

—His homily “*A Priest Forever*” in the book *In Love with the Church*.

—*Christ Is Passing By*, no. 79

—*Furrow*, no. 499.

—*The Forge*, no. 369.

For the ministerial priesthood:

— Vatican II, Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*;

— John Paul II, Apost. Exhort. *Pastores dabo vobis* (March 25, 1992);

— Benedict XVI: Homilies and addresses for the “Year of the Priesthood”;

— Álvaro del Portillo, *On the Priesthood*.

Italy (June 27, 2009)

Interview granted to Quotidiano di Sicilia. By Alessio Petrocchi

What is the mission of Opus Dei?

Its “mission,” to use your expression, is that of striving to follow Jesus Christ, to imitate him, and to make him known to everyone, everywhere. This is what the holiness to which all the baptized are called consists in. Perhaps the most specific feature of Opus Dei is that this personal encounter with Jesus takes place—with the grace of the sacraments—through professional work, family life, friendship, and all the other circumstances of daily life. So it is a goal which, with God’s help, is attainable by everyone.

The Prelature of Opus Dei is inserted in the secular channel of the

pastoral praxis of the Catholic Church, of which it is only a small part. This is a channel of faith and charity, opened up two thousand years ago by Jesus when he said: “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Mt* 5:48).

What exactly do your activities of spiritual formation involve?

St. Josemaría liked to define Opus Dei as “a great work of catechesis.” With the collaboration of many other people, the faithful of the Prelature organize initiatives to help people grasp more deeply the content of the Christian faith and morality. These are initiatives open to people of any age, profession and educational background: classes in theology, meetings to study and reflect on the Pope’s encyclicals and other documents of the magisterium, courses in professional ethics, gatherings in which parents can confront the current challenges in raising their children. These are just a few examples among many, because the possibilities are so varied.

There are also formational activities that are more properly spiritual and ascetical: retreats and days of recollection; talks on topics of Christian life attended by small groups that offer practical suggestions for living the virtues in daily life; and, finally, for those who want, the possibility is provided to speak with a priest for spiritual direction and for confession, etc. The aim of these means of formation is to come to know and love God, in order to transmit this love to others—beginning

with those around us—since the challenge confronting a Christian is to put his or her faith into practice in the midst of one's family, with colleagues at work, in all environments. The methods and pedagogy are in continuity with the traditional means of the Church: prayer, meditation on the Gospels, etc., and always with supernatural and human optimism, because we are sons and daughters of God.

I would like to add that, in carrying out its commitment to give formation, the Prelature never interferes in the professional and family life, or in the political or social views of its faithful. It limits itself to offering a Christian formation adapted to each person, so that they, one by one, can bring Christ's love and joy to their family and their social or professional milieu.

What norms regulate the organization of the Prelature?

Besides what is established in the Code of Canon Law, we have the statutes approved by the Holy See. At the same time, Opus Dei (and this is an expression used by the founder) is a "disorganized organization," where each person acts with freedom, both in the activities of formation and in their personal apostolate. Underlying everything are criteria of collegiality, respect for autonomy, care for and trust in each person. Thus in each country the activities organized are the ones best suited to the local situation, with specific objectives chosen in an autonomous way. The organization of these initiatives is also autonomous

at the local level in confronting the difficulties involved in supporting them financially. This is always a challenge, since these activities have an educational and social goal, never a profit-making one. Therefore the generous help of many people is of decisive importance.

What is the total number of members of Opus Dei? How many of them are lay and how many are priests? Has the number of members been growing?

The figures can be found in the *Anuario Pontificio*. In 2009 there were 87,000 lay faithful and 2,000 priests. Thanks be to God, each year the number of faithful of Opus Dei grows with respect to the previous year, although, as is natural, there are also many whom our Lord calls to heaven.

In any case, it is good to stress that God is not interested in global numbers but in each person in his or her singularity, one by one. What is important is not numbers but the spiritual improvement of each person, that is, the growth of his or her personal identification with Christ.

Last month I visited Japan and Taiwan for pastoral reasons. There too I saw with joy that many people are coming close to the Church, seeking the meaning of their existence. The reality is that only Jesus is capable of quenching the desire for happiness that is present in each one's heart.

It also gives me joy to see that the apostolic work of the faithful of

Opus Dei, like that of the whole Church, is developing not only in the “old” Catholic or at least Christian countries, but also in many “young” nations insofar as evangelization is concerned, such as, for example, in Africa: the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Nigeria, The Congo, Kenya... And precisely during these weeks, stable apostolic activities of Opus Dei are beginning in Korea, Indonesia and Romania. Contemplating this panorama awakens in me sincere gratitude towards God.

What is the most important of the founder of Opus Dei's teachings, as seen in the life of the Prelature?

That the reality of each one's daily life, the path of ordinary life, which at times might seem monotonous, contains divine light and value. St. Josemaría insisted that

Christ wants to “become incarnate” in our occupations and animate them from within, even our most humble actions. This is the message that our Lord entrusted to the founder of Opus Dei in 1928. It was an ideal that had frequently been forgotten throughout history but that was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, which placed it in the center of its pastoral aims. I think it is a forceful call to bring an authentic sense of mission to the lives of so many Christians.

Every day the web page of the Prelature of Opus Dei (www.opus-dei.org), which one can access in 28 languages, receives hundreds of petitions from people who are seeking God. I think this is one more confirmation, among many others, that Christ's call continues being timely, and that it is making itself felt more pressingly in today's world.