

Saint Josemaría's Friends: 1902-1927

Constantino Áncel
Academic Research, University of Navarra

At the beginning of his 1 November 2019 pastoral letter on friendship, the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote: "Saint Josemaría frequently reminded us of the human and Christian importance of this great good. There are also abundant testimonies of how he personally formed many friendships that he kept up throughout his lifetime."¹ These words have brought to mind many memories about Saint Josemaría's friendships with a wide variety of people. Some come from books and articles I have read.² Others are the result of years spent researching documentation and stories about Saint Josemaría, which has led me to speak with quite a few people who considered themselves friends of the founder of Opus Dei. The following article focuses on these friendships during the years of Saint Josemaría's life prior to arriving in Madrid in 1927. It is not my intention here to offer a theological reflection on friendship, but rather to present, on the basis of existing documents, testimonies of his strong and abundant friendships.³

The Barbastró and Logroño Years

The biographies of the founder of Opus Dei show us that, from his childhood and adolescence, he was a sociable person who found it easy to relate to others. This quality was assisted partly by his family environment, where children and cousins abounded. In fact, his grandmother Florencia Blanc's home

1. Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 1.

2. Without trying to be exhaustive, I will mention here some of these writings: José Miguel Cejas, *Amigos del fundador del Opus Dei*, Madrid, Palabra, 1992. Rafael Serrano (ed.), *Así le vieron: testimonios sobre Monseñor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Madrid, Rialp, 1992. José Luis González Gullón - Jaime Aurell, "Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer en los años treinta: los sacerdotes amigos," *Studia et Documenta. Rivista dell'Istituto Storico san Josemaría Escrivá*, (hereafter SetD) 3 (2009) 41-106. Salvador Bernal, "Rasgos de buena amistad," *Scripta Theologica* (Jan-Apr 2002, Vol. 34). Idem, *Apuntes sobre la vida del fundador del Opus Dei*, Madrid, Rialp 1976, chapter IV, *Tiempo de amigos*. Lourdes Flamarique, "Amistad," in *Diccionario de san Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, Burgos-Rome, Monte Carmelo - Instituto Storico san Josemaría Escrivá, 2013, pp. 99-105.

3. The existing documentation is made up mainly of eyewitness accounts of Saint Josemaría's life, although some involve memories of people who were unable to write them down before they died. As regards letters during this first period, until his arrival in Madrid these are quite scarce, with less than ten surviving. During the following years the letters preserved are much more abundant.

was known in Barbastro as “the house with all the children.” Moreover, his social interaction outside his own family began at an early age: at the school of the Daughters of Charity, from the age of three, and at the Piarist School, from the age of six. Childhood friendships formed during these years in Barbastro lasted his whole lifetime, despite the fact that he left his hometown at the age of thirteen. Correspondence with Esperanza and Adriana Corrales (who were sisters), José Mur, Martín Sambeat and his wife Lola Lacau, Miguel Cavero, and Cándido Baselga, together with the accounts written by some of them, confirm this for us.

The Prelate says in his letter: “Strengthening bonds with our friends requires time and attention, and often means avoiding comfort-seeking and setting aside our own preferences.”⁴ In Logroño, Saint Josemaría’s ability to make friends grew as he matured. What at first was the expression of a natural disposition, became a manifestation of the virtues needed to form strong friendships that were consolidated over time. Already during these years, we see clear traits of these specific qualities: the ability to listen, to put oneself in the other person’s shoes, the role of justice in personal relationships, a sense of service, readiness to help, and joy. As a result, the friendships forged in Logroño became more solid, as reflected in the memories and letters of José Luis Mena, José María Millán, Pedro Baldomero Larios, Vicente Sáenz de Valluerca, and Isidoro Zorzano.

This picture would be incomplete without mentioning that he also formed friendships with older people. This fact has its origins in the years spent in Barbastro and in his family’s interest in history. The people of Upper Aragon have a deep tie to the deeds and traditions of their land, and like to talk about them. He would have heard at home and in the homes of his cousins and other families stories about the legendary Kingdom of Sobrarbe and the Aragonese epics, ancient and modern. And not only in Barbastro, since in Fonoz, where he spent the summers, he had the opportunity to attend gatherings in the home of his grandmother Constanza, where the famous Arabist scholar Francisco Codera y Zaydín, a close relative of the Escrivá, was often present.

From this opportunity to meet and listen to his elders there arose strong relationships, although naturally with characteristics different from friendships with his contemporaries.⁵ Saint Josemaría often recalled the conversations and anecdotes of Daniel Alfaro, a military priest who helped him defray the expenses of his father’s funeral. Calixto Terés, his high school philosophy

4. Pastoral Letter, 1 November 2019, no. 10.

5. In no. 13 of the 1 November 2019 Pastoral Letter we read: “friendship, like love (of which it is one expression), is not a univocal reality. There is not the same sharing of one’s own intimacy with all of one’s friends. For example, the friendship between husband and wife and the friendship between parents and children that was so strongly recommended by Saint Josemaría and the friendship between siblings or that between co-workers are not identical. In all of these there is a shared inner space which is specific to that particular relationship.”

teacher, was another person with whom he shared mutual admiration and affection. We can also mention here Xavier de Lauzurica, seminary professor and later bishop, and Gregorio Fernández Anguiano, vice-rector of the seminary, who was quick to stand up in defense of Saint Josemaría.⁶

At the San Francisco de Paula Seminary

In the fall of 1920, Saint Josemaría moved to Saragossa to continue his priestly studies at the Pontifical University of San Valero and San Braulio, and later to obtain a law degree. There he formed many friendships with seminarians, university students and professors. In the seminary of San Francisco de Paula⁷ he encountered a new situation: living with young people coming from a quite different social and cultural background. Very few of them came from middle-class and urban families. Initially, he got on better with the latter. His great friend during these years was Francisco Moreno, whose father was a doctor. Moreno's recollections of his seminary days reflect their deep friendship and are the best record of Saint Josemaría's stay at San Francisco de Paula. Their mutual appreciation and affection, despite many challenges and differences, lasted right to the end of their lives. In the final years of his life, Moreno acknowledged that some of the advice Josemaría gave him about his personal situation bothered him, but at the same time he said that he was the only one who always nobly told him the truth to his face.⁸ It was the greatest proof of sincere friendship.⁹

His friendship with Francisco Moreno did not prevent him from forming friendships with the other seminarians. As Agustín Callejas recalls, "Josemaría was very attentive and tried to form friendships with all his companions." In 1922 he began to have special responsibilities when he was named Inspector. The function of this position was to maintain discipline among the seminarians when the Rector was absent. As the Inspector was also a seminarian, his interaction with the other seminarians had to follow somewhat narrow and limited

6. On his interaction with Daniel Alfaro, Calixto Terés, Gregorio Fernández Anguiano and Xavier de Lauzurica, cf. Constantino Ánchel, *Sacerdotes en el acompañamiento espiritual de san Josemaría Escrivá*, in SetD 12 (2018), pp. 28-42.

7. In Saragossa, ecclesiastical studies were carried out at the Pontifical University of San Valero and San Braulio, but candidates for the priesthood resided in two seminaries: the seminary of San Valero and San Braulio, which was attached to the Pontifical University, and the seminary of San Francisco de Paula, which occupied two floors of the Royal Priestly Seminary of San Carlos. Sometimes the seminary of San Francisco de Paula was called the seminary of San Carlos, because of the building that housed it.

8. Florencio Sánchez Bella, who knew and dealt with him, recalls him saying that Saint Josemaría "had been his most faithful friend and the instrument God used to bring him back to the Church" (*Testimony Florencio Sánchez Bella*, AGP, A.5, 244-1-1).

9. See *Testimony of Francisco de Paula Moreno Monforte*, AGP, A.5, 230-1-8. Cf. also Constantino Ánchel, *Sacerdotes en el acompañamiento espiritual de san Josemaría Escrivá*, in SetD 12 (2018), p. 48; and Ramón Herrando Prat de la Riba, *Los años de seminario de Josemaría Escrivá en Zaragoza (1920-1925). El seminario de S. Francisco de Paula*, Madrid, Rialp, 2002, pp. 351-359.

channels. Callejas says that in carrying out this assignment “his spirit of companionship and understanding was evident. I think that the sense of friendship with everyone was as strong as that of his responsibility to fulfil his assignment: he never let any seminarian look bad before the Superiors.”¹⁰ Years later Saint Josemaría wrote: “This concern of mine [for the formation of others] is not something I’ve had only now; since the age of 21 I have been preaching it and I have tried to live it with all my strength.” And he added: “It is possible that in the Seminary of San Carlos there are papers of mine (because I have always been a friend of putting things down in writing) from when I was Superior, with observations filled with understanding, praising the changes for the better in the seminarians, speaking about charity and the need to give an example of charity.”¹¹ As a testimony to these efforts, we have his “Reports on the conduct of the seminarians in the Seminary of San Francisco de Paula,” which are kept in the diocesan archives of Saragossa.¹²

One could point to many aspects of his ability to form friendships and get along with the other seminarians, but I will limit myself to mentioning one that is especially indicative and that, technically, is called tolerance, but in colloquial language is known as “turning a blind eye.” Agustín Callejas describes it graphically in an account that, despite its length, is worth quoting in full: “When we went to class or for a long walk, he pretended not to notice if someone moved away from the others to smoke unnoticed because he understood that this was of no great importance and was only natural for young boys like us. At that time I had a great love for soccer—which I have never lost over the years. I not only liked to play it but also to go see the games played on Sundays at Iberia’s field, my favorite team. This interest of mine was known and tacitly tolerated at the Seminary. In order to attend these games, when the seminarians went for a walk I stayed in my room and went out later. At dinner Josemaría would say to me with an affectionate smile that was very characteristic of him: ‘What, Agustín, today too you were feeling sick and couldn’t come with us?’ These were small things, not expressly authorized but allowed in fact, and that didn’t harm anyone. This shows what a great companion Josemaría was for everyone, his friendship and understanding; it also shows his love for forming people in freedom, which he later practiced all his life.”¹³

At the university

When studying law at the university, the friendships he formed with his classmates were enduring and the mutual affection lasted a lifetime. Right from

10. *Testimony of Agustín Callejas Tello*, AGP, A.5, 201-3-9.

11. Words of Saint Josemaría, quoted by Alvaro del Portillo in *Romana et Matriten, Beatificationis et Canonizationis Servi Dei Iosephmariae Escrivá de Balaguer, Positio super vita et virtutibus, Summarium* no. 153.

12. See Ramón Herrando Prat de la Riba, *Los años de seminario*, pp. 420 ff.

13. *Testimony of Agustín Callejas Tello*, AGP, A.5, 201-3-9.

the start, he interacted with the other students as an equal and without hiding his clerical status. It should be kept in mind that, in intellectual circles, members of the clergy were generally considered to be reactionary and not sufficiently well-educated to understand the great questions of modernity. One of his colleagues recalls that the university student environment “was not an easy environment for a priest. Most of the students were not very religious and viewed the priest with respect, yes, but not with affection or admiration but rather with coldness and indifference. They were seen as distant from us and we unconsciously tried to keep that distance.”¹⁴

For many of his classmates, meeting Saint Josemaría meant the beginning of an authentic friendship that they would always consider alive, even after many years without direct contact. When the news of his death reached them, their affection often turned into devotion.¹⁵ This esteem sprang from a spontaneous sympathy for Saint Josemaría’s demeanor and personality, for his human qualities.¹⁶ And it strengthened as they became aware of the consideration he showed and the interest he took in their affairs. His dealings with them were not restricted only to academic topics or those arising from his stay at the university. In his conversations he also covered more personal matters of a spiritual nature. He never excluded from his affection those who, because of their ideas, were far from the faith. For example, the magistrate Pascual Galbe, who was a judge in the Barcelona Court during the civil war, had a warm friendship with Saint Josemaría despite their quite different outlooks. In the autumn of 1937, he received Saint Josemaría in Barcelona with great affection and even offered to help him if he encountered problems in his flight from the Republican zone.¹⁷

Some characteristics of his relationship with his classmates and colleagues

14. *Testimony of Arturo Landa Higuera*, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3. Bishop José López Ortiz met Josemaría Escrivá in June 1924, when he went to take his law school exams in Saragossa. He recalls: “In the school I noticed that everyone knew him, and also that owing to his communicative and cheerful character he was clearly very well liked” (*Testimony of José López Ortiz*, AGP, A.5, 224-3-2).

15. I am a witness to the following fact. One day in 1988 I had the opportunity to talk with David Mainar. He was in Rome and had gone to pray before the remains of Saint Josemaría. He was visibly moved. When he finished, he began to evoke memories of his university years and said forcefully several times: “Josemaría and I were very close friends.” And he added: “What’s more, I was his closest friend.” Listening to him, I was reminded of similar expressions from other university classmates of his, who wanted to assert how strong their friendship with Saint Josemaría had been.

16. A colleague, Juan Antonio Iranzo, recalls: “Josemaría was very cheerful and had a great sense of humor. In his dealings with others he was straightforward and simple, not at all conceited or vain. He was a great companion, very open and frank” (*Testimony of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres*, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3).

17. See Jordi Miralbell, *Días de espera en guerra. san Josemaría en Barcelona, otoño de 1937*, Palabra, Madrid, 2017, pp. 97-101.

From the testimonies of those who knew him at the University, the following characteristics of Saint Josemaría's interactions with others can be highlighted:

— The first was that he didn't hide his clerical status, as mentioned above.¹⁸ His way of dealing with those he met at the University could be seen by some as surprising in those years. He didn't use his status as a claim to be above others when interacting with the professors and students at the university. When speaking with a professor, he was always a disciple, and a fellow disciple with the other students. He assimilated with great respect the human values and virtues of the university world and acquired an authentic juridical mentality.¹⁹ Luis Palos recalls his regular attendance at the classes,²⁰ and Juan Antonio Iranzo, Fernando Vivanco, and Arturo Landa remember him as a good student who obtained good grades.²¹

— The second characteristic was the simplicity and humility that marked his relationships with others. Many people emphasize his naturalness and lack of affectation, his simplicity, openness, warmth and joy. Juan Antonio Iranzo recalled that, despite being a clergyman, everyone wanted to speak with him. Some people, on seeing him dressed in a cassock, felt a certain misgiving at first. But his trusting and open spirit soon won them over. He behaved with everyone in the same way.²²

— A third distinctive trait was his understanding and refinement with others. Saint Josemaría's innate qualities, which had developed over the years, made his personality stand out in the university environment. He possessed a special attractiveness that spontaneously won him the esteem of the other university students. But they also discovered in him an uncommon human quality that contrasted with the idea then held of the behavior of a clergyman. They noticed his remarkable ability to communicate, along with an extraordinary

18. It was not very common for clerics to be seen in university classrooms during those years. However, in the same year that Saint Josemaría began to attend university classes, a priest and three seminarians also enrolled (cf. publication of the seminary of San Valero and San Braulio, *Nuestro Apostolado*, Saragossa, June 29, 1924, no. 11, p. 75). But in the testimonies referred to, his university companions only mention their acquaintance with one cleric: Saint Josemaría.

19. The testimony of Professor Miguel Sancho Izquierdo is quite interesting when he recalls his first conversation with Saint Josemaría: "Recalling that conversation later on, which even then made a deep impression on me, more than once it seemed to me that he was already pointing to secularity, the appreciation for human realities that was to be a characteristic of his spirituality and apostolate" (*Testimony of Miguel Sancho Izquierdo*, AGP, A.5, 245-1-9).

20. See *Testimony of Luis Palos Yranzo*, AGP, A.5, 235-2-13.

21. *Relations of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres*, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3; of *Fernando Vivanco Soto*, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1; and of *Arturo Landa Higuera*, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3.

22. See *Testimony of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres*, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3. See also *Testimonies of Arturo Landa Higuera*, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3; of *Fernando Vivanco Soto*, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1; and of *Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres*, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3.

refinement that kept him from imposing himself on others, but that, in turn, did not alienate him. He found it easy to get along with everyone, because he knew how a university student was supposed to act. He had an open spirit, with a great understanding for others' ways of thinking. There are many testimonies about his openness to everyone. For example, Luis Palos says that "Josemaría entered the university with his extraordinary gift for people that quickly led him to form many friendships. Undoubtedly all of us were drawn to him. He had an open mentality, a universal spirit."²³ Other classmates testify to the same fact: "He was an excellent classmate for everyone. He was loved by everyone, whether they were believers or not, and despite the fact that some classmates were clearly anticlerical," Fernando Vivanco says.²⁴

Arturo Landa is the one who gives us the fullest description of these qualities: "He was very friendly. He always had his characteristic smile on his lips. As soon as someone spoke to him about any topic, a smile would appear. It was not, certainly, the smile of a person who wants to make himself attractive to others artificially. Josemaría's smile was spontaneous. He was truly a person it was easy to get close to. Despite his youth, Josemaría already had a serene gravity. He treated everyone equally and did not shy away from dealing with someone who thought differently from him. Josemaría Escrivá respected others' viewpoints and opened his friendship to everyone. I remember some persons in our class who, trying to be funny (and also to annoy him), would tell some inappropriate jokes in front of Josemaría. Not that there was anything especially offensive about them, and they could even be considered natural among students, but they detracted from the consideration due to a priest. He kept quiet, and it seemed to me that it made him a bit angry, because it had to be annoying for him. He kept quiet, as I said, and elegantly moved on to another topic."²⁵

— A fourth quality was the apostolic zeal shown in his relationships with his companions. From the moment he began attending classes, his classmates (although at first what attracted their attention was his great human stature) soon realized how deeply he loved Christ and was trying to identify himself with Him. They felt themselves challenged both humanly and supernaturally.

Almost all his companions in the seminary and at the university retained a clear memory of Saint Josemaría. Those in the seminary realized that he rose above the normal pattern of the seminarian of the time, but, in most cases, they didn't see further than that. That is, they didn't grasp his spiritual depth and remained only with the perception that he was somehow different. However, those at the Law School not only noticed that he was a priest far above the average, but also often recognized his inner strength and deep spiritual restlessness.

23. *Testimony of Luis Palos Yranzo*, AGP, A.5, 235-2-13.

24. *Testimony of Fernando Vivanco Soto*, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1.

25. *Testimony of Arturo Landa Higuera*, AGP, A.5, 331-1-3.

Perhaps this explains why his fellow classmates in Law School always treated him as if he were already a priest, even before he was ordained. Some of them, because of their strong friendship, shared with him a special trust. Several testimonies tell us that Saint Josemaría's closest friends were David Mainar, Domingo Fumanal and Luis Palos. These are the ones who have left the clearest written account of his piety and apostolic zeal.²⁶ Mainar speaks about his own surprise on seeing Saint Josemaría's way of relating to those around him. He didn't see him carrying out his apostolate as a cleric, but rather as a friend. Saint Josemaría, he tells us, "didn't speak to his companions about religion. He didn't like to 'sermonize,' but tried simply to be a good friend."²⁷ Fernando Vivanco says that although he doesn't remember him speaking with him about specific apostolic concerns, later when Saint Josemaría was ordained he decided to go to him for confession: "I liked to go to confession with him, once he was already a priest. And I did go very often. My friends who found out about it asked me if it caused me any embarrassment and shame to do so, since we shared so much trust and friendship. To me it seemed the most natural thing in the world and even the ideal thing to have that friendship in order to go to confession more easily."²⁸

— A final quality, which in a way sums up the previous ones, was his readiness to help and serve his friends. The first exchange of letters that has been preserved was between Saint Josemaría and Francisco Vilellas, a law student. In this correspondence they talk about academic matters such as borrowed notes and programs, but they also mention material favors far removed from the university context. Vilellas, for example, asks him to inquire in a car accessory store about a retreaded tire he had left there before finishing the semester and going to his family home outside Saragossa.²⁹

The Augustinian friar José López Ortiz recalls his first meeting with Saint Josemaría. It was in June 1924. He had gone to the Law School in Saragossa to take his exams. As soon as Josemaría saw him enter the building, he came over and asked if he could assist him. "Josemaría was very well prepared and knew an environment that was unfamiliar to me; generously, and with great naturalness, he gave me valuable guidance on topics related to my studies."³⁰

A final example. One of the professors who taught Canon Law, Juan Moneva, was known to require that his students, since they had all studied

26. "He was very pious," Mainar writes, "with a piety that struck me powerfully. It wasn't a piety that I would call maudlin or somehow sad. It was a warm, cheerful, attractive piety, which was not only compatible with but helped foster his constant sense of humor and positive vision of life" (*Testimony of David Mainar Pérez*, AGP, A.5, 226-1-6).

27. *Testimony of David Mainar Pérez*, AGP, A.5, 226-1-6.

28. *Testimony of Fernando Vivanco Soto*, AGP, A.5, 351-3-1.

29. Letter from Josemaría Escrivá to Francisco Vilellas Orensanz, Saragossa, July 27, 1925; and from Vilellas to Escrivá, Sos del Rey Católico, August 5, 1925.

30. *Testimony of José López Ortiz*, AGP, A.5, 224-3-2.

Latin in high school, should be able to translate correctly in class the canons of the Code of the Church, and recite them in Latin when asked. Some of the students found this requirement quite demanding. As Domingo Fumanal recalls, “we found ourselves in a tight spot to be able to take the exam. Josemaría volunteered to give us classes.”³¹ And Juan Antonio Iranzo relates: “we went three days a week to the Seminary of San Carlos to receive an hour-long class.”³² And Fumanal adds: “he was giving us classes (Juan Antonio Iranzo, someone else and I) at the Seminary of San Carlos, in his room. I don’t recall him charging anything even though he was not very well off.”³³

Relationship with teachers

His university experience provided another opportunity to make new friendships, namely with the professors he met in the classrooms. Some were relatively young, such as Miguel Sancho Izquierdo, born in 1890 and Professor of Natural Law and Philosophy of Law. He recounts his first meeting with Saint Josemaría, who went to see him in his office and told him “that he wanted to study law, and since he was a seminarian still engaged in theological studies, he would enroll as an unofficial student. He wanted, however, to attend classes and get to know, from the inside, the university atmosphere.”³⁴ Thus a relationship was born that lasted his whole life. And he concludes: “He knew how to understand people, love them and make himself loved, respecting the personality of each one without ever being exclusive, but on the contrary valuing and appreciating what was proper to each one.”³⁵

Carlos Sánchez del Río, future professor of Roman Law and only five years older than Saint Josemaría, recalls the moment when he asked permission to attend his classes as an unofficial student: “It was in the early 1920s when I met Fr. Josemaría Escrivá in Saragossa. He was still a seminarian at the time and came to consult me about the classes he wanted to take at the Law School of the university, where I was Secretary-General. From that first meeting I was left with the impression—which was later confirmed—of his distinguished personality, his elegant appearance, and his naturalness, without any affectation, since he was in no way—not in the slightest—pretentious, but on the contrary, simple and cheerful.”³⁶ The acquaintance extended beyond the period of university studies. As the years went by, when Sánchez del Río was appoint-

31. *Testimony of Domingo Fumanal Borrueal*, AGP, A.5 212-3-9.

32. *Testimony of Juan Antonio Iranzo Torres*, AGP, A.5, 220-2-3.

33. *Testimony of Domingo Fumanal Borrueal*, AGP, A.5 212-3-9. The other classmates were Antonio Redondo and Manuel Marraco, as Juan Antonio Iranzo recalled in an interview on August 3, 1975.

34. *Testimony of Miguel Sancho Izquierdo*, AGP, A.5, 245-1-9.

35. *Testimony of Miguel Sancho Izquierdo*, AGP, A.5, 245-1-9. He adds: “How often he spoke to me with affection about my ‘Franciscanism!’ He knew that my greatest title of honor was to be a Franciscan tertiary, and he praised it.”

36. *Testimony of Carlos Sánchez del Río Peguero*, AGP, A.5, 245-1-5.

ed Delegate of the Government in the Navarra Institute of General Studies, their meetings became more frequent. As he says in summary: “he was very sociable with everyone. He had the right word for everyone. He was also very humble. The most striking characteristic of Father Josemaría was certainly his cheerfulness and cordiality. His answers to any question were spontaneous and quick, and showed great mental agility.”³⁷

Other professors were older, such as Juan Moneva, Inocencio Jiménez, and José Pou de Foxá. Moneva, born in 1871, was professor of Canon Law. Right from the first moment, a special rapport and deep friendship developed between professor and student, and in fact, he was one of the few people present at his first Mass.³⁸ In the speech that Saint Josemaría gave at the University of Saragossa upon receiving an honorary doctorate, he dedicated some heartfelt words to the memory of his teacher: “Of all my professors at that time, he was the one I dealt with most closely, and from this relationship a friendship was born that lasted until his death. Don Juan showed me on more than one occasion a marvelous affection, and I was always able to appreciate the treasure of strong Christian piety, rectitude of life, and a charity that was as discreet as it was admirable, hidden under the cover (which some people were deceived by) of his sharp irony and the jovial graciousness of his wit. My heart is truly moved by memories of Don Juan and my other teachers.”³⁹

Finally, we turn to the priest José Pou de Foxá, professor of Roman Law. Their first meeting “took place in the 1923-24 academic year, when Pou de Foxá had just taken over the Chair of Roman Law at the University of Saragossa. Josemaría Escrivá enrolled in this course that year, and as he had done in the first years of his studies, he attended the classes as an auditor or free student. After the summer, he took the exams, and Pou de Foxá gave him the highest grade possible in Roman Law.”⁴⁰

The General Archives of the Prelature contain a letter that Pou addressed to José Escrivá Corzán (the father of Saint Josemaría) on November 18, 1924. It reads as follows: “In due time I received the pleasant [letter] from you dated the 26th of last month. It would have pleased me very much if you had come

37. *Testimony of Carlos Sánchez del Río Peguero*, AGP, A.5, 245-1-5.

38. In the *Testimony of Pilar Moneva y de Oro*, AGP, A.5 228-4-2, we read: “I remember that one day (of which I would not even know the precise year, if it were not for the prayer card that I keep) my mother told me: ‘Tomorrow we are going to attend the first Mass of one of your father’s pupils, whom he loves very much and is very concerned about, since his father died recently.’ When he finished the Mass, he knelt at the feet of the statue of our Lady and remained there silently for some time. Then he went to the sacristy. My father went to the sacristy and my mother and I left.”

39. Various authors, *Josemaría Escrivá y la universidad*, Pamplona, Eunsu 1993. Address “Huellas de Aragón en la Iglesia Universal” [Traces of Aragón in the Universal Church], Saragossa, October 21, 1960, pp. 45-48.

40. Constantino Ánchel, “Sacerdotes en el acompañamiento espiritual de san Josemaría Escrivá,” SetD 12 (2018) p. 43.

here so I could have had the pleasure of meeting you. For from getting to know your son and his character, all the members of your family have already endeared themselves to me.”⁴¹ As can be deduced from this letter, “very soon he discovered the special qualities of his disciple, and his attitude developed into admiration. Despite the difference in age, a strong friendship arose. At first, their conversations focused on academic topics, but over time they began speaking with great mutual trust about more personal matters related to the priesthood and the ecclesiastical environment in Saragossa.”⁴²

When Saint Josemaría moved to Madrid, Pou followed closely his first academic steps and also helped him resolve some matters with the diocesan curia of Saragossa. They kept up an extensive correspondence, of which more than a hundred letters are preserved. In 1933 Saint Josemaría, when recalling the priests who “gave warmth to my incipient vocation,” includes José Pou de Foxá, and describes him as “the loyal, noble and good friend who has always stood up for us.”⁴³

By way of corollary

The above is a brief summary of Saint Josemaría’s friendships during the years prior to the founding of Opus Dei. In the light of what we have seen, some concluding considerations can be offered.

Most of those who knew and dealt with him saw his capacity for friendship as the result of his humanly attractive way of being: his simplicity, warmth, etc. However, some were also able to grasp his apostolic concern. Various documented sources testify to the fact that Saint Josemaría began attending classes at the Law School with an apostolic intent.⁴⁴

His fellow students also testify to his special apostolic concern for the young people at the university, in whom he perceived a void in their religious formation. But they also realized that he didn’t see his role as merely teaching those who were ignorant, but that he sought to win friends so that, through personal contact, he could foster their responsibility and enable them to carry out the apostolic enterprises that their university formation would make them capable of later on.⁴⁵

41. Letter from José Pou de Foxá to José Escrivá Corzán, Saragossa, November 18, 1924. A few days later, on November 27, Saint Josemaría’s father died.

42. Constantino Áncel, “Sacerdotes en el acompañamiento espiritual de san Josemaría Escrivá,” SetD 12 (2018) p. 43.

43. Constantino Áncel, “Sacerdotes en el acompañamiento espiritual de san Josemaría Escrivá,” SetD 12 (2018) p. 43. The words in quotation marks are from *Intimate Notes*, no. 959, March 22, 1933.

44. As we know from other sources, Saint Josemaría studied law at the request and on the advice of his father. This was the reason he enrolled at the university. But in addition to this first intention, he wanted to take advantage of the apostolic opportunities this new situation provided.

45. We have no written record of how Saint Josemaría approached his apostolic activity

These characteristics of his apostolic way of acting, shown already during his years in Saragossa, continued and were consolidated in the following years, when he moved to Madrid.

during these years. But in *Christ is Passing By*, no. 99, he tells us how he always viewed his work as a priest and pastor of souls: “If my own personal experience is of any help, I can say that I have always seen my work as a priest and shepherd of souls as being aimed at helping each person to face up to all the demands of his life and to discover what God wants from him in particular—without in any way limiting that holy independence and blessed personal responsibility which are the features of a Christian conscience. This way of acting and this spirit are based on respect for the transcendence of revealed truth and on love for the freedom of the human person. I might add that they are also based on a realization that history is undetermined and open to a variety of human options—all of which God respects.”