

PREFACE

On June 26, 1975, Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of Opus Dei, died in Rome. The news media at the time highlighted his reputation for holiness, the importance of his life, and the fruitful furrow he had opened up in the history of the Church. Some months later, in September of the same year, members of Opus Dei from all over the world met in Rome and unanimously elected the founder's closest aide, Alvaro del Portillo y Diez de Sollano, as his successor as President General. Immediately afterward, addressing the press, Fr. Alvaro del Portillo spoke of how the spirit of Opus Dei showed people "how to immerse themselves in all noble human activities, to involve themselves in a Christian way, in God's presence, in all those things of the earth which men and women love in a pure and upright way." He stressed that "family life, daily work, the rights and duties that life in society implies, in other words everything which goes to make up a person's ordinary life, can be sanctified."¹

In June 1976, in an article to mark the first anniversary of St. Josemaría's death, he again referred to the universal call to holiness, to the sanctification of work, to viewing marriage as a Christian vocation. . . . Monsignor Escrivá, through his contribution in all these fields, was, he said, "one of the great precursors of the second Vatican Council."²

¹ For the full text of this address, see, e.g., *Studi Cattolici* 176 (Milan 1975) 612.

² A. del Portillo, "Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer, testigo de amor a la Iglesia," in *Palabra* 130 (Madrid, 1976) 205-210.

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Very many Churchmen have spoken or written along similar lines. One of these testimonies calls for special mention: Pope John Paul II, in a homily given on August 19, 1979, addressed to a group of members of Opus Dei, said, "Your institution has as its aim the sanctification of ordinary life while remaining in the world, in your own work setting: living the gospel in the world, living completely immersed in the world but with the purpose of transforming it and redeeming it through your own love for Christ. Yours is truly a great ideal—an ideal which from its very beginning anticipated that theology of the laity which later characterized the Church of the Council and of the post-conciliar period."³

One year before, on July 25, 1978, Cardinal Albino Luciani, very soon afterward to become John Paul I, published an article on "Seeking God through Everyday Work" in which he touched on certain aspects of the spirituality of Opus Dei. He showed its historic importance by comparing St. Josemaría with one of the great modern saints, Francis de Sales, famous for his pastoral concern for ordinary Christians who devote themselves to secular activities: "Monsignor Escrivá," he wrote, "went further than Francis de Sales in many respects. St. Francis proclaimed sanctity for everyone but seems to have taught only a 'spirituality for lay people' whereas Monsignor Escrivá wants a 'lay spirituality.' Francis, in other words, nearly always suggests the same practical means as used by religious, but with suitable modifications. Escrivá is more radical: he goes as far as talking about 'materializing'—in a good sense—the quest for holiness. For him it is the very material work itself that must be turned into prayer and holiness."⁴

Another quotation of this sort is from Cardinal Sebastiano Baggio, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops

³ *L'Osservatore Romano*, August 20–21, 1979.

⁴ In *Il Gazzettino* (Venice), July 25, 1978.

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and someone who had known St. Josemaría since he first went to live in Rome in 1946: "It is evident even today that the life, work, and message of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer constitute a new departure or, better, a new chapter in the history of Christian spirituality." Throughout the history of the Church, he comments, there have been many preachers and directors of souls who have invited everyone, whatever his or her situation in life, to follow Christ's way really seriously; but, he adds, "what continues to be revolutionary in the spiritual message of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer is his practical manner of directing men and women of every condition in life to Christian holiness. This practical realization of his message is based on three new aspects which are characteristic of the spirituality of Opus Dei: (1) the Christian laity should not abandon or despise the world, but should remain within it, loving and sharing the life of ordinary men and women; (2) while staying in the world, they should learn to discover the supernatural value of the normal circumstances of their lives, including the most prosaic and material details; (3) as a consequence, everyday work, the activity that occupies and fills the greatest number of hours of ordinary people, can and should be sanctified and used as a means of Christian apostolate."⁵

In the early part of 1965, I wrote an essay that was published soon afterward in *Studi Cattolici* (Milan). The Vatican Council was in full swing: it had just issued its dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium*, in which it had proclaimed, solemnly, the universal call to holiness, the full share that lay people have in the Church's mission, the Christian value of temporal or earthly realities. I tried in that essay to show the coincidence of this teaching of the Magisterium with the spirit that had animated Opus Dei since its foundation in 1928. I

⁵ In *Avvenire* (Milan), July 26, 1975.

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also wanted to indicate the significance of Opus Dei in the history of Christian spirituality, precisely because of its contribution to the evaluation of an absolutely essential aspect of our earthly existence, the phenomenon of work and particularly of what I called “professional work,” meaning not the work of people of the “professional class” but professional work in the sense of work undertaken as a stable condition of one’s life, work by which one is involved in everyday society—that is, not work as merely “occupation of one’s time.” Revising the text two years later (English trans. *On the Theology of Work*, Dublin 1967), I referred to other, later, Council documents that contained important references to work: the decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* (nos. 2–4 and 6–8) and the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (nos. 22, 33–39, 43, 57, 67). However, I referred to them only incidentally, without reworking my text, because that was unnecessary at the time. Since then, things have changed, not only in the sense that we can now see the subject in better perspective but particularly because I now have many new sources to draw on that show the teaching of the founder of Opus Dei.

For the first version of this essay, I relied mainly on St. Josemaría’s best-known book, *The Way*, and on some other texts deriving from his catechesis and teaching, notes taken from things he said, which I was able to consult. Soon afterward, in 1966–1968, St. Josemaría gave a series of interviews to European and American journalists that were later collected in a book, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer* (1968). After that, he began to prepare for publication some of the very many homilies he had preached throughout years of intense pastoral work; to date, some 39 homilies have been published, ranging in origin from 1941 to 1973, and most of them have been collected in two books, *Christ Is Passing By* (1973) and *Friends of God* (1977).

This fund of new material stirred me to tackle once more

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the task I had first undertaken fourteen years earlier. To have done so in a really thorough way, using all the ideas and nuances in these sources, would have meant setting aside my original essay and starting a completely new book. I thought of doing just that; but I have in fact gone in a different direction, for my original essay is still perfectly valid. What I have done is fill it out, but keeping the general structure and focus of the first essay. This does mean that the founder's published texts contain a wealth of material I have not used, but I am sure that others will explore them later. This approach has also given me the satisfaction of finishing this new version in 1979, in between the fiftieth anniversary of two foundation dates of Opus Dei—October 2, 1928, when the Work first saw the light of day, and February 14, 1930, when it was completed by the foundation of its Women's Branch.

Pamplona

Feast of the Immaculate Conception