

Italy

October 3, 2008

*Interview granted to La Repubblica
a Rome newspaper (interview
by Marco Politi)*

*Bishop Echevarría, The Da Vinci
Code gave you a lot of publicity, but its
image of Opus Dei as a suspicious, se-
cretive group is still circulating.*

“Doesn’t it seem a bit odd to be talking about secrecy in the pages of a major newspaper? Every day hundreds of inquiries reach us from people who want to get in contact. At www.opusdei.org we provide current news, documentation, and personal accounts in 28 languages. Anyone who has met one of the Prelature’s faithful knows about his or her commitment and dedication to Christ. For us, transparency means letting Jesus be seen in our friendship and in the relationships of daily life.”

*Are its members found especially
among those in positions of leadership,
among influential, well-placed people?*

“In reality, the majority of Opus Dei’s faithful belong to the middle class and many are hard pressed financially at the end of each month. But the important point is that any honorable profession can be sanctified and become an opportunity to find Christ. Our spiritual formation is meant for people in all social categories.”

*Aren’t the members of Opus Dei a
bit too eager to do proselytism?*

“Jesus called all Christians to follow him and become ‘fishers of souls.’ Apostolate and proselytism should not be seen as ends in themselves nor as the way an institution might try to build itself up. Our goal is to bring Christ to many other people, always respecting their personal freedom. Opus Dei has no other aim than to echo the teachings of the universal Church.”

*What is the central focus of your
mission today?*

“Our mission follows the priorities of every historical period. Today the main challenge is the family: the upkeep of a home, educating the children, caring for the elderly and infirm, harmonizing the parents’ work schedules. Consequently, one of our priorities is the Christian formation of many parents, whether or not they belong to Opus Dei.”

Even atheists and agnostics?

“We are open to everybody, including people who don’t even know they have an immortal soul, and don’t want to know it. We treat them as friends, as brothers and sisters, and place ourselves at their service, the same as we do for everyone else.”

*Eighty years is a long time: What
has Opus Dei learned? What defects
need to be corrected?*

“I see what I so often heard St. Josemaría Escrivá say, not out of pride or arrogance: that Opus Dei will never need to be reformed in order to adapt itself to a changing

world. For its aim is to teach everyone, beginning with ourselves, to sanctify daily life. Since we live in the world, it will always be necessary to keep our eyes on the God who never leaves us, who always extends a helping hand for us to grasp so as to walk with his help."

What have you personally learned as Prelate?

"Every day I have to learn how to pray, how to be more mortified, how to serve everyone I meet. For our Lord's words are not simply a story, but a reality. He said: 'If you have mistreated the sick, the poor, the uneducated, you have mistreated Me.'"

What do you especially remember about St. Josemaría?

"What impressed me was his good humor, along with his love for God. He was a good teacher who knew how to encourage and correct people, a priest and a father who devoted himself completely to the service of God and souls. He used to laugh a lot and joke with me. On trips in the car he would sing popular love songs, expressing in them his love for God. Once he told us that when he was dying he wanted to hear the Italian song about opening the windows to let in 'the springtime sun.'"

You are also carrying out apostolic work in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. What is happening there?

"Everywhere these days we hear a lot about consumerism, but let's not forget that a large part of humanity

lives in conditions of poverty and misery. In the West, too. The Church's response has always been not only to provide welfare, but also education. For example, in the Peruvian Andes, some of the Prelature's faithful, alongside other persons, have set up a network of 'rural co-ops' that teach language skills and basic hygiene and sanitation. In so many countries, both in the Southern and Northern hemisphere, the challenge is to help local people assume responsibility for improving their own society."

Are you also in China?

"China is not new to us, and neither is Russia. Many of Opus Dei's faithful work in China—as diplomats, engineers, lawyers, teachers. They are ordinary citizens who deal with many people around them, making them feel understood and loved. They also bring them the seed of Christ's teaching. We have educational and social aid facilities in Hong Kong, Macao, and Canton. And priests are responding to the call to help people on mainland China."

Bishop Echevarría: Josemaría Escrivá has already been canonized. Now the process of beatification has begun for his successor, Alvaro del Portillo? Why are you so interested in having your own saints?

"We don't have a hunger for saints but for sanctity. It is sanctity that brings us close to our Lord, who is peace and joy for the whole world. It's not our aim to point to saints and say, 'Look how special this saint is!'

Our aim is to help all men and women see that, if they want, they can strive to be a saint."

Italy November 29, 2008

Interview granted to Il Tempo

Bishop Echevarría: On October 2, 1928, 80 years ago, Josemaría Escrivá founded Opus Dei. The Christian as a "traveling contemplative": this seems to be the decisive factor, the charism that has permitted the Work to enter the third millennium with a vigorous step.

On that day, some 80 years ago, St. Josemaría received an intellectual light about what would be from then on Opus Dei: a multitude of ordinary people, of all races, professions and social conditions, who struggle to live their Christianity fully. Faithful who want to turn ordinary realities into an opportunity for an encounter with God. A "contemplative in the midst of the world" is someone who, with God's help, and despite his or her weaknesses, seeks to find Jesus in each moment of their life.

"Don't let your life be sterile," we read in the Founder's book, *The Way*. "Be useful. Blaze a trail. Shine forth with the light of your faith and of your love. With your apostolic life, wipe out the slimy and filthy mark left by the impure sowers of hatred. And light up all the ways of the earth with the fire of Christ that you carry in your heart."

Jesus spent his life on earth totally dedicated to communicating the message of salvation through his example, his deeds, his untiring service to those around him, right up to his death on the Cross. This is the ideal that wins over every true Christian. As the Founder of Opus Dei used to say, for a person who is in love with Jesus, every moment is a marvelous opportunity to make life more pleasant for others.

The faithful of the Work are viewed by some as "elegantly dressed mystics." In recent times, an international campaign of surprising violence has accused Opus Dei of being a "lay Catholic elite," a "fanaticism that needs a radical reform," etc. What has been the impact of those poisonous criticisms.

People often say (although I don't believe it's true) that half the world is dedicated to criticizing the other half. One shouldn't give importance to falsehoods. One has to respond with charity and with the consistency of one's own life. In many cases, the mistaken or slanderous information provides an opportunity to spread correct information. As is the case with all Christian realities, the Work cannot be understood except after a personal encounter with the light of the faith. When one enters into contact with the faithful of Opus Dei (diocesan priests and simple lay people), the suspicions, prejudices and mistaken views vanish. St. Josemaría prayed every day for these friends of his: that's how he considered them.

How much Opus Dei is there in the future of the Catholic Church?