



THE DONKEY AT THE WATERWHEEL

The Lay Spirituality of St. Josemaría Escrivá

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Booklet

 Scepter

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This booklet is
dedicated
to our children.

May we learn
to be little
like them.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Opus Dei is born</i>	3
<i>A hunted priest</i>	5
<i>Human and supernatural</i>	6
<i>Work not an obstacle</i>	8
<i>Jesus the artisan</i>	10
<i>A triple dimension</i>	12
<i>A clerical misunderstanding</i>	14
<i>God plays with his children</i>	17
<i>To be little</i>	19
<i>Fires of hope</i>	21
<i>Homily: Passionately Loving the World</i>	22
<i>About Scepter</i>	37

INTRODUCTION

“Oh blessed perseverance of the donkey that turns the waterwheel! Always the same pace. Always around the same circle. One day after another, every day the same. Without that, there would be no ripeness in the fruit, nor blossom in the orchard, nor scent of flowers in the garden.” (The Way, #998)

I have just read the next to the last paragraph of “The Way”, the little book of spiritual maxims written by Josemaría Escrivá in the mid-1930’s. Not many here will be familiar with the “*borrico de noria*”; I’m sure he has even disappeared from the plains of Castille where he once provided much needed irrigation.

Harnessed to a water pump, the donkey trod a circular path, raising the water that flowed through irrigation ditches to the orchard and garden. The donkey kept at its monotonous chore hour after hour, and day after day, never perceiving the luxuriant growth for which it was responsible.

Escrivá was a master of parables and analogies. This one was especially dear to him. A book that he planned to write was to have been called “*The Life and Adventures of the Donkey of the Waterwheel.*”

In a sense he did write it because the donkey kept wandering into his other books. He was more than a

picturesque illustration. Escrivá saw himself in the donkey. “*Lit iumentum*” was his frequent aspiration, taken from the psalm that says “*I have become as a donkey (iumentum) in your presence.*” The donkey defined his spirituality and his very personal relationship with God.

(I must thank Father Burns for this topic. When I suggested as a title “*The Lay Spirituality of J. Escrivá,*” he tactfully hinted I might come up with something more imaginative, and this was the first thing to come into my mind.

Lay spirituality, however, is an interesting concept, if you bear in mind that it isn’t the same as spirituality for lay people.

This is a point that was made by Pope John Paul I in an article he wrote about Msgr. Escrivá just before his election to the papacy. “*St. Francis de Sales,*” he said, “*taught a spirituality for lay people; Escrivá taught a lay spirituality, one that was not adapted to, but based on and inspired by the lay and secular condition.*”

The chief characteristic of that condition was secular work, which brings me back to the donkey.)

OPUS DEI IS BORN

Before going any further, however, I should probably recap Escrivá's life. He was born in 1902, the son of a merchant in the Aragonese town of Barbastro. After a normal and happy childhood, he had at age 16 a spiritual experience that made him realize God wanted something special of him. What it was he didn't know. In order to be available for whatever God might ask of him, he decided to become a priest, which he did in 1925 after obtaining a civil law degree. A year later he moved to Madrid with his mother, older sister and baby brother—his father had died—to get a doctorate in civil law and to teach journalism, while at the same time carrying out an intense priestly work. In 1928 while making a retreat he saw the work God intended for him. It was to be a vast mobilization of men and women in every occupation who would seek genuine sanctity without in the least modifying their secular condition of life.

At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War eight years later there were a dozen young men who had committed themselves to Escrivá's work. They would be celibate—married members of Opus Dei came later—Opus Dei

would be their family. They would give up everything to follow Jesus, but without changing their secular status and profession which was to be the context of their apostolic mission. (*The mission or service Opus Dei renders to the Church, then as now, is to spread the ideal of sanctity in secular life.*)

A HUNTED PRIEST

During the civil war Madrid was controlled by a particularly lawless band of anticlericals, and Escrivá soon found himself to be a hunted priest, going from one hiding place to another. He was smuggled across the Pyrenees to safety and continued his apostolate from the city of Burgos.

After the war vocations to Opus Dei multiplied among both men and women. In 1944 three of his earliest followers were ordained priests to assist him in giving spiritual attention to the members. After World War II the Work spread to other European countries, and in 1946 Fr. Escrivá moved to Rome permanently. He devoted all of the next 25 years to training his disciples, to planning works of apostolate, and directing the pastoral formation of the 800 members who were ordained to the priesthood before his death.

Out of humility, he stayed away from the public eye because he was convinced his role was to disappear. But during the last three years of his life he felt compelled by the crisis in the Church to confirm the faith of his children and made several long trips throughout Europe and to many countries of Latin America to address large gatherings of Opus Dei members and friends.

HUMAN AND SUPERNATURAL

After returning from one of these trips he died quite suddenly in Rome, in the middle of the day's work, on June 26, 1975. Five years later the process of his beatification was inaugurated by two tribunals commissioned by the Holy See to hear witnesses.

In 1956, I went to Rome to take a degree in philosophy. For three years (1956-1959) I lived in the same complex of buildings where Msgr. Escrivá lived and worked. I came to know him quite well. Physically, he was a man of only medium stature by European standards, but he had such amazing vitality I don't think I ever realized it. He was exceptionally affectionate. He was a funny man and great fun to be with. In conversation he freely moved back and forth between the very human and the very supernatural.

Like St Catherine of Siena he was forthright and outspoken. To be with him was to pray. This is probably true of all saintly people, and I can remember feeling something like it when Dorothy Day spent an occasional evening at my family's apartment in New York when I was growing up.

It was an almost overpowering experience in the case of Msgr. Escrivá despite the fact that he was a very simple and natural person about whom there was absolutely nothing pretentious or self-important or ceremonial. In his own eyes he was only a donkey.

WORK NOT AN OBSTACLE

This patient and industrious animal appeals to me, for the donkey is sturdy and austere, and he is humble. But above all it's because he works, because he knows how to persevere, drawing the water that makes the orchard thrive. The donkey submits to everything even blows. He works and works, and with a handful of straw or grass he has enough.

Work, Escrivá taught, is not an obstacle, not a distraction from, but an aid to sanctification. He was not defending a “work ethic” where work is an end in itself; an escape from God and contemplation. In Escrivá’s scheme of things work is fused with contemplation. His approach may not seem unusual today, but, it was a very significant departure from classical spiritual authors who really did not think much about work at all. Most of them regarded work or any secular entanglement as a dangerous proposition.

When the Imitation of Christ says “*man must eat and drink, sleep and wake, labor and rest—all of these natural needs have a claim on him, and it makes a devout soul feel wretched and harrassed; why can't he be clear of it all, beyond the reach of sin,*” it faithfully echoes the sentiments of most classical masters of the spiritual life.

Even if the spiritual author is careful to point out, as did St. Alphonse de Ligouri, that all must seek sanctity, the man in the world, the merchant, as well as the religious, he elsewhere states (in his commentary on the presentation of the child Mary in the temple) that the sooner one is free of the snares of the world, the better.

St. Thomas Aquinas like the other medieval schoolmen paid scant attention to work. The *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa* goes directly from the presentation of Christ in the temple to his baptism by John. He does not deal with the working years in Nazareth, and when he asks why Christ postponed his baptism until he was 30, he says it was because he should first reach the mature and perfect age. Nothing about the supernatural significance of this dedication to obscure and ordinary work during all those years.

JESUS THE ARTISAN

Jesus was, of course, known to his countrymen as the carpenter, the fabricator, the artisan. Like the first Adam who was a husbandman, the new Adam comes to us as a workingman, because work is crucial to the new creation of grace just as it was to the old creation of nature. The role of work in this new Christian dispensation was the subject of Escrivá's 1967 homily "*Passionately Loving the World*"¹ which is one of his most important statements on lay spirituality.

God is calling you to serve him in and from the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theater, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home, and in all the immense panorama of work. "*Understand this well: there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each of you to discover it.*"

I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the 1930's that they had to know how to materialize their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so

¹ Also available in the book *In Love with the Church*, St. Josemaria Escrivá, Scepter Publishers, 2007

common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On the one hand, an interior life, a life of relation to God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities.

No! We cannot lead a double life. We cannot be like schizophrenics if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.

“*Only connect,*” says a character in E. M. Forster’s *Howards End*. “*Only connect the prose with the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.*” Instead of the schizophrenic life, a life lived in fragments, Escrivá urged a unified life which he identified as the characteristic note of Opus Deis spirituality:

*“The double aspect of our aim (ascetic and apostolic) is so intrinsically and harmoniously united and bound up with the secular character of Opus Dei that it gives rise to a unity of life which is simple and strong (unity of ascetical apostolic and professional life) and turns our whole existence into prayer, sacrifice and service in a filial relationship with the most Holy Trinity: with the Father, with the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ; perfectus Deus, perfectus Homo (February, 14, 1950).”*²

2

The Sanctification of Work, by J. L. Illanes, Scepter, 1982.

A TRIPLE DIMENSION

There was a triple dimension to sanctifying work. Ordinarily he spoke of sanctifying work, of sanctifying oneself in one's work, and of sanctifying others through work. Let me explain briefly.

To sanctify work means first of all to *do it well*. We can't offer sloppy tasks to God. To sanctify it doesn't mean to beatify it, that is, to give it a religious name or venerate (calling a restaurant the Holy Apostles' Bar and Grill doesn't move it any closer to the Kingdom of God). Any honest work can be sanctified; but it must be done well, with professional competence. Here Msgr. Escrivá's teaching incorporates the Thomist tradition on the relation of nature to grace and on the relative autonomy of the temporal sphere.

Next is to *sanctify oneself* in one's work. This means to do it with the right intention, in the presence of God with a spirit of penance and mortification, embracing the cross that is entailed in the monotony or the sheer burden of one's round of duties. It means to practice virtue in the fulfillment of one's work.

Finally, we have to *sanctify others* through our work. Work has this apostolic dimension because it is service,

because through the Mass it becomes part of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ; it co-redeems. Also because the competent worker, commanding the respect of his colleagues is better able to lead them to God. Apostolate is not an afterthought; it is the whole point of work. It is the reason that the Christian is there, in that particular job, with those people. He is Christ who passes by. He is there to help them discover that their round of duties has supernatural value, that it is the stuff of sanctity.

A CLERICAL MISUNDERSTANDING

Although it has become more commonplace to speak of sanctity in the world, it is important to insist on these ideas, because it remains difficult for us to grasp the supernatural and sanctifying potential of ordinary secular work. Recently a local Catholic periodical began a feature story on lay apostolate with these words from Vatican II: *“The laity, too, share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own role to play in the mission of the whole people of God in the Church and in the world.”*

The article then proceeded to explain how the recent growth of the lay ministries showed how strong the laity’s sense of its role is, and how lay people were beating a path to the church door to take on duties, often quite ecclesiastical ones, that were formerly handled by clerics. This is, I believe, the very common—perhaps, the most common—understanding of the priestly, prophetic and royal mission of the laity.

The danger, as John Harriott points out in a recent article in *The Tablet*, is “to lead lay people to devalue their

secular duties as a means to holiness, and to inspire an appetite for quasi-clerical or clerical-auxiliary functions as if these were the only way to confirm that they are truly members of the Church. . . . The notion that secular activities are quite futile for holiness and that only 'churchy' activities really count dies hard." *"Every work"* he adds, *"shares in the divine work of creation and redemption. . . . (they) are holy works, not merely made so by their being offered up'. And their very doing brings insight into God, makes contact with him. They too can be matter for contemplation."*

Since the 1940's, many people have articulated similar insights in what has been variously called Theology of the Laity, Incarnation Theology, or Theology of Earthly Realities. Escrivá's genius was not simply to have seen and said these things. He gave much more than the theory and the solution. His greatness was letting himself be the instrument God used to open a path for tens of thousands of ordinary men and women who would seek holiness in the world with the single-mindedness of the most austere religious. It is important to keep in mind that what mattered to Escrivá was not a theology of work nor even the practical success of his apostolate. All that mattered to him was sanctified work, and that meant contemplative life.

During the Council, some bishops and periti were discussing lay apostolate on the occasion of a visit to the founder of Opus Dei. One of them made the remark that it was the laity's task to transform with Christian spirit the

structures of the world. “...*If they have contemplative souls, Your Excellency,*” Escrivá interjected, “*because if they don’t they won’t transform a thing. They will themselves be transformed. Instead of Christianizing the world, the world will have converted them.*”

Contemplative spirit was something he also saw in the donkey. I have already mentioned his frequent prayer “*Ut iumentum.*” The entire verse of the 73rd psalm reads: “*I was like a donkey in your presence. But I am always with you. You hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will receive me to glory.*” “*You take me by the bridle,*” was his free translation. “*You have made me do your will.*”

GOD PLAYS WITH HIS CHILDREN

He was 26 years old without a thing but the grace of God and good humor when he had the vision of what God wanted him to do. The whole enterprise was madness, an impossibility. So what he did was remember that he was the donkey, that God was leading him by the bridle.

In traditional terms this meant divine filiation—“*I am a child of God.*”—which was the rock solid foundation of his spiritual life. “*God plays with me as a father plays with his child. The child is building a castle with toy blocks. Put the square block here, his father tells him, and the long one over there. Now put the arch here. And to the child’s astonishment a magnificent castle is built.*” That was his deepest conviction all along the way.

In the 1940’s some Church approval was needed for Opus Dei, but the danger was that its juridical or canonical form would fail to reflect its secular spirituality. In 1947 a new figure, that of secular institute, was created, but Fr. Escrivá would only consent to its application in a provisional way. Because the members of a secular institute

would be “consecrated persons,” and the members of Opus Dei were ordinary faithful like anybody else, with the same freedom and apostolic responsibility. What he had in mind was the secular jurisdiction of a personal prelature which the Church eventually decreed for Opus Dei in 1982. But personal prelatues did not exist. Before Vatican II not even the concept existed. All Escrivá could do was pray and place the blocks where his Father told him, to let God treat him like the tiny child.

TO BE LITTLE

This sense of spiritual childhood inspired the two most moving chapters of *The Way*:

“To be little. The great daring is always that of children. Who cries for the moon? Who won’t stop at danger to get what he wants?”

“Put in such a child a great deal of God’s grace, the desire to do God’s will a great love for Jesus and all the human knowledge he is capable of acquiring and you’ll have a likeness of the apostles of today just as God undoubtedly wants them.” (*The Way* #857)

He is describing the same unity of life I referred to earlier, but the accent here is less on the work of mature manhood, and more on the simple, direct, contemplative piety of the child. The donkey is always in God’s presence; on the road to Jerusalem it is closer to Jesus than anyone.

One last glimpse of the donkey occurs in a homily on the feast of Christ the King. The context is the seeming impossibility of genuine sanctity in secular life.

How would we reply if he asked us: how do you go about letting me reign in you? I would reply that I need lots of his grace. Only that way can my every heartbeat and breath, my

least intense look my most ordinary word, my most basic feeling be transformed into a hosanna to Christ my king...

If Jesus' reign in my soul meant that he should find it a perfect dwelling place, then indeed would we have reason to despair. But "fear not daughter of Sion; beloved, your king is coming sitting on a donkey's colt."

Don't you see? Jesus makes do with a poor animal for a throne. I don't know about you; but I am not humiliated to acknowledge that in the Lord's eyes I am a beast of burden...

Try to remember what a donkey is like—now that so few of them are left. Not an old, stubborn, vicious one that would give you a kick when you least expected, but a young one with his ears up like antennae. He lives on a meager diet, is hard working and has a quick cheerful trot. There are hundreds of animals more beautiful, more deft and strong. But it was a donkey Christ chose when he presented himself to the people as king in response to their acclamation. For Jesus has no time for calculations, for astuteness, for the cruelty of cold hearts, for attractive but empty beauty. What he likes is the cheerfulness of a young heart, a simple step, a natural voice, clean eyes, attention to his affectionate word of advice. That is how he reigns in the soul.

A great image of poetry can rarely be explicated. Much is lost in the critic's exegesis. So it is with the donkey. You don't need the exegesis to see that he is engaged in a work that is unspeakably joyful because it is a labor of souls.

FIRES OF HOPE

Fires of hope. Hope aptly describes Escrivá, because he had more confidence in human beings than the rest of us. In the man on the street he saw the makings of a saint and apostle. He had hope, not because the world is nearing the millenium, but because all human work, despite sin, despite the spiritual ruin of an entire civilization, is good and can be sanctified. Once walking in the city of London he felt overwhelmed by the mighty power of the world and his own helplessness. “*I can do nothing, Lord,*” he said in his heart, and he heard interiorly the words: “*You can’t, but I can*” That was hope.

And there was in him a passion for souls that consumed him and spread from him with the contagiousness of fire. His younger brother, Santiago, recalls how the young priest used to sing to himself in the early 1930’s Jesus’ words, “*I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled.*”

Josemaría Escrivá wrote this epitaph for the donkey: “*The story of the donkey has a happy ending: he dies working. And then they destroy him—they skin him—and out of his hide they make big drums, for a war of peace, and little ones for songs to the Child who is God.*”

HOMILY: PASSIONATELY LOVING THE WORLD

A 1967 homily by the founder of Opus Dei that encapsulates his teachings, taken from “Conversations with Josemaría Escrivá,” Scepter, 2002.

(Homily given by Saint Josemaría Escrivá at the University of Navarre on October 8, 1967)

You have just listened to the solemn reading of the two texts of Holy Scripture which correspond to the Mass of the 21st Sunday after Pentecost. Having heard the Word of God you are already in the atmosphere in which I wish to situate the words I now address to you. They are intended to be supernatural, proclaiming the greatness of God and His mercies towards men. Words to prepare you for the wonder of the Eucharist, which we celebrate today on the campus of the University of Navarre.

Think for a moment about what I have just said. We are celebrating the holy Eucharist, the sacramental Sacrifice of the Body and Blood of our Lord, that Mystery of Faith which links all the mysteries of Christianity. We are celebrating,

therefore, the most sacred and transcendent act which man, with the grace of God, can carry out in this life. To communicate with the Body and Blood of our Lord is, in a certain sense, like loosening the bonds of earth and time, in order to be already with God in heaven, where Christ Himself will wipe the tears from our eyes and where there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor cries of distress, because the old world will have passed away (cf. Rev 21:4).

This profound and consoling truth, which theologians call the eschatological significance of the Eucharist could however, be misunderstood. And indeed it has been, whenever men have tried to present the Christian way of life as something exclusively “spiritual”, proper to pure, extraordinary people, who remain aloof from the contemptible things of this world or at most, tolerate them as something necessarily attached to the spirit, while we live on this earth.

When things are seen in this way, churches become the setting *par excellence* of the Christian life. And being a Christian means going to church, taking part in sacred ceremonies, being taken up with ecclesiastical matters, in a kind of segregated world, which is considered to be the ante-chamber of heaven, while the ordinary world follows its own separate path. The doctrine of Christianity and the life of grace would, in this case, brush past the turbulent march of human history, without ever really meeting it.

On this October morning, as we prepare to enter upon the memorial of our Lord’s Pasch, we flatly reject this deformed vision of Christianity. Reflect for a moment on the

setting of our Eucharist, of our act of thanksgiving. We find ourselves in a unique temple. We might say that the nave is the university campus; the altarpiece, the university library. Over there, the machinery for constructing new buildings; above us, the sky of Navarre....

Surely this confirms in your minds, in a tangible and unforgettable way, the fact that everyday life is the true setting for your lives as Christians. Your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind.

I have taught this constantly, using words from Holy Scripture. The world is not evil, because it has come from God's hands, because it is His creation, because "Yahweh looked upon it and saw that it was good" (cf. Gen 1:7ff). We ourselves, mankind, make it evil and ugly with our sins and infidelities. Have no doubt: any kind of evasion of the honest realities of daily life is for you, men and women of the world, something opposed to the will of God.

On the contrary, you must understand now, more clearly, that God is calling you to serve Him *in and from* the ordinary, material and secular activities of human life. He waits for us every day, in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work. Understand this well:

there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it.

I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the thirties that they had to know how to “materialise” their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a kind of double life. On one side, an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities.

No! We cannot lead a double life if we want to be Christians. There is just one life, made of flesh and spirit. And it is this life which has to become, in both soul and body, holy and filled with God. We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things.

There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him. That is why I can tell you that our age needs to give back to matter and to the most trivial occurrences and situations their noble and original meaning. It needs to restore them to the service of the Kingdom of God, to spiritualize them, turning them into a means and an occasion for a continuous meeting with Jesus Christ.

Authentic Christianity, which professes the resurrection of all flesh, has always quite logically opposed “dis-incarnation”, without fear of being judged materialistic. We can, therefore, rightfully speak of a “Christian materialism”, which is boldly opposed to that materialism which is blind to the spirit.

What are the Sacraments, which early Christians described as the foot-prints of the Incarnate Word, if not the clearest manifestation of this way which God has chosen in order to sanctify us and to lead us to heaven? Don't you see that each Sacrament is the Love of God, with all its creative and redemptive power, giving itself to us by way of material means? What is this Eucharist which we are about to celebrate, if not the adorable Body and Blood of our Redeemer, which is offered to us through the lowly matter of this world (wine and bread), through the "elements of nature, cultivated by man," as the recent Ecumenical Council has reminded us (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 38).

It is understandable that the Apostle should write: "All things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:22-23). We have here an ascending movement which the Holy Spirit, infused in our hearts, wants to call forth from this world, upwards from the earth to the glory of the Lord. And to make it clear that in that movement everything is included, even what seems most commonplace, St. Paul also wrote: "in eating, in drinking, do everything as for God's glory" (cf. 1 Cor 10:32).

This doctrine of Holy Scripture, as you know, is to be found in the very nucleus of the spirit of Opus Dei. It leads you to do your work perfectly, to love God and mankind by putting love in the little things of everyday life, and discovering that divine something which is hidden in small details. The lines of a Castilian poet are especially appropriate here: "Write slowly and with a careful hand,

for doing things well is more important than doing them” (Machado, A., *Poesías Completas*, CLXI — *Proverbios y cantares*, XXIV, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1940).

I assure you, my sons and daughters, that when a Christian carries out with love the most insignificant everyday action, that action overflows with the transcendence of God. That is why I have told you repeatedly, and hammered away once and again on the idea that the Christian vocation consists of making heroic verse out of the prose of each day. Heaven and earth seem to merge, my sons and daughters, on the horizon. But where they really meet is in your hearts, when you sanctify your everyday lives.

I have just said, sanctify your everyday lives. And with these words I refer to the whole program of your task as Christians. Stop dreaming. Leave behind false idealism, fantasies, and what I usually call mystical wishful thinking: if only I hadn't married, if only I hadn't this profession, if only I were healthier, if only I were young, if only I were old.... Instead turn seriously to the most material and immediate reality, which is where Our Lord is: “Look at My hands, and My feet,” said the risen Jesus, “be assured that it is Myself, touch Me and see, a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see that I have” (Lk 24:29).

Light is shed upon many aspects of the world in which you live, when we start from these truths. Think, for example, of your activity as citizens. A man who knows that the world, and not just the church, is the place where he finds Christ, loves that world. He endeavours to become properly

formed, intellectually and professionally. He makes up his own mind with complete freedom about the problems of the environment in which he moves, and then he makes his own decisions. Being the decisions of a Christian, they result from personal reflection, in which he endeavours, in all humility, to grasp the Will of God in both the unimportant and the important events of his life.

But it would never occur to such a Christian to think or to say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are “the Catholic solutions” to problems. That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism, “official Catholicism”, or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things. You must foster everywhere a genuine “lay outlook”, which will lead to three conclusions: be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one’s own personal responsibility; be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains; and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions.

It is obvious that, in this field as in all others, you would not be able to carry out this program of sanctifying your everyday life if you did not enjoy all the freedom which proceeds from your dignity as men and women created in the image of God and which the Church freely recognises. Personal freedom is essential to the Christian life. But do

not forget, my children, that I always speak of a responsible freedom.

Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency. A call to fulfil honourably your commitments as citizens, in all fields — in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in your job — accepting with courage all the consequences of your free decisions and the personal independence which corresponds to each one of you. A Christian “lay outlook” of this sort will enable you to flee from all intolerance, from all fanaticism. To put it in a positive way, it will help you to live in peace with all your fellow citizens, and to promote this understanding and harmony in all spheres of social life.

I know I have no need to remind you of what I have been repeating for so many years. This doctrine of civic freedom, of understanding, of living together in harmony, forms a very important part of the message of Opus Dei. Must I affirm once again that the men and women who want to serve Jesus Christ in the Work of God, are simply citizens *the same as everyone else*, who strive to live their Christian vocation to its ultimate consequences with a serious sense of responsibility?

Nothing distinguishes my children from their fellow citizens. On the other hand, apart from the Faith they share, they have nothing in common with the members of religious congregations. I love the religious, and venerate and admire their apostolates, their cloister, their separation

from the world, their *contemptus mundi*, which are other signs of holiness in the Church. But the Lord has not given me a religious vocation, and for me to desire it would be a disorder. No authority on earth can force me to be a religious, just as no authority can force me to marry. I am a secular priest: a priest of Jesus Christ who is passionately in love with the world.

Who are the men and women who have accompanied this poor sinner, following Christ? A small percentage of priests, who have previously exercised a secular profession or trade. A large number of secular priests from many dioceses throughout the world, who thus strengthen their obedience to their respective bishops, increase their love for their diocesan work, and make it more effective. They stand with their arms open in the form of a Cross so that all souls may always find shelter in their hearts, and like me they live in the hustle and bustle of the workaday world which they love. And finally a great multitude made up of men and women of different nations, and tongues, and races, who earn their living with their professional work. The majority of them are married, many are single. They share with their fellow citizens the important task of making temporal society more human and more just.

They work, let me repeat, with personal responsibility, shoulder to shoulder with their fellow men and experiencing with them successes and failures in the noble struggle of daily endeavour, as they strive to fulfil their duties and to exercise their social and civic rights. And all this with

naturalness, like any other conscientious Christian, without considering themselves special. Blended into the mass of their companions, they try, at the same time, to detect the flashes of divine splendour which shine through the commonest everyday realities.

Similarly the activities which are promoted by Opus Dei, as an association, also have these eminently secular characteristics. They are not ecclesiastical activities. They do not, in any way, represent the hierarchy of the Church. They are the fruit of human, cultural and social initiatives, carried out by citizens who try to make them reflect the Gospel's light and to enkindle them with Christ's Love. An example which will help to make this clear is that Opus Dei does not, and never will, undertake the task of directing diocesan seminaries, in which the bishops "constituted by the Holy Spirit" (Acts 20:28), prepare their future priests.

Opus Dei, on the other hand, fosters technical training centres for industrial workers, agricultural training schools for farm labourers, centres for primary, secondary and university education, and many other varied activities all over the world, because its apostolic zeal, as I wrote many years ago, is like a sea without shores.

But what need have I to speak at length on this topic, when your very presence here is more eloquent than a prolonged discourse? You, Friends of the University of Navarre, are part of a body of people who know they are committed to the progress of the society to which they belong. Your sincere encouragement, your prayers, sacrifice

and contributions are not offered on the basis of Catholic denominationalism. Your cooperation is a clear testimony of a well-formed civic consciousness, which is concerned with the common temporal good. You are witnesses to the fact that a university can be born of the energies of the people and be sustained by the people.

On this occasion, I want to offer my thanks once again for the cooperation lent to our university, by the city of Pamplona, by the region of Navarre, by the Friends of the University from every part of Spain and, I say this with particular gratitude, by non-Spaniards and even non-Catholics and non-Christians who have understood the intention and spirit of this enterprise and have shown it with their deeds.

Thanks to all of them this university has become a source, which grows day by day, of civic freedom, of intellectual preparation, of professional emulation, and a stimulus for university education. Your generous sacrifice is part of the foundations of all this work which seeks the development of human knowledge, of social welfare and of the teaching of the Faith.

What I have just pointed out has been clearly understood by the people of Navarre, who also recognise that their university is a factor in the economic development and, especially, in the social advancement of the region, a factor which has given so many of their children an opportunity to enter the intellectual professions which, otherwise, would have been difficult and, in some cases, impossible to obtain.

This awareness of the role which the university would play in their lives is surely what inspired the support which Navarre has lent it from the beginning; support which will undoubtedly grow continually in enthusiasm and extent.

I continue to harbour a hope, which corresponds to justice and to the living experience of many countries, that the time will come when the Spanish government will contribute its share to lighten the burden of a task which seeks no private profit, but on the contrary is totally dedicated to the service of society, and tries to work efficiently for the present and future prosperity of the nation.

And now, my sons and daughters, let me consider for a moment, another aspect of everyday life which is particularly dear to me. I refer to human love, to the noble love between a man and a woman, to courtship and marriage. I want to say once again that this holy human love is not something merely to be permitted or tolerated alongside the true activities of the spirit, as might be insinuated by false spiritualism to which I alluded previously. I have been preaching just the contrary, in speech and in writing, for forty years and now those who did not understand are beginning to grasp the point.

Love which leads to marriage and family, can also be a marvellous divine way, a vocation, a path for a complete dedication to our God. What I have told you about doing things perfectly, about putting love into the little duties of each day, about discovering that “divine something” contained in these details, finds a special place in that vital sphere in which human love is enclosed.

All of you who are professors or students or work in any capacity in the University of Navarre, know that I have entrusted your love to holy Mary, Mother of Fair Love. And here on the university campus you have the shrine which we built with devotion, as a place where you may pray to her and offer that wonderful pure love on which she bestows her blessing.

“Surely you know that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, Who is God’s gift to you, so that you are no longer your own masters?” (1 Cor 6:19). How many times, in front of the statue of the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Fair Love, will you reply with a joyful affirmation, to the Apostle’s question: Yes, we know that this is so and we want, with your powerful help, to live it, O Virgin Mother of God!

Contemplative prayer will rise within you whenever you meditate on this impressive reality: something as material as my body has been chosen by the Holy Spirit as His dwelling place... I no longer belong to myself... my body and soul, my whole being, belongs to God... And this prayer will be rich in practical consequences, drawn from the great consequence which the Apostle himself proposed: “glorify God in your bodies” (1 Cor 6:20).

On the other hand, you cannot fail to be aware that only among those who understand and value in all its depth what we have just considered about human love, can there arise that other ineffable understanding of which Jesus spoke (cf. Mt 19:11). It is a pure gift of God which moves one to surrender body and soul to our Lord, to offer him an undivided heart, without the mediation of earthly love.

I must finish now. I told you at the beginning that I wanted to announce to you something of the greatness and mercy of God. I think I have done so, in talking to you about sanctifying your everyday life. A holy life in the midst of secular reality, lived without fuss, with simplicity, with truthfulness. Is this not today the most moving manifestation of the *magnalia Dei* (Sir 18:5), of those prodigious mercies which God has always worked, and does not cease to work, in order to save the world?

Now I ask you with the Psalmist to unite yourselves to my prayer and my praise: *Magnificate Dominum mecum, et extollamus nomen eius simul*: “Praise the Lord with me, let us extol His name together” (Ps 33:4). In other words, dearly beloved, let us live by Faith.

Let us take up the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit, which are God’s Word, as St. Paul encourages us to do in the Epistle to the Ephesians (6:11ff), which was read in the liturgy a few moments ago.

Faith is a virtue which we Christians need greatly, and in a special way in this “Year of Faith” which our beloved Holy Father, Pope Paul VI has decreed. For without faith, we lack the very foundation for the sanctification of everyday life.

A living Faith in these moments, because we are drawing near to the *mysterium fidei* (1 Tim 3:9), to the Holy Eucharist; because we are about to participate in our Lord’s Pasch, which sums up and brings about the mercies of God among men.

Faith, my sons, in order to acknowledge that within a few moments upon this altar “the Work of our Redemption” is going to be renewed. Faith, so as to savour the Creed and to experience, upon this altar and in this Assembly, the presence of Christ, Who makes us *cor unum et anima una* (Acts 4:32), one heart and one soul, a family, a Church which is One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, which for us means the same as universal.

Faith, finally, my beloved daughters and sons, to show the world that all this is not just ceremonies and words, but a divine reality, by presenting to mankind the testimony of an ordinary life which is made holy, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and of holy Mary.

ABOUT SCEPTER

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Our mission is to support a grassroots evangelization in the service of the Church—in the middle of the world—in every sector of society.

Our Founders

Our founder was Fr. Dick Rieman, a former naval aviator, the first member of Opus Dei in The United States, who went on to become a priest. One of our founding directors was Fr. Joseph Musquiz, who, in 1949, was sent by St. Josemaría Escrivá to the United States. In 1944, Fr. Musquiz, was one of the first three men ordained as priests for Opus Dei (along with Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and José María Hernández Garnica).

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[**The Donkey At The Waterwheel**](#)

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