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Chicago Academic Symposium on Blessed Josemaria's Teachings

A symposium in Chicago on June 28 brought together a group of theologians, philosophers, and other scholars to discuss aspects of the Founder of Opus Dei's teaching.

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At a June 28 symposium entitled "The Teachings of Blessed Josemaría

Escrivá: Implications for New Millennium,” a group of sixteen theologians, philosophers, and other scholars discussed aspects of the Founder of Opus Dei’s teaching before an audience of about 70 persons. The event was co-sponsored by Shellbourne Conference Center and the American Public Philosophy Institute, and preceded a larger, public conference held at Northwestern University on June 29. According to Dr. Christopher Wolfe, president of the American Public Philosophy Institute, the symposium “was intended to give scholars who are concerned about the integration of faith and everyday life an opportunity to reflect on Blessed Josemaría’s insights in an open, collegial atmosphere.”

In the day’s morning sessions, Dr. Janne Haaland Matlary of the University of Oslo discussed Blessed Josemaría’s emphasis on work as a

path to holiness, and Dr. Paul Griffiths of the University of Illinois at Chicago considered the relation between holiness and personal struggle. After lunch, Dr. Michael Pakaluk of Clark University reflected on the extent to which Blessed Josemaría's teaching on friendship anticipated the personalistic outlook of the Second Vatican Council. Finally, Dr. Wolfe spoke about the secular nature of the lay Christian's path to God, as it appears in Blessed Josemaría's teaching and in the spirit of Opus Dei. Respondents to the papers included such well-known scholars and writers as Dr. David Novak, who holds a chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, Dr. Hadley Arkes, professor of political philosophy and American institutions at UMass at Amherst, and Dr. David O'Connor, professor of philosophy and classics at the University of Notre Dame.

According to Dr. Wolfe, who teaches at Marquette University and writes mainly on political philosophy and constitutional law, the conference organizers worked to achieve a broad, interdisciplinary discussion. "This was first the academic conference on Blessed Josemaría to be held in the United States," he said, "and we didn't want to define the discussion too narrowly. So we thought, let's just pick some major themes, find the most interesting scholars we can to talk about them, and see what happens." In fact, discussion ranged from work and the Sabbath in Jewish thought, to contemporary personalist and Renaissance humanist models of friendship with God, to the relevance for contemporary feminism of Blessed Josemaría's teaching on work as vocation.

Among those attending the conference was Rev. Arne Panula,

vicar of Opus Dei for the United States, who stressed the importance of Blessed Josemaría's teaching for the Church and also for society as a whole. "In the case of someone who not only lived a holy life, but taught others to follow a particular way to God, canonization is a sign that the Church values his teaching," he said of Blessed Josemaría, who will be declared a saint by Pope John Paul II on October 6. "The role of theologians and philosophers is to draw out the implications of that teaching not only for their own disciplines, but for the Church's tradition and, also, for the world in which we live."