians, businessmen, workers, or fathers and mothers of families who live their faith consistently and who sometimes express an opinion going against the current: in favor of life or of the family, for example.

*The Work has been accused of secrecy and of exercising its great influence in a way that is somewhat hidden. Why is there so much reserve on the part of its members to acknowledge that they belong to it?*

Please pardon me for saying that I don't agree with this. The faithful of Opus Dei are well known as such to their families, their colleagues, their friends. They do not object, very much to the contrary, to being known as belonging to the Prelature. If this were not the case, how could they speak about what they live, about Opus Dei, about the seeking of sanctity in one's professional work? I have the impression that this accusation of secrecy is a thing of the past, the result of a manipulation of reality promoted by small groups jealous of their turf. It seems to me that there are few institutions about which so much is known as Opus Dei. An official bulletin of the Prelature is available, and one can find Opus Dei in the telephone book and on the Internet.

*What do you make of the international situation since the terrorist attacks of September 11?*

Like everyone else, I felt great sorrow at these attacks. I was deeply moved by those words of the Pope—I am now speaking from memory—of the hopes for peace, long desired and suddenly wounded by these thorns. I have thought too about the tragedies of our time, like those of Africa, which have occurred far from the television cameras, and which also cry out to heaven. These profound crises demand radical solutions, perhaps new forms of relationship among peoples, in which not the logic of violence, power and money but that of dialogue prevails. It seems that more concrete means of fostering justice must be found.

*There are some who say that it is a question of a real conflict of cultures. How does Opus Dei see relations with Islam?*

I would rather not look at the situation as a planetary conflict. A terrible terrorist act, carried out by a group of fanatics, cannot taint at one stroke the history and culture of dozens of countries, even though it is for everyone a warning cry.

*What do you believe would be the reaction of Blessed Josemaría, if he were to see the present-day situation, in which one can foresee even the possibility of cloning human beings?*

Humanity has always had a genius for bringing torments upon itself. Cloning is like a nightmare: man has become drunk with the power of

science and uses it without moderation, sowing fear and distrust around him. It is precisely this disdain for ethics and morality that could lead one to justify even the worst forms of barbarism of the twentieth century, which wreaked such havoc. I have no doubt that this misuse of science would cause Blessed Josemaría great pain. But in today's world there are also many positive advances that he would admire and rejoice at.

*Do you think that he would be satisfied with the evolution of his Work?*

I think so. It seems to me that one of his great achievements was encouraging Christians to see themselves as "sowers of peace and joy." Josemaría Escrivá had great admiration for saints who possessed, according to their contemporaries, a good sense of humor, such as Thomas More, Philip Neri, St. Teresa or Don Bosco. This is why he always had a good rapport with young people.

## Vatican City January 9, 2002

*Article in L'Osservatore Romano, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá*

On January 9, 1902, Blessed Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born in a small city in Spain. A faithful picture of his fruitful passage on earth is the point with which he began *The Way*: "Don't let your life be barren. Be use-