

filling it with meaning.

May both young people and adults realize that holiness, far from being an obstacle to accomplishing our dreams, is in fact their fulfillment. All our desires, all our projects, all our loves can form part of God's plan. As Saint Josemaría reminds us: "Charity lived well is already holiness."

The Christian life does not involve identifying ourselves with an idea, but rather with a person: with Christ Jesus. For faith to illumine each of our steps in life, besides asking ourselves "Who is Christ for me?" let us also consider: "Who am I for Christ?" Thus we will discover the gifts God has given us that are directly related to our personal mission. And then an interior attitude of openness to the needs of others will gradually mature in us, and we will know how to put ourselves at the service of everyone, and see with more clarity the place in the world that God has entrusted to us.

In a society that often thinks too much about well-being, the faith can help us to raise our eyes to a higher reality and discover the true dimension of our own existence. If we are bearers of the Gospel, our passing through this world will be fruitful. And the whole society will without doubt benefit from a generation of young people who ask themselves, with faith in God's love for us: What is my mission in this

life? What mark will I leave behind me?

Interview Granted to *Vatican Insider*, Italy (October 2, 2018)

Andrés Beltramo Álvarez (interviewer)

"Forgiveness for our failings and sins." An unusual request at a time of celebration. On this 90th anniversary of the Opus Dei's founding, the Prelate Fernando Ocáriz wanted to recognize the shortcomings of the members of the Work, especially for those people who did not receive the "generosity and affection they needed." At the same time, he expressed his gratitude for the thousands of people all over the world who, thanks to the path proposed by the Prelature, "wish to fall in love with Christ and be souls of prayer in the midst of the world."

The third successor to Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer is originally from France (he was born into a Spanish family exiled during the civil war). He has been at the head of Opus Dei since January 23, 2017. In this interview with *Vatican Insider* and on the anniversary of its foundation, he speaks about the challenges the Prelature faces and points to the invitation of Pope Francis to all the faithful of the world to pray for the

unity of the Church and against the attacks of the devil. As he states clearly: “Everything that is contrary to unity does not come from God, but from the enemy.”

What is the state of health of Opus Dei on this 90th birthday?

“I thank God for all the Catholics who, with the grace of God, respond freely, every day, to the Christian vocation. Among them, men and women of Opus Dei, or who participate in the apostolates of the Work. The pastoral journeys I have made this summer in Nigeria, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, have also led me to this consideration, seeing so many young people and adults eager to fall in love with Christ and to be souls of prayer in the midst of the world, contemplating many realities of service that have borne fruit thanks to St. Josemaría’s message: schools, hospitals, universities, and so on... To all this we must also add the limitations of each one; the objective or subjective obstacles we find; the difficulty, for example, of developing a true work of evangelization in some complex environments, sometimes where Christians are truly persecuted. An anniversary marks a good time to thank God and, at the same time, to ask for forgiveness for our faults and failings. I am thinking, for example, of those people who have been in contact with the work of Opus Dei and to whom we have not been able to respond with the generosity

and affection they needed. The 90th anniversary leads us to say to God, as Blessed Alvaro del Portillo used to do: ‘Thank you, forgive me, help me more.’”

What does it mean to lead Opus Dei in the times of Pope Francis?

Saint Josemaría loved to repeat in Latin: *Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*. That is, ‘all with Peter, to Jesus through Mary.’ Union with Peter, at all times, is a necessary path for Catholics. Now the Pope invites us all to go forth, avoiding any conformism that holds back the evangelizing dynamic in the periphery that is currently the middle classes of society, in those environments in which, at times, God no longer has space, and poverty of values and ideals grows.

In this sense, it is urgent that we bring the joy of the Gospel to the family and to young people; spaces of evangelization that the last general congress of Opus Dei has set as a priority. Following the Pope’s wish for the Church, also in the Prelature we are committed to helping couples and marriages manifest the beauty of authentic love, while we accompany young people in the discovery of their mission in the world.

Five years have passed since the election of Pope Francis. What has been special to you about this period?

Among other things, his invitation to proclaim the Gospel through what he called the “saints next door”; to do one’s duty (pray, work, take care of the home, take care of the family, rest) with the hope that these tasks, even in the midst of difficulties and suffering, are a way of encountering God and of service to others. The Church is all the baptized together; each one is the protagonist of evangelization. I would also stress the Pope’s insistence on God’s forgiveness and mercy, especially during the Jubilee of Mercy. It implies constantly having in mind God’s love for all men and women, so clearly seen in the sacrament of reconciliation. Despite one’s own miseries, there is no man or woman who cannot hope for God’s forgiveness: there is always a path to return to him. On the other hand, the closeness of Pope Francis to the most vulnerable, calls all Christians to foster the “culture of encounter” that is so evangelical.

A few days ago, the Pope invited the faithful of the world to pray against the attacks of the devil, who always tries to destroy the unity of the Church. How did you receive this invitation?

My first reaction was joy, because Pope Francis’ invitation to pray for such an important intention gives us impetus and hope for the faith that the Pope himself has in prayer. On the other hand, it saddens us, because it responds to a difficult situation. Everything that

is contrary to unity does not come from God, but from the enemy. He also asks us to pray to Saint Michael. Unity is a necessary condition for life, also because, for the Church, for theology and for the faith, the Pope is the visible principle of unity; the burden of unity falls on the Pope and hence he asks us to help with prayer, not only now, but always. Every time he finishes a letter he asks: “Pray for me.” It is clear that it is not just a nice, pious phrase, but that he really believes in prayer and asks for prayer, especially in this difficult moment. We must always pray for the Pope; and the more difficult the situations are, the more dangers there are against unity, the more we need to be with the Pope and with the unity of the Church.

So is the Pope asking that before we become upset or get angry about problems, we need to return to what is essential?

Binding the figure of the Pope with unity is not only good, but essential. The Pope is the visible principle of unity, faith, and communion. I insist, it is a reason for joy, but also for sorrow, because of the current difficulties.

For many years Opus Dei has been present in countries such as China and Russia, the same countries that the Pope has included in his priorities. Are they still “taboo” countries for the Church?

In the case of Russia, the

presence of the Catholic Church is appreciated by the Orthodox hierarchy, and there is a desire for fraternal collaboration, which grew after the meeting between the Pope and the Patriarch of Moscow in 2016. Catholics and Orthodox share many spiritual and cultural challenges, and the faithful of Opus Dei who live in Russia work together with other Christians to promote the family, respect for life, help for the needy, the determination not to be afraid to go against the tide for young people, support for Christians persecuted in different parts of the world, etc.

And in the case of China, on what paths can Christians travel?

As for China, the new agreements necessarily imply new challenges, as the Pope explained. The Church in China wants to live its faith and continue with the work of evangelization, and the few faithful of Opus Dei who work in this great country wish to contribute to this, learning from other Catholics, and bringing the message of sanctification of ordinary life.

After the media crises that Opus Dei has had to deal with in the past, such as that of the “Da Vinci Code,” do you feel that the nature of the Prelature has already been explained clearly enough?

It seems to me that, in large part, these are perceptions of the

past, quite common when a new reality arises in the Church. In the case of Opus Dei, for example, it has required effort to explain the autonomy of its members who, being lay people like most of the faithful of the Church, enjoy the same freedom in their life, professional choices whether intellectual or political, without their views or actions representing the Prelature, as happens with the faithful of any other ecclesial constituency: diocese, ordinariate, etc... As the centenary approaches, there are a great many people who have known Opus Dei directly, not only by hearsay, and have managed to make a true judgment based on reality.

Are there still people who consider it a closed and sectarian group?

It isn't surprising that from time to time pseudo-literary or fictional phenomena like the one you mentioned arise. I think that sometimes there is no other remedy than to respond to these events with a smile and work patiently to bring out the truth. The caricature of Opus Dei was so far from the truth that it was almost comical. With hindsight, I can say that it helped to accumulate experience on how to make ourselves better known, with a much wider audience than usual. And I thank God for the thousands of people who have drawn closer to the Church through this apparently unfortunate event. From the perspective of faith, criticism and opposition have always spurred Christians to a greater spirit of

prayer, humility, and the desire to share with others the joy of a life according to the Gospel.

The future of Opus Dei?

My desire for the future is that, faithful to the charism of Saint Josemaría, all of us in Opus Dei let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit towards a renewed evangelizing drive. It is a matter of bringing the warmth of Christ to many friends, family, colleagues, neighbors. The essential thing about this evangelizing drive is not to set in motion new activities or institutions such as those that already exist, and which, in themselves, are already something very positive, but to fuel personal friendship, openness to all and the spirit of service: profoundly evangelical attitudes that are fundamental to the Christian apostolate and that, at the same time, are compatible with the flaws and weaknesses that we all have.

What will the challenges be?

The challenges are very different. In countries where Christians are a minority, such as Indonesia or Sri Lanka (to name two in which the Prelature has begun a stable work in recent years), it is very important to maintain trust in God and have great faith: the Christian commitment of the Opus Dei faithful, and of Catholics in general, is a small seed, whose fruits grow little by little, with the grace

of God. In other countries of Christian tradition, perhaps the main challenge is to live the Gospel with joy and authenticity, without blending in with a society that often puts material or economic factors first. Another obvious challenge, common to the whole Church, is the generational change. Every year about a thousand faithful of the Prelature die, people who, in a certain sense, have completed their journey: together with the pain experienced in the face of each of these human losses, they are also a great spiritual force and a support for the work of evangelization of the Church in the world.”

Interview Granted to *Famiglia Cristiana*, Italy (October 14, 2018)

By Orazio La Rocca

Carrying out academic and cultural initiatives for the formation of young people all over the world, especially among the most needy. Bringing to life hospitals, reception and rehabilitation centers with the most advanced techniques at the service of the sick, the suffering and those in need of care. But, at the same time, bringing the Word of God to everyone, near and far, men and women, rich and