

FOREWORD

THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN EDITION OF THIS BOOK was published shortly after Pope John Paul II beatified Msgr. Josemaría Escrivá on May 17, 1992. Bishop Alvaro del Portillo himself died only a little over a year later, on March 23, 1994, just after returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; he said his last Mass on earth in the Church of the Cenacle in Jerusalem—traditionally believed to be the site of our Lord’s institution of the Holy Eucharist. His successor as Prelate of Opus Dei is Fr. Javier Echevarría, who worked closely with Msgr. Escrivá during the twenty-five years before his death, and who was secretary general (and later vicar general) of Opus Dei for the almost nineteen years during which Bishop del Portillo served as successor to the founder. The current Prelate was ordained a bishop by Pope John Paul II on January 6, 1995.

The interviewer, Cesare Cavalleri, who was born in northern Italy in 1936, has been the publisher of the theological journal *Studi Cattolici* since 1965, and a columnist and television critic for the Italian newspaper *Avvenire* since its beginnings in 1968. His column, “Persone & Parole” (“Persons and Words”), gave rise to his book of the same name, published in 1989. He has also published a version in Italian (in poetic form) of *Libro de la Pasión*, by the Chilean poet and theologian José Miguel Ibáñez Langlois, and is a professor of communications arts at the University of Genoa.

PREFACE

FIRST OF ALL, I would like to express my profound thanks to the late Bishop Alvaro del Portillo for his generosity in sharing with me his personal recollections, together with relevant letters and documents, which cast light on little-known features of the personality of Opus Dei's founder, whom, as of May 17, 1992, the Church venerates as a Saint.

Having lived for forty years at the side of Msgr. Escrivá, Bishop del Portillo was a privileged—even more, a unique—witness to the founder's holy life and his untiring and heroic activity for the good of the Church and all souls.

This book is relatively brief, covering only some aspects of the founder's personality and correspondence to God's initiative. It is by no means exhaustive. His spiritual richness was such that even a much longer book could scarcely do it justice. The founder's message—a practical spirituality—is, in my opinion, most clearly shown through a combination of anecdotes, specific deeds, and personal experiences. This book is not, therefore, presented as any kind of substitute for the biographies of Opus Dei's founder. An acquaintance with them would, in fact, provide a historical context for the information contained herein, much of which has never before been published.

Carrying out this interview was a most gratifying professional and spiritual experience. Gaining a deeper knowledge of so beloved a man of God through the living experience of his closest son was the source of a deep joy.

There only remains for me to express my hope that the readers of these pages will be moved by St. Josemaría's life and virtues, so faithfully reflected in the words of his first successor, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.