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*Interview with the Father
in La Croix*

Opus Dei fascinates and disquiets people at the same time. How does its message meet the needs of today's Catholics?

Opus Dei echoes the call that Christ addressed to everyone: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 548). The Prelature's mission is to spread this message and to help people put it into practice in their daily life, especially in one's professional work. The spirituality of Opus Dei insists on the joy that can be found in the sanctification of work, in the value of little things when done for love.

A close bond with the Pope forms part of Opus Dei's identity. How is this relationship shown?

As the Prelate of Opus Dei, I have actually been appointed by the Pope, and I give an account to him through the Congregation of the Bishops, with a report every five years on the state of the Prelature, similar to that given by the dioceses. Opus Dei's mission is clearly framed by the statutes the Holy See has approved for it.

Opus Dei is accused of being a "Church within the Church." Its special status as a personal prelature is something unique. Why don't you want to be under the local bishops?

Opus Dei is not a particular Church, but it does have certain analogies with a diocese. In fact, Opus Dei is headed by a Prelate; it has its own clergy and its "cathedral" (the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace in Rome), its tribunal, etc. Within the Prelature an organic cooperation exists between laity and priests, for the good of a mission that is not limited to a specific social sector. This mission is to reconcile the world with God, in accord with St. Paul marvelous formulation. The priests incardinated in the Prelature, about 1900 in number (and on May 27th I will have the joy of ordaining another 35), are dependent on me. As far as the lay faithful are concerned, they depend on me only in what concerns their spiritual and apostolic commitments in the Prelature. The majority attend Mass in their own parish.

Is there any danger of a conflict in authority arising with the bishops of the dioceses where members of Opus Dei live?

No, the jurisdictions are juxtaposed, but never interfere with one another. The faithful of Opus Dei strive to respond to the orientations of the bishop of their diocese exactly as do all Catholics animated by an authentic ecclesial concern. The Prelature can be seen as a service that the universal Church provides to the particular Churches. To put it in a few words, Opus Dei is a small portion of the Church, not a "Church within the Church." That accusation was spread in 1981 by persons who put considerable financial resources into a lost cause, since it was a calumny.

What does the use of the cilice and disciplines involve? Does it make sense today to seek suffering?

Your question is something that is very marginal in regard to the reality of Opus Dei. St. Josemaría liked to say that the best penances are those that one finds in one's own work and in daily life. For example, a smile when one is tired, finishing one's work well, knowing how to listen to others with patience and understanding.

As far as corporal mortification is concerned, this is part of the Church's spiritual patrimony: Thomas More, Paul VI, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Sr. Lucia of Fatima all practiced it, to cite only a few names. Even those who don't believe in God can see some good reasons for voluntary mortification, such as solidarity with those who are suffering, controlling one's body, the free rebellion against the tyranny of pleasure. Naturally, corporal mortification has to be practiced with common sense and moderation.

Opus Dei is often accused of being a financial power. How is the Prelature financed and organized?

The Prelature has practically no expenses of its own except for the maintenance of its priests. The buildings necessary for carrying out its formational activities belong to autonomous non-profit groups and entities whose names I don't even know. Obviously Opus Dei does not operate any commercial or financial enterprises. If someone in Opus Dei runs a company, it is his own concern, not the Prelature's, just as if he wins a tennis tournament, the ac-

claim is solely his. The initiatives undertaken in certain countries, for example, providing health services in the Congo, always have their own financing and keep their own balance sheets. This is not merely a façade; rather this way of acting corresponds to the professional and lay mentality of those involved. All these accusations that some persons spread, therefore, are pure fantasy.

The practice of secrecy is what seems to give the most fodder to the critics of Opus Dei. Of what use is secrecy for spreading the teachings of the Gospel?

Forgive my bluntness, but I think that claim is quite out of date. It is brought out from time to time like a tattered scarecrow, but it is hardly credible. The Prelature's centers all over the world and its directors can be easily known by anyone who has any interest. There are diocesan directories, the web page, and the Prelature's official bulletin, *Romana*. What more can we do? We aren't going to undertake a marketing campaign as though we were selling mobile telephones. No member of the Prelature hides the fact that he or she belongs to Opus Dei. St. Josemaría used to say that he "abhorred secrecy." On the one hand, when Opus Dei began, some found it strange that its members didn't wear a religious habit. But that would have meant violating our own nature! On the other hand, the word "secret" is quite attractive. Christ himself said that if a person does what is true he will go into the light, so that it may be seen that his deeds are done in God (cf. *Jn* 3:21). But he also said that one's left hand should not know what the right

hand is doing (cf. *Mt* 6:3). The faithful of Opus Dei, I insist, do not hide themselves; on the contrary, they try to share their happiness with others. The same ones who accuse you of being secretive accuse you of doing apostolate. A strange contradiction. Perhaps this is a result of trying to categorize people and put them in boxes.

Isn't there a contradiction between the public side of the Work after the canonization of its founder and the inner side, reserved to its members?

As with every human reality, one cannot be both inside and outside at the same time. Could you imagine me participating in the editorial board of *La Croix*? That's not my place. In any case, Opus Dei is not closed to others. Possibly it's one of the best known institutions in the Church today. For example, in recent years various journalists, at their own request, have shared for some time the daily life of faithful in Opus Dei, even here, in the curia of the Prelature.

The book The Da Vinci Code has been very successful. What does this fact say about our society?

It might surprise you to know that I haven't read the book. I have a lot of commitments and don't have extra time to waste with that kind of novel. I think that its success is, above all, a financial success. What concerns me about the novel is not that it attacks Opus Dei, but that it attacks God and the Church. I pray every day for the author, as well as for those who have taken part in the movie, because perhaps they don't realize that they can harm people and that they are blaspheming. This phenomenon, at the same time, shows the thirst for transcendence that our society harbors. But the novel and the movie defraud these desires, and fail to meet these expectations of today's men and women. Indeed, all this shows once more the need for spiritual and religious formation. Today people are willing to listen to anyone. Loss of faith always leads to superstition.