

*wild. What did you ask our Lady for on your recent trip to Fatima?*

In her maternal presence, I went over some of the challenges of this world of ours, so complex and exciting. I asked her for the grace to bring the Gospel to everyone, in its original pure form, and at the same time, in its radiant newness. In a message sent later to my children, I wrote something that I think can be useful: “Our calling summons each of us, with our spiritual and intellectual resources, with our professional skills or life experiences, and also with our limitations and defects, to try and see how we can cooperate more and more in the huge task of setting Christ at the summit of all human activities. To do this we need in-depth knowledge of the times we live in, its dynamics and potential, and also of the limitations and injustices, sometimes serious ones, that afflict it. Above all, we need personal union with Jesus, in prayer and the sacraments. Thus we will be able to remain open to the action of the Holy Spirit, in order to call, with charity, at the door of our contemporaries’ hearts.”

*I think that these words can be a fitting conclusion to our conversation, one in which I would have liked to bring up even more topics. But we have to leave it here. Thank you so much for your time and your frank answers, and also for not rejecting any uncomfortable questions! Thank you for having tried, together with us, to build bridges.*

I also thank you for the time you have spent with me. Besides, it has been wonderful to speak in an atmosphere of freedom, openness and affection where we always learn from one another. I’m actually happy that you asked me some questions that could be annoying, but that have given me the opportunity to deal with some interesting points, and that besides were motivated by a sincere desire to spread the truth. As I say this, there come to mind some words from the third letter of Saint John: “cooperators in the truth,” which Joseph Ratzinger chose as his episcopal motto.

## An Interview Granted to *Corriere della Sera*, Italy (October 12, 2017)

By Gian Guido Vecchi

*Opus Dei in the time of Pope Francis. Has anything changed Monsignor? What is the relationship between the charism of the founder and the recent pontiffs?*

The Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which Pope Francis defined as a “program” for his pontificate, invites us to bring the joy of the Gospel to the men and women of our time. It’s about starting from the beauty of faith, from the joy

that is born of the encounter with Jesus Christ.

The charism of Opus Dei offers a specific way of carrying out this mission, especially for those who want to be faithful to the Gospel in their daily life, in their work, their families and their social relationships.

All pontiffs point out priorities, and we are all called to commit ourselves to carrying them out.

*After your election, and then in your audience with Pope Francis, you spoke about three priorities: the family, young people, and a “proactive sensitivity towards the most needy.” The first two points are clear, but what does the third one mean?*

Taking up the image of the Church as a field hospital, I would like each of us to be a “hospital” for those around us. That’s what I would like for everyone, and first of all for myself: there is still a long way to go.

Our society has so many wounded people: the sick and the abandoned elderly, those suffering from loneliness, those out of work, those who have experienced a sorrowful failure in their love, those who have lost all hope, etc. The faithful of Opus Dei, in their life in the middle of the world, are challenged every day by these wounds. Often they suffer them in person, or in their own families, or find

them in a co-worker or in a neighbor living close by.

The challenge is to become better Samaritans, men and women who “roll up their sleeves,” who bring imagination and commitment to help solve the problems of others as if they were their own. Charity is never theoretical or generic; it becomes real in relationships with others, as in Jesus’ life, seeing each person as important, because Christ died for them.

*Opus Dei and the poor. The image exists of the Work as a “club for the rich.” How do you respond to this cliché?*

In Italy, the people of the Prelature are simply a reflection of the society. The vast majority are ordinary workers, school teachers, housewives, storekeepers, students, laborers, etc. There are also people in the Work who are lawyers, businessmen, artists, journalists.... Sometimes the public’s attention can be focused on them, but those who struggle to make ends meet each month don’t appear in the newspapers. The important thing is that we all strive to imbue the relationships and circumstances of our daily life with God’s love and mercy.

Led by the cliché that you mention, unfortunately at times some people might approach the formational activities of the Work thinking that they will find some type of advantage. But in two weeks, when they see that one comes here to serve others and to

receive spiritual accompaniment, they go away.

*Can you give an example of activities to help the needy or migrants?*

In Rome, for example, there is the ELIS center. It has been working in the Tiburtino neighborhood for 50 years. When that project was born, the district was very poor. Thanks to the training offered there, generations of mechanics, watchmakers, workers and goldsmiths have found a position in the workplace. Now the ELIS center is about to start a free full-time school, that is, one open also on weekends, to welcome and train children from the outskirts of Rome, most of them first or second generation immigrants.

There are also many personal initiatives on a smaller scale. In Naples, for example, a retired teacher has begun an association offering education to girls from disadvantaged neighborhoods and help for girls who are unemployed. They are taught a manual craft to help them find a job in society, where it is becoming more and more difficult to find people with certain needed skills: seamstresses, potters, etc. Another initiative is the effort of the girls in a university residence in Milan to assist Syrian migrants, by providing counseling help as soon as they arrive.

I remember many other examples that I had the opportunity to visit during my pastoral trips

last summer. I will mention two here. In the Raval neighborhood in Barcelona, where about 20,000 immigrants live, the Braval and Terral schools have more than 300 volunteers involved in educational, sports and vocational training programs. In Cologne, Germany, I was able to meet the volunteers and priests at the parish of St. Pantaleon, who provide shelter for 30 Syrian refugee families in a structure built by the diocese and the city. Families reside there for 6 months, and when they have become better integrated in society and can make it on their own, new families are welcomed there.

Thanks be to God, institutions of this kind have arisen in many places. For example, if you ask about Opus Dei in Kinshasa, in the third poorest country in the world, many people will mention the care they are given at the Monkole Hospital, begun by faithful of the Prelature and their friends.

But as I was saying, the real revolution would be that we all decide to embody the attitude of the Good Samaritan in our home, in our workplace: truly being concerned about others, giving them spiritual and material assistance, whenever possible. I know courageous businessmen, for example, someone in the Philippines who with the profits of his three hotels started an orphanage for 50 street children; also researchers in the field of economics who dream of

building a more just world, far removed from an economy of exclusion; or prestigious doctors who work tirelessly for their patients. This is an aspect in which everyone in Opus Dei has to keep growing, and also learning from others.

*What is your opinion of the accusations made in Italy against NGOs that help rescue migrants?*

Without entering into the political debate, of which I don't know all the details, it seems to me that Italy is giving a Christian example to the rest of the world, by welcoming those who, after losing everything and driven by desperation, play their last card by crossing the Mediterranean in humiliating and inhuman conditions. It is up to political leaders to analyze how to deal with the huge waves of immigrants and how to integrate these people into our society, with generosity and within the appropriate legal framework.

And then we can consider our own attitude. A Christian heart does not build walls or place obstacles, but rather recognizes Jesus in the suffering flesh of the migrant. A Christian heart dreams of restoring hope to those who have lost everything. A Christian heart suffers on seeing this tragedy, and tries to respond as far as possible to the needs of these brothers and sisters of ours.

*What did the Pope tell you? I am thinking of what I have read on the*

*website of the Work, about his invitation "to give priority to a specific 'periphery': the middle class and the professional and intellectual world that has distanced itself from God."*

He encouraged us especially to bring the joy of the Gospel to the peripheries of the middle classes, of the professional and intellectual world. These are not geographical peripheries, but daily existential ones, often distanced from God. We should try to see these, with God's help, with the merciful eyes of Jesus: trying to give comfort, to listen, to accompany, to give of our time.

In the same audience, I also spoke with the Holy Father about the apostolic work the Prelature is carrying out throughout the world, especially in regard to the spiritual care of each person, ecumenism in countries where Catholics are a minority, and some educational and social projects in various continents.

*The pontiff is calling for a "Church that goes out." What does this mean for Opus Dei?*

A nurse, a mechanic or a cook in Opus Dei builds up this Church "that goes out" by trying to be a consistent witness to the Gospel in their workplace and family.

The people of the Work are ordinary citizens—many have lost their jobs in this economic crisis, or work in very precarious situations. They share the same worries and

fears, they denounce the same injustices and have the same hopes. And amid these challenges, their daily meeting with Jesus, in the Eucharist and in prayer, spurs them to go out to share with everyone the joy and hope of the Gospel.

This effort is also shown in their Christian consistency even in quite small gestures, such as a simple smile or lending a hand to someone who is tired—and also when making important decisions that affect the good of many other people. Sometimes even small gestures, added to those of so many others, can help to spread joy and hope in the world.

## Interview Granted to *Tertio*, Belgium (November 8, 2017)

By Immanuel Van Lierde

*How did you meet Opus Dei? What led you to discover your vocation to Opus Dei and to the priesthood?*

I met Opus Dei through one of my brothers, whom I'm very thankful to. He invited me to take part in some formational classes organized in a center for young students. I liked the environment, the friendly and practical tone of

those classes. However, since in the Jesuit school where I was studying we already had enough religious formation classes, I didn't see the need to continue participating. Later, in 1961, during the summer before attending the university, I started going around to another center of Opus Dei. When during that summer the possibility was raised of my joining the Work, I thought about it a lot. I prayed and concluded that God was asking me for this, and I wrote a letter to the founder asking for admission. It was that simple.

Six years later, I accepted the invitation to move to Rome, to deepen my philosophical and theological studies. And that's where the possibility of serving others in a new way, through the priesthood, was opened to me. The founder himself, St. Josemaría Escrivá, was the one who asked me if I was willing to be ordained. Since it was something that was already in my mind, little was needed to decide. These are fundamental decisions that are made in prayer, in dialogue with Christ.

*You are the third successor of St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei. What was his specific charism and why did he found Opus Dei? Do you have personal memories of St. Josemaría?*

St. Josemaría said that Opus Dei was not his idea, but the result of an inspiration from God, which took place in Madrid on October