

jobs suited to their age, in which they can show in a practical way, a human and supernatural concern for their fellow men.”³⁸

As Harambee is directed to the world of Africa, I would like to quote some words of Benedict XVI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* of November 19 last year: “Human consciences are challenged by the grave injustices existing in our world as a whole and within Africa in particular. . . . If justice is to prevail in all areas of life, private and public, economic and social, it needs to be sustained by subsidiarity and solidarity, and still more, to be inspired by charity.”³⁹

Harambee came into being in response to St. Josemaría’s canonization. As I wish you a happy anniversary today, I would like to thank you for your work and assure you that I am praying for many more people to join in your shared effort to support people and entities in Africa, who, in their turn, wish to be the builders and agents of their own development. Together with you I thank God for the many educational projects that have already been set up in sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade, and for the many activities you have promoted in the rest of the world. One of your aims is to spread an image of Africa that is very different from the stereotype. In your continent, it is true that there are many injustices that no one can ignore, but Africa is also a land of spiritual values that are of the greatest importance in our time.

The day after tomorrow, the Thirteenth Assembly of the Synod of

Bishops opens, with the theme “The new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian Faith.” I invite you all to pray for this intention. On the tenth anniversary of St. Josemaría’s canonization we can ask him to intercede for the Synod, so that this ecclesial Assembly may remind the world that holiness is not just a goal for the privileged few, but, as the Second Vatican Council confirmed, it is an invitation to everyone, within the reach of every man and woman of good will. Let’s pray that this Synod, and the Year of Faith that is about to begin, may help to enlarge many people’s hearts “in the measure of the Heart of Christ.” May those hearts then stir up other conversions, and be what drives transformations on the social level in accordance with human dignity and our destiny in God’s glory, in Africa and throughout the world.

Interview Granted to *Avvenire*, Italy (October 6, 2012)

By Francesco Ognibene

The scenes of the half million pilgrims who filled St. Peter’s Square on October 6, ten years ago, are still deeply engraved on our memories. We saw a vast multitude of men and women from all over the world, from many different professions, and social and educational backgrounds.

39. *Africae Munus*, 24.

More than ten years have now gone by since Rome woke up to that multitude of ordinary everyday people who had come from all over the world for the canonization of Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá, a Spanish priest who was a pioneer of the sanctity of lay people in the midst of the world, and who founded Opus Dei in 1928. He died in 1975 and was beatified 17 years later.

Bishop Javier Echevarría is the second successor as head of this ecclesial entity, which was erected as a personal prelature by John Paul II in 1982. He recently spoke with *Avvenire* about the meaning and importance of that day.

Your Excellency, ten years ago the Church solemnly recognized the holiness of the founder of Opus Dei in the presence of hundreds of thousands of people in Rome. What do you recall about that day and what is its message for us?

From that day I especially recall the atmosphere of gratitude to God and the festive spirit of so many faithful overflowing with joy. The message of encouragement that the canonization of St. Josemaría gave us was an injection of hope: “to seek personal conversion every day.”

The spirit of St. Josemaría is not just a promise, but a specific and efficacious path for living the Gospel and attaining holiness. His teachings foster a life of virtue, dedication to God and to other men and women. I ask our Lord to engrave that message deeply on our hearts and to help us to put it into practice.

What does St. Josemaría have to say to the Church today?

The fact that his canonization took place at the dawning of a new century is particularly meaningful. If the past century gave witness to the “rediscovery” of the universal call to sanctity, the 21st century should be characterized by the putting of this teaching into effective practice. That is one of the great challenges that the Holy Spirit is indicating to the men and women of our time.

The message of St. Josemaría resounds today with special force: “Holiness is not something for the privileged few,” he insisted. God calls everyone, people of every condition, profession or occupation, right where they are. Normal, everyday life can be a path to holiness, and all the pathways of the earth can be an opportunity for meeting Christ. This is a real and decisive answer to secularization in today’s world.

The canonization of a founder is always a moment of change, marking the “full maturity,” as it were, of the institution they established. In these ten years, what has changed in Opus Dei? How has an institution that is still young in the Church “matured”? And what do you foresee for the future?

The Prelature of Opus Dei is a small part of the Church and is assisting the Church’s universal mission, following the guidelines of its pastors. In the ten years that have gone by since St. Josemaría’s canonization, the faithful of Opus Dei, as well as the many people who take part in its means of formation, continue in their personal commitment

to spread the search for holiness in ordinary life.

Specifically, they are working enthusiastically to show that holiness is not an ideal that is purely “spiritualistic,” so to speak, but that it brings with it tangible fruits of justice and peace, as the Holy Father Benedict XVI so often reminds us.

The last ten years have seen the setting up of numerous activities of service to other men and women through the initiative of people of the Work together with their friends, such as the Irtysh Language School in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the Laguna Center for Palliative Care in Madrid, the new center for the Campus Bio-Medico in Rome, the International Harambee Association, which is carrying out educational projects in many African countries, etc. All of these social initiatives have as their primary purpose to help those who take part in them to come closer to God.

What contribution can lay people who live in the middle of temporal realities—to whom the message of St. Josemaría is principally directed—make to the global crisis? A crisis that is, as the Pope has pointed out on various occasions, above all ethical in nature.

Like all men and women, we Christians know that life can sometimes present critical situations and challenges that are often very difficult to solve. This crisis profoundly affects what mankind most deeply desires: the stability of the family, work, social relationships, financial tranquility.

Those who live as God’s children count on the security of having a good Father in heaven. We need to transmit this hope, which is grounded in faith and in a personal relationship with Jesus. Christians are called upon to discover and re-discover what is essential: that we need to carry on our shoulders others’ hardships, helping them to rebuild families, with a spirit of disinterested work, fostering good social relationships with everyone.

The Church has recently recognized the heroic virtues of your predecessor, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo—the first step towards beatification. What does it mean for you to be the successor of two figures of this stature?

This news filled us with joy. As the first successor of St. Josemaría, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo gave us a great example of fidelity and joy. He was above all a faithful man, that is, a man of faith: faith in God, faith in the Church, faith in the supernatural origin of Opus Dei, and therefore faith in the divine character of the enterprise to which he was called by our Lord to help bring forward, as St. Josemaría did during his whole life. Having two predecessors of that stature spurs me to follow their example and to go constantly to their intercession, knowing my limitations so well.

Fifty years ago the Council took place. What was Msgr. Escrivá’s contribution to the work and results of that Assembly? And what aspects of the Second Vatican Council are most relevant to us today?

Benedict XVI defined the Council as “the great grace the Church received in the 20th century.” St. Josemaría did not participate personally in the work of the Council, but he followed with great attention that decisive event in the Church’s history. In accord with Pope John XXIII’s wishes, he was in contact with the Conciliar fathers and *peritos*, to whom, with a spirit of service, he tried to transmit his extensive pastoral experience.

Fifty years have now gone by since the Council proclaimed the universal call to holiness and apostolate, which St. Josemaría (as the decree of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints recalled for his beatification) had contributed to awakening for several decades. Much work still needs to be done for this truth to illumine and guide the ordinary life of all Christians.

What does Opus Dei offer those who come into contact with its apostolates, and in particular young people?

To all who draw close to Opus Dei it offers a very clear ideal: that of loving God better, and of reaching full identification with Jesus Christ, responding generously to the Holy Spirit, especially in one’s daily life, in family life and at work.

Young people specifically are asked to feel the responsibility of the times in which they live, since they are the future of society. The Holy Father never fails to encourage them as often as possible not to have any fear of dedicating their lives to some-

thing great. This past June, in Milan, he assured them that “every age in life is ready to receive Christ.” We can be saints with only a few years of life behind us. Because God calls everyone to holiness, not just a few.

What will be Opus Dei’s contribution to the Year of Faith?

All Catholics are called to a deeper and more radical conversion that will help illumine all sectors of society. Our faith can open doors that have been closed and horizons that seemed impossible to attain.

We need to discover around us, in our professional, family and social life, the many people to whom perhaps no one has yet spoken about God and the eternal happiness to which all men and women aspire. Despite our personal weakness, we should awaken others from their lethargy, opening their eyes with the eloquence of our life and the enthusiasm of our words, bringing them closer to Jesus.

Nor can we ever forget that it is we who are called in first place to deepen our spiritual and human formation. This is the challenge of the year which is about to begin and which will give rise to hundreds of activities: courses to rediscover the faith, academic conferences in various universities that receive pastoral assistance from the Prelature, moments of prayer and Eucharistic adoration, etc. And, above all, a deep and broad personal apostolate, person to person.

Address at the Inauguration of the Academic Year, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (November 5, 2012)

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies
and Illustrious Authorities,

Professors and students,

And all who work at the Pontifical
University of the Holy Cross,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

1. Many of the events that took place during the last Academic Year are related to the year we are about to inaugurate. First of all, I would like to recall that on the past June 28, Pope Benedict XVI, with the publication of the decree on heroic virtues, declared Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, the first Chancellor of this University, as Venerable. This was a great gift for us who lived alongside that most faithful son of St. Josemaría.

In addition, a week ago saw the close of the Synod for the New Evangelization convoked by Benedict XVI, coinciding with the beginning of the Year of Faith, which commemorates the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the publication, in 1992, of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

These events show a common thread linking them as parts of a sin-

gle picture. When we see an artist painting various figures, one by one, we don't always appreciate the harmony of the whole. But when the work is finished, we see that all the figures contribute to a unified, much larger scene.

The same thing happens in the events that God's providence oversees in history: taken together they offer a vision of amazing beauty, in which each part contributes to the attractiveness of the whole.

2. Something similar also took place regarding the awareness of the universal call to holiness, which the early Christians lived with faith and naturalness, and which later was almost forgotten for many centuries. It was set forth again, finally, with great force by Vatican II, after having been preached with unreserved dedication for many years by St. Josemaría Escrivá, whom John Paul II called the saint of the ordinary.

The inspirer of our university was a true precursor of the Second Vatican Council. Since 1928 he reminded many faithful of the vocation of all men and women to holiness and of the need to find God in their daily life.

The Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, which proclaimed the Year of Faith, underlines the personal responsibility of Christians (which the Synod for the New Evangelization also stressed): "The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate