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“Violence is never suitable, neither to conquer nor to convince”

Interview with Bishop Javier Echevarría, prelate of Opus Dei:
“Peace in communities and between peoples can come about only from peace in consciences.”

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For many people, religion has lost its weight in the scale of values....

There are more Catholics now than ever before. But more important than numbers is the fact that the Church is vibrant, challenging and attracting people just as it did 20 centuries ago. Of course, it cannot be denied that there are some countries or places where fewer people practice the faith. There are many reasons for that, but certainly one is the encroachment of a culture that marginalizes Christ, producing fertile ground for the passions to take root.

How can people be made to see that sacrifice and charity yield more happiness than pleasure and money?

We all experience the discrepancy between what we are and what we should be. But when Christian magnanimity is discovered, its superiority to the fleeting happiness brought by pleasure and money becomes clear. Therefore our Lord

invites us to struggle against being prisoners of comforts and inclinations that soften and degrade the soul. Nothing is more wonderful than a selfless life of union with Jesus Christ.

Opus Dei invites us to seek holiness through our work. How many people nowadays believe they are working for anything besides a paycheck?

One's occupation should not be conceived in mere economic terms. In the plans of God, work develops and perfects the person. People are ennobled when, instead of just drawing a salary, they put their creativity and interest into doing things well and offering loyal service to God and others. In our economically hyperactive society, discovering the Christian value of work can be liberating and brings about fraternity.

You reject birth control. But is it responsible to bring half a dozen children into the world on a salary of 600 euros a month?

Wages insufficient to support children, inadequate housing, and obstacles to balancing family and professional life are all problems that citizens and their representatives should seek to alleviate. But this is not solely an economic question: many people using birth control make more than 600 euros. What the Church rejects is a vision of life that puts material welfare above the Christian and human values of marriage.

In the face of a succession of pederast priest cases, can the Church still legitimately require chastity before marriage?

Continence is part of Christian morality, which is nothing other than a way of acting in accord with the

dignity of the person and one's true happiness. The Church's teaching about marriage will never change. If a Catholic were caught stealing, whether a priest or a layperson, the Church wouldn't change its teaching on robbery.

Do you approve of church leaders giving their opinions on politics?

Every layperson, like any other citizen, can take part in politics according to his or her own views. The only thing necessary is that they act in accordance with their faith, which does not impose any political program, but calls for honesty, playing by the rules, and a sincere spirit of service to the community.

Is it acceptable that religion be the cause of military conflicts, such as the one between the Palestinians and Israel?

It is a great tragedy for men to be killed, whatever the cause. But I don't think the conflict in the Holy Land has religious motives. It's a fight over land. Among Palestinians and Israelis, there are men and women capable of living together in a spirit of brotherhood. Peace is a blessing of heaven that requires men of good will on earth.

How can peace come to the Basque country?

Peace cannot be reduced to the mere absence of war. For that, military victory or a truce would suffice. Authentic peace, inseparable from justice, springs from a friendly understanding among people. This requires mutual understanding and forgiveness, an effort to get to know each other and resolve misunderstandings. And a great deal of grace from God. St. Josemaría never tired of repeating that peace in

communities and between peoples can come about only from peace in consciences. And he added that violence is never suitable, neither to conquer nor to convince; the one who uses it always ends up the loser.

Does Opus Dei have a lot to thank John Paul II for?

The entire Church owes John Paul II a great deal of gratitude for his constant dedication. It would take a long time to mention all the reasons. One only has to see how, despite his age and physical condition, he spares no effort in his service to the Church and the world.

Can he stop the war in Iraq?

John Paul II is a luminous example of love for true peace. Allow me to take the opportunity to ask those who will read these words to unite themselves to the Pope and pray for what he is

doing, and has always done, for the cause of peace.

Does the prelate of Opus Dei ever suffer a crisis of faith?

No crises, but trials, yes. Faith necessarily goes through hard moments. Sometimes evil appears to triumph – or really does, though never in a lasting way. The unexpected death of people you love, physical ailments, life's setbacks: these personal encounters with the Cross can be disconcerting. But through them our Lord helps us grow, as persons and as Christians.

How much time do you pray every day?

I dedicate time to meditating before the Blessed Sacrament, as well as many hours at work, which is also prayer, because all activities can become prayer. But the center of my

life is the Holy Mass, just as it is for every Christian.

What distinguishes a member of Opus Dei from an ordinary Christian?

Members of Opus Dei are ordinary Christians who have listened to God's call to identify themselves with Jesus Christ and help others know him, from their place in the world: their home, their profession, their social environment.

Is faith a sufficient weapon against depression?

Depression can affect anyone. Faith helps people deal with it well, by conferring meaning on suffering and difficulties. It spurs people to have patience and to trust more in God. As with any other illness, it can be turned into a privileged opportunity for sanctification.

Opus Dei set up an ambitious educational “mission” in Africa to coincide with the canonization of Escrivá. What else have you done for the disadvantaged?

Opus Dei has worked in Africa for more than fifty years. A few examples that come to mind are the Monkole Medical Center in Kinshasa; Kianda School and Strathmore College, Kenya’s first interracial schools; and Iroto Rural Development Center in Nigeria.

Do you harbor hopes that churches will be filled again some day? How can this be accomplished?

There is no lack of places where the churches are filled each day. I see it on my trips. For 2,000 years Christianity has maintained a perennial youth, even though its vitality lives side by side with decadence or indifference. There is no need to revise doctrine, which

must always remain faithful to the Gospel. Rather, what is needed is to revise one's life each day, seeing where God is asking us for a conversion.

What has your contribution to Opus Dei been?

I haven't thought about it. I am trying to be faithful to the inheritance I received and to leave this inheritance to my successors as intact and alive as it was when I took it. I like to repeat a prayer I learned from St. Josemaría: "Lord, make Yourself seen through my wretchedness."

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