

Considering the example of a holy life invites us to ponder the fact that the Blessed Trinity has put us in this world for a purpose. We can and ought to go beyond the horizon of our own personal interests. The natural vocation of man is love, not selfishness. And for the Christian, charity has no limits; it does not discriminate, but is open to all men and women, and embraces every action in our life.

One could analyze many aspects of the extraordinary pontificate of John Paul II and its significance for the history of the Church and the world. But today I prefer to recall this facet of his personality: his love of Jesus Christ, from which arose his capacity for sacrifice, for giving himself unreservedly to fulfilling his vocation.

Rome April 20, 2006

On the first anniversary of the election of Benedict XVI

One year ago, Benedict XVI was elected as the Successor of Peter, receiving the baton from John Paul II. One year is a very short span of time in the history of the Church, but sufficient for us to experience once again that in the transition from one Pope to another, over and above differences of personality, a clear continuity exists.

What underlies this continuity, above all, is the assistance the Holy

Spirit offers the Church, and the prayer of the faithful for their Supreme Pastor. Unity among Catholics does not mean uniformity in things that are matters of opinion and changeable, but rather communion in the same faith, in identical hope, in fraternal charity, which, if we respond faithfully, will make us one heart and mind in Jesus Christ.

The world needs all of us in the Church to show the utmost loyalty to her mission of service, and a firm commitment in the truth. For this we now count on Pope Benedict XVI who, together with his well known human qualities, offers us in particular a firm testimony of faith in this God of ours who is Love. Our Lord wants Catholics to second the grace that moves us to adhere with our whole mind to the Magisterium of the Pope, and to pray daily, from the heart, for him and for his intentions.

Paris April 21, 2006

Interview with Le Figaro Magazine

Why has the Church granted Opus Dei the status of personal prelature—the only one in existence at present? Does this enable the Church to be better informed about the evolution of secular society in general and about the Catholic community in particular?

It is true that Opus Dei is the only personal prelature in the strict

sense today. But in the Church there are other circumscriptions equivalent to it on the theological and canonical plane. I am thinking of the military ordinariates or the prelature of the Mission de France, for example. These structures are not based solely on a territorial criterion for jurisdictional competence; hence the adjective “personal.”

The present, definitive status of Opus Dei corresponds exactly with its nature.¹ When one’s identity is clearly defined, everyone knows who you are and why you exist. When a suit fits you well and you are comfortable with it, it is better for everyone.

The faithful of the Prelature live in the midst of the world, wherever they happen to be: a university, an office, a vacation spot.... They try to work well, each in his or her own profession. They are men and women who are lawyers, doctors, journalists, artists, manual workers, farmers, musicians, members of the armed forces, teachers.

Every professional environment is a place of evangelization. Every task is truly an opportunity for finding God, as St. Josemaría Escrivá taught since 1928—it’s a way of loving God and of understanding those around us better, participating in the work of creation and redemption, by means of work.

How would you define Opus Dei’s specific contribution to the Church?

Opus Dei—as old as the Gospel, and like the Gospel, new, as St. Josemaría said—primarily spreads a message: God calls all men and women to love him and to love their neighbor, that is, he calls them to sanctity and apostolate in everyday life. Not “despite” their work but “by means of” their work, in a world that reflects God’s goodness and that cooperates with him. It is, in a certain sense, an adventure of love.

Opus Dei provides the help needed to respond to this divine call. The Prelature offers activities of Christian formation and personal spiritual assistance that are both demanding and adapted to ordinary life.

All of this effort, both divine and human at the same time, in imitation of Jesus Christ, is based on trust in God’s loving fatherhood, faith in the risen Christ, and the action of the Holy Spirit, now present in every soul.

Opus Dei tries to fulfill this mission, in the heart of the Church, as a portion of the people of God. It is, as it were, a school of permanent formation to help people find God in their ordinary life and to share the joy of this encounter with their colleagues, friends and acquaintances.

1. The juridical status of Opus Dei was a long-standing problem because there was no possibility in the Catholic Church for the laity to be “members in the full sense” (with the same right as the clergy) of one of its institutions. This difficulty was partially overcome after 1950 with the status of a “secular institute.” But the Founder of the Work, Josemaría Escrivá, saw this as quite unsatisfactory, perhaps because it placed Opus Dei under the authority of the bishops of the various dioceses. It was his successor as head of Opus Dei, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, who finally obtained, from Pope John Paul II, the concession of the double status of “a personal prelature” (created by Vatican II) and of “a universal diocese.” Bishop Echevarría has described this juridical status as a “suit” that fits “very comfortably.”

By investing heavily in schools, universities and centers of formation, Opus Dei has to some extent taken the place formerly held by the Jesuits in education. With one difference, that the young people educated by Opus Dei have the possibility of becoming members. How do you respond to those who might call this indoctrination?

Within the Church the different charisms enrich one another for the good of all. All of them are useful and complementary. There is room for everyone, respecting each one's particular concerns.

The centers of education that you mentioned spring up through the initiative and personal responsibility of specific people, who in general tend to be the parents of the students since they are the first ones interested in the education of young people. Opus Dei does not intervene in this; it respects people's freedom in their social action.

Every person who is old enough has the possibility of belonging to Opus Dei. It is enough to feel drawn by spiritual, disinterested reasons, and to see that one fits in. Obviously a personal meeting is necessary, since this type of thing doesn't happen by telepathy. The word "recruitment" is appropriate for the army or a commercial enterprise, but not for an ecclesial reality such as Opus Dei.

The aim of Opus Dei, like that of the Church, is not to constantly grow, but to prolong Christ's presence in the world, and to serve souls until our Lord returns.

Naturally, this requires spreading the Christian message, in particular the call that God directs to each person in his or her ordinary life.

Opus Dei is apostolic because, being a part of the Church, it is in continuity with the first disciples of Christ who were "sent forth." A Church that is not missionary would be a cadaver. Woe to me, said St. Paul, if I do not preach the Gospel! (cf. 1 Cor 9:16).

This is why the Second Vatican Council, and Paul VI in his exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and finally John Paul II in *Redemptio Missio*, recalled the need for Christian commitment in proclaiming the Gospel. Jesus addressed a clear, unequivocal invitation to those he found on his way: "Follow me."

At times this invitation fell on deaf ears, as in the case of the rich young man; nevertheless, Christ did not refrain from inviting him (*Lk* 18:22). St. Paul taught that faith comes through preaching (*Rom* 10:17), not just through the witness of one's life, although that witness is a necessary prerequisite.

Opus Dei sets forth elevated ideals in a society that today is not Christian, and I hope the Prelature will always continue to do so. A minimum of a spirit of rebellion is required, a desire for independence, but also the generosity to aspire to do something for others.

The Church therefore (and within its bosom, Opus Dei as a small portion in it), in following

Christ, speaks to young people. Above all it is Christ himself who speaks to each one.

Clearly a commitment to Opus Dei requires a long path of mutual acquaintance, a lot of time, in order to carry out an initiative that is always personal and unique, as every person is in God's eyes. Each person's response is free, but one cannot respond if the question has not been asked. Holding up a goal in life for people, encouraging them to do something worthwhile with their life, something useful for others, is part of charity.

Why should one be surprised by this, in an era such as ours when human organizations carry out a proselytism that is all too frequently excessive and aggressive? One can recall here marketing and advertising campaigns, attempts to sensitize people to social problems, the effort to recruit people for particular jobs or to obtain a specific share of the market, or to increase the number of subscribers to a magazine, or to dissuade smokers, not to mention other areas, which at times include an harassment that is far from innocent.

Many people, perhaps because of a misunderstood humility, would never have dared to consider the possibility of finding God in their work and ordinary life, if no one had opened up for them these perspectives. Christ became man for everyone, not just for a few special people. This is a message that it's impossible to hide!

How can you explain Opus Dei's being able to gather more than 300,000 faithful at the Vatican for the Founder's canonization, when its official membership is only 85,000?

Do the arithmetic: less than four people for each member of Opus Dei. That's not so meritorious. Millions of people would have liked to be present at that great celebration, if they had had the time and money to go. The great majority of those who take part in Opus Dei's formational activities don't have any institutional tie with the Prelature. Two points need to be kept in mind. On the one hand, the Founder's message is very attractive for anyone who has a noble love for the world and mankind—an integral Christian commitment without doing anything extraordinary, except putting love into the smallest things. This is really possible! On the other hand, St. Josemaría's personality was also very likable, his joy, his human warmth and simplicity. All of this has led many people to pray to him and to read his writings, even without having had any contact with Opus Dei.

Many people have commented that the appearance of The Da Vinci Code three years ago is what has led to the Work being better known, and this interview is evidence of that. Do you agree with them that the more that's known about the Work, the better?

Yes. Ignorance is always a great evil and information is something good. Communication is not a game for amateurs. One learns over time to make oneself better known and also to understand oneself better.

One needs to have patience in this field also.

Regardless of the financial autonomy of the associations run by members of Opus Dei, it must be easy in the computer era to make a list and calculate the amount of funds these have. Why don't you do this? Is it to discredit the idea that Opus Dei is "immensely rich"? Or, on the contrary, because it is more useful to let people think this is true?

The essential thing is the free and responsible initiative arising from the base. What are the associations that are run by faithful of the Prelature? I certainly don't know what they are, and neither do those who work alongside me. It doesn't even pass through my head because it's a fanciful notion. Admitting that it would be possible to do the calculations you speak of, one would end up with a heterogeneous catalog. An apple plus two chairs. How can you add violins and footballs? Which associations are directed by people who walk along streets called "Avenue of the Republic," or by those who have green eyes or play tennis every week? What do they add up to? St. Josemaría Escrivá wanted each initiative to be financially self-supporting through the help of patrons and regular contributors. But Opus Dei does not intervene nor should it do so, also for the sake of a healthy principle of autonomy and respect for each one's field of competence.

Born in Spain less than 80 years ago, Opus Dei is present all over the world and in practically every country.² In which of them is its presence the most useful today for the evangelizing mission that has been entrusted to you? And why?

The concept of usefulness entails much more than merely technical parameters. Fruitfulness comes from God. Psalm 127 proclaims that if God does not construct the house, its builders labor in vain. The name "Opus Dei" means "work of God." I think that Opus Dei will be useful wherever it carries out exactly its mission: there will be well-situated, in its right place. My responsibility is precisely to see that this happens, and that's what I am doing. I have in mind the primacy of prayer, the sanctification of work and one's daily occupations, and therefore of one's whole life seen as an offering made to God and a service to one's neighbor. I see evangelization as the crowning of true friendship, person to person, heart speaking to heart, as Newman liked to say: the whole person, intellect, emotions, will. Opus Dei is useful when, as part of the Church, it helps each person to find, once more, interior peace in God's forgiveness, in the harmonious building up of one's personality, in the acceptance of oneself. In a word, when one is helped to realize that Jesus is still close to us, giving meaning to our lives. One can understand then why Josemaría Escrivá used to say that the happiness of heaven belongs to those who know how to be

2. The official count (not including Cooperators) is 1,800 members in Africa; 4,800 in Asia and Oceania (with a strong presence in Japan); 20,400 in North and South America; and 49,000 in Europe (of which 35,000 are in Spain, Opus Dei's country of origin).

happy here on earth. Along with suffering, of course, since it is inevitable, but happy nevertheless, truly happy.

Milan

May 13, 2006

Interview in Il Sole 24 Ore

Why is sanctifying one's work central to Opus Dei's message?

Work is seen as something positive, something good. Our Founder used to say that we can recognize God's presence not only in the world of nature, but also in the way we work, in the effort we make.

So seeking perfection in work is characteristic of Opus Dei members?

If work is a place where we can meet God, it has to be done as well as possible, with professional competence. But the degree of sanctity is not determined by the kind of work one does, nor by its social standing or its monetary reward.

What about the unemployed?

It's important to help them, especially the young, to acquire the skills needed to render a service to society. As one example, Opus Dei operates a trade school in Rome (Centro ELIS) in a working class district where young people are trained. At this point, more than ten thousand of its graduates are employed.

How can someone who works in finance where speculation is common find a path to sanctity?

Sometimes we still encounter the old prejudice that such jobs are necessarily negative or dangerous for Christians. But if someone working in finance and market transactions practices this work honestly and sees it as a service to others, it can become an occasion for giving glory to God. So yes, one can find God even on Wall Street.

Then even financial speculation can be a path towards God?

It mustn't involve injustice towards persons; a sound ethical context is necessary. But Jesus said that those involved in business also need to render fruit with their talents.

Most business people never seem to think about making their "talents" bear fruit when they engage in trade....

Sometimes acting uprightly in the world of business requires heroism. A person with an upright conscience will need to confront unjust practices that are morally unacceptable. In fact, sanctity is always heroic. We are all called to sanctity, and so everyone is capable, with God's help, of making "heroic" decisions when circumstances require it.

Are members of Opus Dei given some special guidance in these matters?

They receive no guidance on how to exercise their professional work. What they do receive is Christian formation that gives them a