

"An ideal worth living for"

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Toni first came into contact with Opus Dei in early 1961. His engineering studies at the Swiss Federal Technical Institute were coming to an end. At the same time,

the Christian faith that he had practiced zealously in his youth was becoming more and more tenuous in his life. For years he had been living in a world governed by an exclusively technical outlook that refused to make room for the “God-hypothesis.” Moreover, faith didn’t seem to have any real place in his self-sufficient and successful life. Toni had become a non-practicing Catholic with a baptismal certificate.

But deep in his heart he was still searching for “an ideal worth living for, one worthy of his love.” That is what he told St. Josemaría Escrivá, the Founder of Opus Dei, in a letter written in 1962. Up till then he had been pursuing goals that were certainly good, but also purely worldly: professional success and the love of a woman. “I didn’t dare to look beyond these goals; I had a great fear of having to make a decision,

whatever it might be, that would bind me for my whole life.”

Toni already had his goals almost within grasp. He did brilliantly in his studies and had unlimited professional prospects. He was also going out regularly with the daughter of a professor, and as the son of a very successful businessman, he had no financial worries. Humanly speaking, things could hardly be going better.

But despite everything, he began to sense that, in the long run, it wouldn't fulfill him completely. “When I had attained practically everything I had set out to accomplish, and was thinking that now for the rest of my life everything would continue that way, governed by the same desires and ambitions, I felt that something was missing, that I had to go beyond this. I had to love truly and overcome my self-

centeredness, and make a decision to commit myself.”

Amid this inner unrest, several of his fellow students spoke to him about the importance of living his faith and about an institution in the Catholic Church, Opus Dei. This led Toni, little by little, back to the faith. Although as yet he knew very little about what interior life meant, a new horizon was opening up before him.

During the 1961/62 Christmas holidays, Toni went on a ski trip with some friends. Soon after arriving, a Veronese priest he had known in his boyhood, Fr. Ferdinand Rancan, sent word to him that a retreat was about to begin in a conference center on Lake Como, and that it could be of great help to him in growing in his spiritual life. Without giving it too much thought, Toni broke off his vacation and headed for the retreat.

While there, it became clear to him that, among other things, living as a Christian required taking a true interest in others, especially in their human and spiritual welfare. He had to admit to himself that this concern had up till then been completely missing in his life, which he now deeply regretted.

He returned to Zurich with a firm resolve to change his life completely, and soon began to practice his faith once again.

“I once again drew close to the faith, and also to Opus Dei, which seemed to me almost as its living embodiment. On returning from Italy to Zurich, I moved into the Fluntern student residence, to prepare for my final examinations at the Institute in mechanical engineering. A month later, someone there asked me whether I would like to join Opus Dei. I made the decision

almost immediately, and no one was more surprised by this than myself!"

Toni requested admission on March 19, 1962, the solemnity of St. Joseph, as a numerary member. In doing so, he gave his heart to God undivided. He told his girl friend about his decision and she accepted it.

He found himself filled with a completely new joy that transcended external circumstances. He realized that he had said yes to Love, and was filled with the firm conviction that he was following God's will.

Toni maintained this joy and love right to the end, undisturbed by the small and great obstacles that crossed his path. Even the leukemia that he fought to overcome for three years in a losing battle did not distance him from God; on the contrary, it led him to a much deeper union with the Crucified One.

It was almost as though Toni were making up in Jesus' eyes for the failure of the rich young man in the Gospel. Unlike him, Toni answered God's call with an unconditional and irrevocable yes.

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