

“With my stories many people have come to know ‘another language’”

José Antonio is a policeman in Elche, Spain, and also a well-known author of crime novels, a genre in which he has won several awards.

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In this interview he speaks about how he became a writer of crime novels and how the teachings of Saint Josemaria assist him in a genre

that at first glance does not seem closely tied to the Christian meaning of life.

How did your professional vocation as a crime novel writer come about? Is it related to your work as a policeman?

I have enjoyed telling stories ever since I was a child. I think this was the result of many hours spent reading books when I was young. I devoured the novels of Jules Verne and the editions of works of various authors for young people. This was an adventure in itself that made me love the world of literature. I started writing stories for our school newspaper with the encouragement of my teachers and took part in children's story contests in which I won some prizes.

Since then, in one way or another, I have not stopped writing, and have gone from telling stories to poetry,

and later to the great adventure of the novel. This involved a lot hard work to improve my style and taking courses on novel writing.

My passion for crime novels began early on and stemmed from watching noir films, listening to jazz music, and reading American crime novels.

I also love my profession as a policeman, since it enables me to offer my life in service to my fellow citizens. My professional experiences have certainly helped me to construct and give more rigor to my stories.

The crime novel is a genre that, at first glance, seems closely connected with vice and evil. Isn't it a bit opposed to fostering virtues in your readers?

The crime novel seems to have vice and evil as its protagonists. But it is

also concerned with making restitution for corruption and immorality, and with an abundance of good. Evil is starkly described in my novels since they have to be very realistic and describe the reality of the criminal world unambiguously. But law enforcement and justice also enter in to make the offender pay back society for the wrong done and to enable the good to be restored.

The crime novel describes a lot of street life and social problems. The characters have to act as they really are. Often characters will act brutally, as they do on the street. This genre needs to confront violent death and social injustices. But I am very careful in developing my stories to treat all the characters as real people, with their wickedness but also with their capacity to repent and return to their Father's arms, like the prodigal son. One of the maxims that I always try to express in my stories is this:

“Hate the crime but have compassion for the criminal.”

I don't try to shock my readers but rather to make them reflect on goodness and evil, on beauty but also on the stark reality of life. I help them to get to know a world that, although often unknown to them, is close by. I want them to enjoy reading my books.

In the presentations of your books or in book fairs, what is the relationship with your readers like?

I greatly enjoy meeting my readers, since you can share with them a story that you have created. You see that these people, in some way, also know you, because the writer, unconsciously, also shows himself through his stories.

Since I started writing, I have had one thing very clear: to always be

concerned about my readers. How I myself would like this novel to be if I were to read it. There is nothing more beautiful in the writer-reader relationship than when people tell you that a chapter has deeply moved them, or that they couldn't stop reading until they finished, even sacrificing their sleep. Ultimately, I hope that I can change something in each person's life after reading the book.

With fellow police officers I must be very careful because they know a lot about police techniques that other people don't know. That is why it is very important to be rigorous and thorough in developing a story; otherwise it can end up "full of holes." I have a very good relationship with my colleagues and I count them among my best readers. As for fellow writers, we also have a very good relationship; we highly value a job well done and know how

difficult it is to put together quality stories.

How do the teachings of Saint Josemaría help you in your work as a policeman and as a writer?

In the midst of iniquity, corruption, robberies and homicides, I always try to remember that each person is a child of God. Despite all the mistakes in their life, everyone should always be given the chance to return to the right path.

As Saint Josemaría said: *Omnia in bonum*, everything is for the good. At times, in the midst of the greatest evils, there have been silent miracles of personal conversions. I also always keep in mind what he taught us about sanctifying work, any work: sanctify what you do, sanctify those with whom you do it, sanctify others through what you do, and sanctify yourself with what you do. Thus you

will always do a good job for the greater glory of God.

What advice would you give in order to encourage people to read more? What are readers of your own books like?

Today young people have a range of resources, especially audiovisual resources that we didn't have in the past. But I think they often lack the creativity you attain by reading good literature.

To foster a love for reading, you need to present it to young people not as a compulsory and tedious task, but as the door to a wonderful world that he or she can make their own. We need to help them see that in a novel they become the protagonist, because they put their own imagination at the service of that story. They have to put faces on the characters, stir up sorrow for painful situations, fear for disturbing events.

On the other hand, my readers are of all ages and backgrounds: both adults and teenagers who have “stolen” the book from their parents and then have told me that they loved it. My young son, who is a great reader of all kinds of literature, is one of them. I want to express gratitude to my many readers.

As a Christian, do you try to bring your readers closer to Christ?

One of the constant concerns in my books is to always try to treat each character as a human being. This is a Christian humanism that stems from my formation and values, and also from my relationship with God.

My hope is that, in a subtle way, through the creation of these stories that often express deeply Christian virtues, many people will come to know “another language” they didn’t know before, a melody they had never heard. Helping people to see

that the origin and end of life is Jesus Christ thus becomes an exciting task.

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