

THE WORK (II)

Its' universality and unity

Two aspects of the Church are considered in these lines, as they apply to Opus Dei: universality and unity. Related to these are other essentially Christian themes which will also be considered: fraternity, openness of heart, the sense of responsibility to transmit what one has received, as the first disciples did. For example, it was St Luke who in his Gospel wrote *about all that Jesus began to do and teach* (Acts 1:1), and in the *Acts* followed it up with the Ascension, Pentecost, and the preaching of Peter and Paul, demonstrating how all nations would be open to the Gospel from the universal Church present in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:9-12)

1. Universality in time and space

Opus Dei, as a small part of the Catholic Church, takes part in her mission to extend the presence of Jesus Christ in time and in space: the Church extends throughout the world *toto orbe terrarum*.¹ Our Lord had promised this to Peter: *I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Mt 16:18). The *gates* here reflect the power of evil, for in the East of old the authorities meted out justice at the gates of a city.

Opus Dei's universality, like that of the Church, is geographic, being on the five continents. It is also personal, in the sense that it is directed to men and women of every country in the world. This desire for universality is born from its character which is catholic (which in Greek means universal). It is united to an essential aspect of its message: the sanctification of all human tasks, especially that of work. *Our aim is to collaborate with all other Christians in the great mission of being witnesses of Christ's Gospel, to recall that it can vivify any human situation. The task that awaits us is immense. It is a sea without shores, for as long as there are men on earth, no matter how much the techniques of production may change, they will have some type of work that can be offered to God and sanctified. With God's grace, Opus Dei wants to teach them how to make their work an act of service to all men of every condition, race and religion. Serving men in this way, they will serve God.*²

In practice, in Opus Dei one finds people of all social environments and in all honest manual or intellectual professions. Each one makes an effort to sanctify his or her work and the ordinary activities of life. As regards geographical extension, at the end of 2016, the prelature was present in 70 countries, organized in 49 circumscriptions. This presence can be extended to all parts: in practice, it is important that wherever a person feels the calling to Opus Dei, this person can be attended to there and given formation, without having to change location or profession. Pope Francis, on the occasion of the beatification of St Josemaría's first successor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, wrote: "The heart of the new Blessed beat with the desire to bring the Good News to all hearts. And so he travelled to many countries to foster new projects for evangelization, undeterred by difficulties, moved by his love for God and his brothers and sisters. One who is very immersed in God is able to be very close to other people. The first condition for announcing Christ to them is

¹ *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer I or Roman Canon, *Te igitur*.

² ST JOSEMARÍA, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 57.

to love them, because Christ loves them before we do.³

2. *The unity of Opus Dei*

The universality of Opus Dei is necessarily based on its spiritual, moral and juridical unity, which involves *union with the Father and the directors*.

The Prelate of Opus Dei is named by the Pope *ad vitam* – for life. Just as a bishop in his diocese is the principle and visible foundation of unity, so is the Prelate for the prelature.⁴ The union of the faithful of Opus Dei with their Prelate and his intentions moves the intellect, the will, and the affections. He is a father in the Lord⁵ for the portion of the People of God entrusted to him. Through this unity, the faithful of Opus Dei, priests and laypeople, feel more united with the Pope, bishops and Catholics worldwide.

Unity in Opus Dei is both a gift and a task. This is why one has to ask for it, just as one asks for the unity of all Christians, uniting oneself to the prayer of Christ who sets a high target since he compares it to the inter-Trinitarian unity: *they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me* (Jn 17:20). That is why the propagation of the faith, that is to say, the extension of the Church, also depends on this unity. Being a gift, unity should be guarded by distancing oneself from sin, which is the deepest cause of evil, countering the activity of the devil (from the Greek *diabolein*, to divide), the “father of lies” (cf. Jn 8:44), who is bent on cooling charity among the disciples of Christ.

In the authority of the prelature – setting aside the qualities and defects of individuals – the faithful see the authority of God. When it comes to acting, this faith gives one great freedom, without servility or adulation, but charity shown in affection, desires for unity and obedience. The same faith leads one to see in the Directors of Centres, people who follow the Prelate and transmit his fatherly cares: these Directors act as brothers in the Lord, and have no power of governance. In fact, neither the local organization of Centres nor spiritual direction form part of the hierarchy of governance.

3. *Fraternity and big-heartedness*

*How well the early Christians practised this ardent charity which went far beyond the limits of mere human solidarity or natural kindness. They loved one another, through the heart of Christ, with a love both tender and strong.*⁶ St Josemaría traced this love to the fact of being children of the one God the Father, and united it to the hunger which saves all of humanity. And he continued: *Tertullian writing in the second century tells us how impressed the pagans were by the behaviour of the faithful at that time. So attractive was it both supernaturally and humanly that they often remarked: ‘See how they love one another’ (Tertullian, Apologeticus, 39: PL 1, 471).*⁷ Perhaps we have discovered these words echoed when, having got to know the Work, we noticed the joy proper to a small family, an integral part of the larger family of the children of God which is the Church. All this is imbued with the spirit of the gospel. In an atmosphere of confidence we discover a way of living which respects a very wide pluralism, the fruit of a sincere love for one another. Fraternity in the Work is born with Baptism and with the common vocation to Opus Dei. It is strengthened in the Eucharist and in prayer, in kindness, patiently loving others as they are, with the humble ambition of loving them more. In the Statutes which the Holy See gave to Opus Dei, we read that in Christ we are more than friends, we are brothers: “We are all friends – *‘But I have called you friends’*

³ FRANCIS, Letter to the Prelate of Opus Dei on the occasion of the Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo del Portillo, 26 June 2014, in *Romana* (2014) 50, p. 265.

⁴ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

⁵ Cf. Article 6.

⁶ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 225.

⁷ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Friends of God*, 225; Cf. 228.

(John 15:15) – and indeed sons of the same Father, and thus brothers in Christ and together with Christ. Therefore, the special means of apostolate of the faithful of the Prelature is friendship and habitual dealings with their colleagues at work.”⁸

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). The charity which we direct towards God is the same supernatural virtue which draws us towards our neighbour. In this way we love the goodness of God present in others, created in his image and likeness, made *other Christs* by the action of grace. That is why the greatest love is always found *in the Lord* and it leads one to sacrifice oneself for others *until Christ be formed in you* (Gal 4:19), as St Paul says. Fraternity among the members of Opus Dei also has its roots in apostolate. They are united knowing themselves to be in the same supernatural enterprise, pursuing the same goals: evangelization in the midst of everyday jobs to communicate to human beings the joy of knowing oneself to be children of God. When we all face in the same direction, there is then very deep harmony. We don’t distance ourselves because we are linked by big objectives, which are those of the Church, and within it, of the Work.

St Josemaría invited one to have a *big, universal heart*. Fraternity in Opus Dei does not enclose anyone within this Work; on the contrary it opens one’s heart to the needs of all souls. As St Paul told the Corinthians: *Our mouth is open to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return – I speak as to children – widen your hearts also*” (2 Cor 6:11-13).

Charity is born of humility. *Make sure that your good intentions are always accompanied by humility. Because good intentions often go together with harsh judgements, almost amounting to an incapacity to yield, and a certain personal, national or party pride.*⁹ The closed group becomes a refuge of the mediocre, who often tend to attribute to themselves medals other have won. *I dislike intensely anything that might sound like ‘blowing one’s own trumpet’.*¹⁰ We all descend from Adam and one should not reduce a person to his ethnic or geographic origin This is what Nathanael did when he was asked, and before Christ had taught him to be more broadminded: “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*” (Jn 1:46). If patriotism is good, tribalism or nationalism isn’t:¹¹ *Love your own country: it is a Christian virtue to be patriotic. But if patriotism becomes nationalism, which leads you to look at other people, at other countries, with indifference, with scorn, without Christian charity and justice, then it is a sin.*¹² St Josemaría invites us to be positive, and to see the good things in other countries: *To be “Catholic” means to love one’s Country, letting no one surpass us in that love. And, at the same time, to hold as mine the noble aspirations of all countries. How many glories of France are glories of mine! And, in the same way, many things that are a matter of pride for Germans, Italians, Englishmen..., for Americans and Asians and Africans, are a source of pride for me as well. –Catholic!: big heart, wide-open mind.*¹³ At the same time he highlights the danger, for the Church, of human factions: *You must reject that form of nationalism which hinders understanding and harmony. In many moments of history it has been one of the most evil of barriers. You must reject it yet more strongly, since it would be all the more harmful, when it tries to set foot within the Body of the Church, where the unity of everyone and everything in the love of Jesus Christ*

⁸ CODEX IURIS PARTICULARIS SEU STATUTA PRAELATURAE SANCTAE CRUCIS ET OPERIS DEI, 117,

⁹ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Furrow*, 722.

¹⁰ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 18.

¹¹ The word “nationalism” is used in this context to refer to a negative approach which is described further on in the text. However, with this term we don’t wish to allude to political options, legitimate in themselves, provided they don’t get in the way of solidarity between men or, general, against a Christian spirit.

¹² ST JOSEMARÍA, *Furrow*, 315.

¹³ ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Way*, 525.

ought to shine out most clearly.¹⁴

The founder of Opus Dei invited one to get over a ‘narrow small-minded mentality’, which leads to subordinating the universal to the local. This avoids the so called “self-referential”, which consists in enclosing oneself and not knowing or wanting to know anything other than what is one’s own. This is something intrinsically contradictory for any authentic ecclesial reality; and consequently for Opus Dei, which was born in the Church, by and for the Church, where we find the truth of St Paul’s words: *So let no one boast of men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s* (1 Cor 3:21-23).

What is local is subordinate to the universal awareness that the person is never a means. In this way, in their personal apostolate, the faithful of the Work try to bear in mind the wider horizon of the work of the Prelature: they know and follow the guidelines of the Father, they coordinate their efforts with those of other people, whether they be in the Work or not, rejecting the temptation to put oneself in the limelight in initiatives. At the same time, they move in the wider horizon of the life of the Church, nourished by Sacred Scripture, the sacraments, the living Tradition of the Church, the liturgy, the Magisterium of the Pope and bishops, the lives and teachings of the saints, and as is obvious, the teachings and example of the founder. What is therefore important is to have a higher reality as a reference point. The rest are overcome by facing up to them as these words of St Josemaría suggest: *It is true that sometimes you find serious shortcomings in Christians’ lives. But the important thing is not ourselves and our shortcomings. The only thing that matters is Jesus. It is Christ we must talk about, not ourselves.*¹⁵

Furthermore, knowing that everything that is true comes from the Holy Spirit,¹⁶ the faithful of Opus Dei, each one according their abilities and condition, have to get to know and to love the different cultures which embody a Christian spirit: literature, art, history, the sciences... And, in a special way, those of the place where they reside, although this may not be their place of origin.

4. Family traditions

St Paul exhorts the Thessalonians with these words: *Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter* (2 Thess 2:15). They are ethical and didactical traditions, which refer both to deeds and teachings (cf. 2 Thess 2:17). And so, a sign of life in the Church are its traditions; and this also happens in Opus Dei: “Opus Dei, my children, is not “a thing”; nor even, primarily, an institution. Like the Church, of which it forms part, it is a communion of persons, the kind of communion proper to a family. In our case, it has family customs and traditions which show how paternity, filiation and fraternity are taken very seriously, in accordance with the spirit that God entrusted to our Founder.”¹⁷

Family traditions in Opus Dei help to strengthen the bonds which arise from one’s vocation itself, they set aflame the desire for many souls to enjoy this anticipation of heaven which comes from fraternal living in Christ: the *hundredfold* (Mt 19:29). Following St Josemaría’s teaching and his life, these traditions are loved and transmitted, first by living them faithfully. They include the norms and customs which foster habitual and confident conversation with God, with our Lady, according to the spirit of Opus Dei which the founder left “sculptured”. All are rooted in Christian traditions. The faithful of Opus Dei are called to live the inheritance received and transmitted by St Josemaría, in all its original purity and in its integrity, without being rigid, giving life to these family traditions with Love, which is the supreme law. A sign of this spirit, consists, for example, in giving material help which repairs to houses always require, for they are not *houses without an*

¹⁴ ST JOSEMARÍA, *The Forge*, 879.

¹⁵ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Christ is Passing By*, 163.

¹⁶ Cf. ST THOMAS AQUINAS, *S Th*, I. II, q. 109, a. 1, ad 1: “*Omne verum, a quocumque dicatur, a Spiritu Sancto est*” – all truth, whoever may say it, comes from the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ JAVIER ECHEVARRÍA, *Pastoral Letter*, 28 November 1995, 17.

owner.¹⁸

Tradition is received, and as in large families, it is transmitted. In the most ancient description of the Resurrection, a little more than twenty years later, St Paul is a witness to “the living tradition of the Resurrection”:¹⁹ *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures* (1 Cor 15:3).

He also transmitted to the Corinthians the basic points of the mystery of the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 11:23-33). At a different level, but always within the framework of an authentic life according to the spirit of the Gospel, the same happens in the supernatural family of Opus Dei: its members try to form themselves well so as to transmit, to those who come later, the spirit of Opus Dei, integrally and pure.

St Josemaría used to speak of members being *links of the one chain*. During the Spanish civil war (1936-1939) he spent more than two months taking refuge in the Honduran Legation in Madrid. He was anxious to leave as soon as he could, so as to be able to extend the apostolate of the Work, and he preached in these terms: *Yes, my sons, all of us must be united, in a true union of charity. I'm not a separate link, a loose verse. By God's mercy, I'm the first link, and you're first links as well in a chain that will continue till the end of time. I'm not alone. Now there are people ready to suffer with me, to think with me, to share with me in the life that God has given this body of the Work, which has hardly been born. And many more people will come in the future. I have the duty of praying for them, for you and for all those who will follow you. I have to ask that all of you be granted firm perseverance, faith, strength of soul, and an understanding of the spirit of the Work.*²⁰

And, on another occasion, with the humble certainty of faith, he could discern a horizon which reminded him of the song the angels sang to the shepherds, announcing the glory of God and peace to men of good will (cf. Lk 2:14): *I see the Work over the centuries always youthful, elegant, beautiful and fruitful, and always defending Christ's peace so that all may come to possess it. We will help society recognise the rights of the person, of the family, and of the Church. Our apostolate will diminish fratricidal hatred and mistrust among peoples. And my daughters and sons, fortes in fide* (1 Pet 5:9), *firm in the faith, will anoint every wound with the sweet balm of Christ's charity.*²¹

G. Derville
2 October 2016

Comments and suggestions to: collationes@collationes.org

© ISSRA, 2017

¹⁸ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Instruction*, 31 May 1936, 63; Cf. *ibidem*, note 111.

¹⁹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 639.

²⁰ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching*, 19 May 1937.

²¹ ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 16 July 1933*, 26.