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Become sowers of peace through a new evangelization

The Prelate of Opus Dei comments on the ever-growing need to improve culture and promote peace in our society, especially in light of the recent conflicts in Colombia.

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Excerpt from Revista Pensamiento y Cultura (University of La Sabana, Colombia). We know that you follow very closely the news of events in

Colombia. The great majority of Colombians are Catholic, and we realize that we have an obligation to contribute to building a just society. What advice do you have for trying to solve the serious conflicts our country is undergoing?

I know that the situation here causes you to suffer, and that everyone in one way or another is suffering the consequences. But at the same time, unconsciously, there may be a bit of resignation. We have to flee from passivity in the face of problems and search untiringly, with hope and a sense of responsibility, for solutions to conflicts. Each person, in their own job and place in society, has to find ways to help construct peace. Because peace is like a large river, made up out of a multitude of small streams and tributaries. And each of them is important.

There is a great need for an apostolic sowing of peace, based on prayer, understanding and the collaboration of everyone. When in Rome, I share in your sufferings, and even more so during these days I am spending in Colombia. It's not just Colombia's problem, but the whole world's problem. I am constantly asking our Lady to obtain peace for this country. The prelatric church of Opus Dei in Rome is dedicated to Our Lady of Peace. At the end of the nave there is a votive candelabra, with candles lit to our heavenly Mother asking that she win from our Lord peace for each one of us and peace for all humanity. I have decided that one of the candles should burn permanently in petition for peace in Colombia. I also advise that you seek out the intercession of Blessed Josemaria, a great friend and promoter of peace, who loved your country so much. I would like many

people to ask him to help obtain peace for this wonderful country.

How do you see the role of the University of La Sabana, and of the university in general, in this troubled society?

There comes to mind how Blessed Josemaria responded to a similar question, also in an interview. He said that the university is not foreign to any human problem. The university, he said, is where one can acquire the preparation needed to later contribute to solving society's great problems and to defending the fundamental rights of the person, always remembering that there is never only one answer to social questions. There are many legitimate proposals on how to solve each specific case. To fulfill its role in society, the university community must foster and respect this freedom.

Pope John Paul II told a group of university students some years ago that "the Church does not promote specific programs for the university or for society, but rather a program for man, for a new man, reborn through grace" (Homily to university students, June 5, 1979). Therefore the university has to try to ensure that its students receive an integral formation, and that they understand the greatness of this program, that of a new man reborn through grace. They need to grasp this reality in a vital way, freely undertaking—as we all must do—the path of spiritual renewal, with the always necessary help of the sacraments. For as you well know, science and faith should walk hand in hand. The faith that you profess illuminates your intellectual work. And the science that you teach helps you to go more deeply into the faith.

The culture of today is the culture of contemporary man, with his technological advances and ease of communication, but also with many problems. The pluralism of our society at times overwhelms us. How can we construct our future with faith and reason as recommended by John Paul II. How can we be Christians of the 21st century?

Cultural pluralism is not a problem for Christians, but a reality that we take for granted, as ordinary citizens. The Pope has repeatedly urged us to carry out a new evangelization, of culture as well. We have no right to be afraid. In his letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, the Holy Father said that "in the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace"

(no. 55). He also said recently that globalization "is not *a priori* either good or bad. It is what people make of it. No system is an end in itself, and it is necessary to insist that globalization, like any other system, should be at the service of the human person, of solidarity" (Address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, 27 April 2001, no. 2).

The real problem is a selfish individualism. The Pope invites us to confront this deviation forcefully. "Now is the time for a new 'creativity' in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by 'getting close' to those who suffer" (Apostolic letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 50). Therefore what is needed in today's world, with the help of science, technology, and the ease of communication, is the globalization of charity. And we will not achieve global solidarity without personal solidarity.

Today's society seems to give importance only to one's image, to appearances, while the truth is seen as something secondary and even out of date. Nevertheless, it's clear that without truth our life loses coherence. What can we do to foster truth and to live in accord with it?

You, as university people, have a commitment to search for and transmit the truth. A consistent Christian refuses to compromise with lies and superficiality. Therefore Christians are a spur for people's conscience in a world where only power, money and the trappings of wealth count for anything. But, in this world of ours, everyone harbors deep in his heart a "nostalgia" for the truth, for the clarity and beauty of truth, for the splendor of truth we could say, paraphrasing the title of one of the Pope's encyclicals.

Don't we all enjoy being with a sincere friend who speaks the truth clearly and selflessly, who helps and corrects if needed? "To speak the truth with charity" is a Christian motto that can satisfy the burning thirst of this world of ours.

Your book *Pathways of Christian Life*, which was recently published, has had a great success in terms of sales. To what do you attribute this fact, in a society like today's, which sometimes seems so far from ideals? What were the main points you wanted to stress in your book?

The women and men of today are thirsting for God. The Pope has expressed this beautifully, saying that we are beginning a new Christian springtime. We have just celebrated the great Jubilee of the year 2000, a year of thanksgiving for the incarnation of the Son of God. Christ is, as always, the permanent

"newness" towards which all our efforts are aimed, also those of the 21st Century, which can be summed up in imbuing ordinary life with Christian meaning. This is the core of Blessed Josemaria's message.

Pathways of Christian Life draws heavily on my personal experience of daily life alongside the founder of Opus Dei, from 1950 to 1975: twenty-five years of seeing Blessed Josemaria seek, deal with, and love our Lord Jesus Christ. With this book, I have tried to contribute to the rediscovery of the face of Christ, a goal Pope John Paul II set for us during the Jubilee.