

Today's youth are the victims of a relativism that runs counter to the defense of life, marriage and the family. How should an ordinary Catholic confront this situation?

He has to be, as any other Catholic, loyal to the faith. Each of us clearly has a great need to get to know Catholic doctrine, because we can't hold fast to what we don't know.

In any case, even though we don't digest everything, I specifically recommend that people should study the Catechism of the Catholic Church. If it seems too large or extensive to someone, we now have the Compendium, which is a beautiful source book for attaining a solid and rich formation. This doctrinal formation equips us very well for dealing with those around us. Not only in order to defend Catholic doctrine but also to defend the life and dignity of those who are in error.

Suppose that a friend comes up to us and says: "Listen, I want to change, I want to get closer to God but I don't know how to do it. What do I have to do?" What should we tell him?

To look at the one who is his true friend, at Jesus. To strive to get to know him. I, in the words of a saint that I had the privilege of living alongside for twenty-five years, would tell him: Get to know Jesus, who is your best Friend, the Friend who never betrays, the Friend who understands you, the Friend who forgives you, the Friend who is constantly coming to seek you. In that way, by getting to know him in the Gospel, you will realize that you are

one more person in the Gospel scene, and that you can live as close to Christ as did those who listened to him and followed in his footsteps, even in the most difficult moments.

The listeners to the Cope network are following closely all the news from World Youth Day. What message would you like to send to the Spanish audience?

I think that we all uphold one another. I would like to tell the listeners of Cope that, precisely because they want to have a solid Christian formation, a human formation consistent with Christianity, they should support these young people with their prayer, with their mortification—which is not a matter of doing extraordinary things, although at times our Lord can ask for that. Specifically, with their ordinary life, their work, their life lived face to face with God, they can help these young people in the meeting they are now having with Christ through the dedication of the Pope, who is completely generous. He has come to Germany specifically to seek out these young people, as did John Paul II. He came to seek them so that they can also answer consistently, responsibly. The Pope relies on them. May they learn to rely on Christ, who is the one the Pope represents.

Thank you very much, Bishop Javier.

Rome
October 11, 2005

Interview granted to La Gaceta de los Negocios.

The central headquarters of Opus Dei in the Eternal City is at Viale Bruno Buozzi 75. From the outside it looks like an apartment complex. Within, it is a conglomerate of edifices including the old Hungarian Embassy to the Holy See, which is easy to pick out, and other buildings of different styles and tastes. Taking up a whole block, it includes small interior gardens with fountains and sculptures. The interview with the Prelate of Opus Dei took place in one of these patios. I had sent him a questionnaire in advance, which he handed me as soon as we had greeted each other, but the interview continued while we took pictures and for quite some time afterwards. He spoke quickly and in a low voice, with an accent that reminded me of Italian. His look was quite intense. The first questions were, of course, about the synod of bishops set to begin the following day, in which the Prelate of Opus Dei was to participate at the express wish of Pope Benedict XVI.

Your Excellency, there are those who think that this Synod will be characterized by a certain rigidity.

Then they are mistaken. What the Holy Father wants to do is to listen to all the bishops of the world and the theologians and specialists who have been invited to attend. I am sure that questions will be discussed that will help everyone to live the sacrament of the Eucharist better, and that the decisions taken will be of great help for the universal Church.

Benedict XVI's meetings with Bernard Fellay, the leader of the LeFebvrists, and

with Hans Küng, have given a different image of the present Pontiff. How do you interpret these audiences?

Although we still have little specific information about their content, what is clear is that the Church continues to be open to everyone. The Pope is doing all he can to help people come closer to God, to recover souls for God. And those who seek the truth will find it.

Bishop Echevarría, a few days ago Benedict XVI blessed a statue of the founder of Opus Dei in the Vatican. Will the Work's relationship with this Pope be as good as with the previous one?

In St. Peter's Basilica there are 150 statues of saints from every epoch. I think that the blessing of these sculptures by the Popes has great symbolic value. It places before our eyes the reality that the saints contributed to the building up of the Church and adorned it with their virtues. At the same time, the Church presents Catholics with the attractive example of these faithful sons and daughters of hers.

And what does this mean for Opus Dei?

In the specific case of St. Josemaría, his statue on the Basilica wall also shows that the Prelature exists to serve the Church and that this commitment represents the most ardent desire of all its faithful.

And the Pope blessed the statue...

As you can imagine, the blessing imparted by Benedict XVI was a cause of great joy for me. At the same time, there came to my mind something that St. Josemaría said: every day, even the most extraordinary ones, we have to care for what is ordinary and small, which for many people passes unnoticed.

What changes have taken place in the Prelature since the Founder died in 1975?

Opus Dei is a living organism that grows and matures over time, with God's grace and following his plans, with each one's effort to struggle, and also with our personal mistakes, which are always a great school of learning.

Despite the mistakes, you can't deny that during the Pontificate of John Paul II the Work has grown in every facet.

These thirty years have seen, as is natural, a growth in the number of people and countries, and new apostolic undertakings. The situation of the Church and the world has changed; one need only consider what the Pontificate of John Paul II has meant. But what has not changed in Opus Dei is the substance: its foundational spirit, the implications of the call to holiness and apostolate in ordinary life, in professional work, and in the exercise of a Christian's daily duties.

But what have been the most important changes?

Perhaps the most important changes—to use your words—have been the result of two events of great importance since 1975: the structuring of Opus Dei as a personal prelature, something that St. Josemaría had already foreseen from the beginning, and the canonization of that holy priest. These two milestones bring with them consequences that are to a certain extent incalculable. Among others, one could say that they have helped confirm, in a solemn way, the spiritual aim of Opus Dei in the heart of the Church.

And what did the canonization mean for the members of the Work?

I think that, with the canonization, the faithful of the Prelature have seen themselves called upon to increase their responsibility, their evangelizing commitment. In the months preceding that event, I told myself that the canonization had to spur a new resolution of conversion, of seeking God.

Did that conversion have something to do with the new apostolates that the Work is now developing?

The apostolates depend upon the needs of each one's environment. In accord with the new needs of society and souls, the appropriate apostolic works develop. Specifically, in the last few years many different initiatives have arisen in the area of the family. I have had the good fortune of hearing many people tell me about the projects they are developing, each in one's own way: activities of spiritual formation

for married women and men, courses on conjugal love or on raising one's children.

It seems that the apostolates of the Prelature are centered on the family.

I think it's only logical that so many initiatives of this sort should arise, since the family is a source of life and happiness, now and always. One sees each day more clearly the importance of the family, which brings the indispensable environment of affection, and which at the same time strengthens civil society.

Is the family apostolate specific to Opus Dei?

In Opus Dei, apostolate is carried out from person to person, from friend to friend. The effectiveness of the evangelization does not depend just on structures or organizations. The key is that we Catholics know how to make Jesus present, that we help others discover the beauty and truth of his words, and that we deal charitably with those around us.

That is also the evangelizing work of all Christians.

Para servir, servir, to be useful, serve, as St. Josemaría often said. These words can also be applied to the evangelizing work of the Church: if we serve others we will be useful to the Church as transmitters of the Gospel. Thus we will present the credentials of a Christian.

How have you been affected by having two cardinals in your institution or, at present, two bishops in Spain, the archbishops of Burgos and Tarragona?

Before answering, I would like to correct the terms of your question, because the Prelature does not "have" cardinals or bishops. Cardinals and bishops depend on the Pope in their work. But I would go even further, even with the risk of appearing exaggerated: the word "have" is also not appropriate when referring to any of the faithful of the Prelature. Certainly, one usually says that a person "belongs" to Opus Dei, or that a diocese "has" a certain number of priests or faithful. But, as is obvious, this belonging does not mean property, but another kind of relationship.

I accept the correction.

No, forgive me. I'm making this point because it seems to me that occasionally one speaks mistakenly of the Church as an institution that in some way can "manage" its faithful, when in reality the Church is a home where one lives freely. And, in Opus Dei, the first defender of his own and other people's freedom was always St. Josemaría.

But you can't deny that these appointments affect the Work?

The fact that some priests of the Prelature are named cardinals and bishops amounts to a loss of manpower for the specific apostolates of Opus Dei, which we accept with the joy of serv-

ing the universal Church also in this way.

Speaking of freedom. It is a fact that Spanish society is no longer Christian. Neither in its laws, nor in its customs. How do you see the future of our country?

I have serious doubts about whether one can make such an absolute statement. I believe that a good part of Spanish society is Christian and, in more than a few aspects, that almost the whole of Spanish society is such. It is enough to recall, for example, the numerous deeply-rooted and popular traditions with an eminently religious meaning. One should also make clear that in reality it is persons who are Christians.

Perhaps the fact is that in Spain some who call themselves Christians aren't really such, or don't act like they are.

Well, in what refers to the faith, the future is open. On the one hand, we Catholics trust above all in the grace and mercy of God, not in our human ability to persuade. On the other hand, since the faith is transmitted by means of apostolate, the future is in our hands. If we Catholics encourage one another to be loyal, cheerful, helpful, humble, upright, industrious; if we participate in the public life of our country, exercising our rights and duties as citizens, then the panorama of the Church in Spain is promising.

But you can't deny that the environment isn't Christian.

The external environment certainly has an influence, but the future of the faith depends above all on the faithfulness of Catholics.

Perhaps it is very different from what you have just seen in the gathering of young people in Cologne.

Those who took part in the meeting in Cologne experienced the desire to find Christ on the part of many hundreds of thousands of young people, and also on the part of older people who have been moved by this worldwide mobilization.

But, aside from Cologne, you can't deny that the world is distancing itself from God.

You are right. Looking at the other side of the picture, one sees many symptoms of the fact that unfortunately, only too frequently, we men distance ourselves from God. It is not a matter of listing once more the causes of concern, the outbreaks of violence, the plague of loneliness, the lack of respect for life, the spread of a relativistic mentality, so clearly denounced by Benedict XVI, etc. But I don't want to focus on the evils found in today's world, nor do I want to overlook the many positive elements in present day society.

But what can a Christian do in the face of this situation?

The way to respond to evil is not to complain or lament, but to make the humble and cheerful decision to provide our grain of sand to the collective

construction of the good. There comes to mind another expression very much liked by St. Josemaría: “sowers of peace and joy.” That’s how we Christians have to respond.

There are still some people in Spain who are mistrustful of Opus Dei’s presence in public life, of its strength and power.

I think the attitude that you allude to on the part of some—not as many as one might think—reflects the problem I referred to earlier. The mistake of seeing Catholics in general, or the faithful of Opus Dei in particular, as pieces of a mechanism, part of an organization, blindly obeying orders coming from on high, and acting “en bloc” in political questions. Nothing is further from the truth. The millions of people who have known Opus Dei at first hand in Spain, in its almost 80 years of existence, give unanimous witness to the freedom that they find there.

Perhaps these people are unhappy with the presence of members of the Prelature in politics.

I think there is a need to understand better the freedom of Catholics in public life and politics, and to overcome ideological positions that belong to the past, or that result from rather closed mentalities. Then they will see that the faithful of Opus Dei enjoy the same freedom as other citizens, neither more nor less.

Do you think that the institutions in the Church have an important role to play in society?

One of the clearest signs of progress in our society is that the rights of the citizen, of the common man, are being given more and more importance. Human communities are formed through the free exercise of voting, through the payment of taxes, through competent professional work, etc. It is the citizens who make the decisions that determine the make up of society.

And do you think the common man is interested in what religion has to offer him?

Of course. There is nothing more logical than that the Church develop its work of proclaiming the Gospel among the laity, because it is their role, with freedom and responsibility, to bring the light of the faith into the heart of human activities, ennobling all human tasks, constructing a society to the measure of the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God.

But what if people aren’t interested in what religion has to offer?

The destiny of the Church and the destiny of the world are not opposed, or on separate paths. Both depend on the responsibility of the citizens, and of Catholics, especially the lay people.

I see you as very optimistic.

That’s because, rising above all contemporary events, our Lord’s promise provides a sure foundation for our hope.

"I am with you always, to the close of the age." These words fill me with great optimism, because the Truth always triumphs, despite the need to overcome suffering and opposition.

Avvenire, Milan October 26, 2005

Ordinary work, offered on the altar

The assembly of the Synod of Bishops that has just concluded was convoked by John Paul II and presided over by his successor, Benedict XVI. Thus it represents, in a symbolic way, the "linking" of two pontificates. It is significant that the topic of this synod was precisely the Eucharist, the source of the Church's unity.

On the opening day, Benedict XVI asked the participants to study how the connection between the Holy Mass and the daily life of Christians can be strengthened, so that these not be seen as two disconnected realities. As a result, the synod's work included the study of specific recommendations to help Christians better understand that the Eucharist should inform their daily lives.

As an act of worship, the Eucharistic Sacrifice has to be as perfect as possible, since it is offered to God Himself. Any human action lovingly and carefully done in all its details is pleasing to others and shows respect towards them. How much more must this be true of any act offered to God. This is the tenor of many of the proposals introduced in the synod.

Priests and lay people should celebrate or attend Holy Mass with a firm doctrinal piety, with love and attention. In the Eucharist, where time and eternity meet, Christ offers Himself to the Father and gives Himself to us once again. Therefore we need to respond with all the love we can muster. God is not asking us simply for external devotion, but above all for our love. Only thus can our offering be perfect, pleasing to God.

But the presence of the Eucharist in a Christian's life is not limited to the sublime moment of the Mass. We can bring to the altar our daily actions, while striving throughout the day to direct our ordinary work to God in the Eucharist. Any honorable work can be a means to unite ourselves spiritually to Christ's sacrifice in the Holy Mass. In this way, the Eucharist becomes the summit and source of our entire existence. This idea was expressed over and over during the synod, with the certainty that Christ wants to unite the Holy Mass to the salvation of all men and women.

These are thoughts that oriented my own reflections during the synod and that point to three areas in which Christians can help to make Eucharistic life flourish throughout the Church.

The first one pertains to priests: that we know how to celebrate the Eucharist with the greatest possible refinement. In other words, that we foster the *ars celebrandi*, the art of celebrating Holy Mass with the required dignity, which makes manifest the beauty and depth of the liturgy, lived for the glory of God and our edification.