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Interview with Msgr. Fernando Ocariz

"Monsignor Fernando Ocariz, the first Auxiliary Vicar in the history of Opus Dei, welcomed me into his home at the Opus Dei headquarters in Rome. We talked about what being Auxiliary Vicar means with regard to the governance of Opus Dei, in the context of the 41st anniversary of the Founder's death, Sunday June 26, 2016.

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An interview with the Auxiliary
Vicar of Opus Dei, Msgr. Ocáriz, by
Jordi Picazo, published in *Religion en
Libertad*

Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz was born in Paris, October 27, 1944, took his degree in Theology at the Pontifical Lateran University in 1969, and obtained his doctorate at the University of Navarra in 1971. He was ordained a priest that same year.

He has been a lecturer in fundamental theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, and, since 1986, a consultor of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; since 2003 he has also been a consultor of the Congregation for the Clergy; and, since 2011, for the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization.

He has been a member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology since

1989. On April 23, 1994 he was appointed Vicar General of the Prelature of Opus Dei by Bishop Prelate Msgr. Javier Echevarria, and recently, on 9 December 2014, Auxiliary Vicar, with Msgr. Mariano Fazio taking his place as Vicar General.

The figure of Auxiliary Vicar is provided for in the law of the Church for the Prelature of Opus Dei, established in numbers 134 § 1 and 135 of the Codex “Iuris particularis Operis Dei” promulgated by John Paul II in the Apostolic Constitution Ut Sit dated 28 November 1982. It had been thought of originally by the founder of Opus Dei himself.

In the decree appointing Msgr. Ocariz as Auxiliary Vicar, Bishop Javier Echevarria states that “the expansion of the apostolic work of the Prelature and the growing number of regional circumscriptions, centers and

apostolates whose pastoral care is entrusted to Opus Dei, have brought a increase in the work of government for the Prelate.” Therefore, he adds, “in view of my age, I see the need to appoint an Auxiliary Vicar”.

Bishop Echevarria, as Prelate, now shares the helm of the ship of Opus Dei for the first time with you as Auxiliary Vicar, a position provided for by its Founder. Is this a gesture of detachment by the Prelate?

After listening to the opinions of those who help him in pastoral governance, Msgr. Echevarría appointed me as Auxiliary Vicar to share with him the executive authority reserved by law to the Prelate. It is, as you say, a position provided for by Opus Dei’s founder, St. Josemaría. At the same time, the statutes of the Opus Dei Prelature speak of the role of the Prelate as

that of “teacher and father”, underlining the fact that the task entrusted by the Church to the Prelate – as with every pastor who heads a church organisation – is not simply the power of governing, but also includes this important dimension of being a father to all the priests and lay faithful in his care.

St. Josemaria embodied that spiritual fatherhood, which should characterize every priest, very intensely. And that is a legacy he passed on to his successors. The Prelate’s fatherhood makes all the faithful of the Prelature feel part of a family, in Opus Dei and in the Church: the family of God’s children.

In the words of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Opus Dei is a “beautiful little family”. Is “family” the word that best defines Opus Dei?

The Pope reminds us that the Church is “a family of families” (*Amoris*

Laetitia, no. 87). It is in our families that we learn to be happy, and develop skills. It's where we are loved as we are, and where we can always come back to.

St. Josemaría nurtured a family atmosphere around him: praying for one another, wanting to bring Christ's love to others, serving one another and, when necessary, correcting one another. Achieving this atmosphere means daily self-conquest, a commitment by each member of the family.

What is Opus Dei's 'Strategic Plan' for the near future? Where is Opus Dei heading in the twenty-first century?

Where the Holy Spirit leads us. St. Josemaría asked us to fan out: in the 21st century we must continue bringing this seed of the Church to many more places. The bottom line is being, and helping others to be,

docile to God's grace and to live up to what we believe, joyfully, at work, at home, and in serving society.

In addition, we'll try to expand the solidarity projects set up by many faithful and Co-operators of the Prelature worldwide.

With the grace of God and the support of so many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, we want to broaden the range of those projects, which seek to bring humanity to our "common home". A challenge in Europe right now is to foster a culture of welcome to migrants.

In the next few years, we will need to continue developing effective pastoral care for families and young people, partly because of the very strong pressures they are subjected to.

And from the geographical point of view, have you already planned where Opus Dei's apostolate will begin next? What difficulties have arisen in places where it has recently begun?

Certainly there are many places where the local bishops are asking us to go: we are now thinking about Vietnam and Angola. However, you have to realize that people of the Work don't just go to a place, but go there to do their own professional work. It is difficult to plan very far in advance.

Right now we are starting, for example, in Korea. The biggest problem there is not work, or people, but the language. Other places where it is hard are, for example, Estonia or Finland, but thank God, the apostolate is developing: the first Finnish priest in Opus Dei has just been ordained.

2028 will be the centenary of Opus Dei's founding. The night from 23 to 24 June 1946 was spent by St. Josemaria Escriva in prayer, looking at the Apostolic Palace and St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican from a nearby balcony. He had been told that Opus Dei had arrived 100 years too soon, because of its novel doctrine about sanctity for laypeople. Are laypeople in the 21st century like the early Christians, working for the sanctification of the world from within?

21st-century lay people, like those of all times, are called to act like the first followers of Christ in the world, at home, at work, and in their times of rest and entertainment. In every sphere they are invited to be apostles, to talk about Christ and talk to their Father, God, who is listening to them.

That is the ordinary way to holiness which St. Josemaria insisted on so much. The apostolate of Opus Dei is essentially what lay people do through their work, married people in their families and priests in their pastoral ministry.

Did God bring Alvaro del Portillo to Escriva so that he could do Opus Dei?

St. Josemaria often thanked God for having put Alvaro del Portillo at his side. I think the fruitfulness of Blessed Alvaro's life was the result of seeking God's will at all times. He never sought any glory for himself and for that very reason, he was outstanding.

Many remember him as an example of fidelity to the Church (first as an engineer, then as a priest, and finally as a bishop), and to the Popes with whom he was in contact; and of fidelity to the founder of Opus Dei.

And that fidelity – which is a creative virtue, because it requires a continuous inner and external renewal – was obviously a great support for St. Josemaria.

Pope Francisco has just approved the decree about the Venerable Montse Grases, a 17-year-old member of Opus Dei who died of cancer in Barcelona. This means she is possibly on the way to beatification and canonization. Is holiness no longer a utopia?

Holiness, thank God, has never been a utopia: from the first century until today, there have been many examples of Christians who have sought to imitate Jesus heroically. What was maybe lost sight of for a while was that each and every baptized person is called to holiness. And to achieve it, you don't need to make any special consecration if you don't have that particular vocation.

The recent news about Montse, a girl from Barcelona who lived only 17 years but was determined to talk with God at all times, is like a new confirmation of all this. And it is an encouragement for many young people who, like her, spend much of their day at school or university, doing sports, and among their friends.

It's about realizing that every Christian bears the mission of the Church. Evangelization is done by all Christians, about the whole Gospel, each in their own place. The priest as a priest, and the laity as laity: the teacher as a teacher, the worker as a worker, each in their own surroundings. The Second Vatican Council proclaimed this clearly. We must all seek holiness. Being canonized or not, is not important for the person concerned. It only matters for the Church. It is the Church that benefits from the saints.

When you felt the ground give way beneath your feet, how did you in Opus Dei experience the mercies of the Blessed Virgin Mary? How do you experience her presence in this Jubilee Year?

Turning to your mother when you're in trouble is almost instinctive. That is how Christians have acted ever since Pentecost, when the apostles gathered around the Virgin Mary. St. Josemaria went to numerous Marian shrines to ask Our Lady for a favor, beg for her protection, and pray to her for the Church. And he always came away as if a great weight had been taken off him, because he had experienced God's mercy.

This Jubilee Year can help each person feel God's providence in ordinary life, while being a channel for his mercy to reach many others. The challenge is to accept the

“ordinary” signs of God’s mercy,
which is extraordinary.

Opus Dei handles communications well, and the Prelate is in constant communication with the faithful of the Prelature. What is the importance of communications in the Church, and what challenges exist in this area?

You are very kind, but I think there is always a long way to go, and much to be learned from others. I think the fundamental challenge is sincerity. Communication cannot be something artificial. You have to communicate from what you are, and then with words. So you could say that charity is the best language for communicating the faith.

That is what Pope Francis said in his Message for the 50th World Communications Day. “If our hearts and actions are inspired by charity, by divine love, then our

communication will be touched by
God's own power” (24 January 2016).

Jordi Picazo

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