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God's "Plan A" for you

Commentary of Msgr. Joseph S. Duran, Regional Vicar of Opus Dei in the Philippines, on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Opus Dei.

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On 25th November of this year, the *Instituto de Estudios Superiores de la Empresa* (IESE) will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its first program in Barcelona. It was called *Programa de Alta Dirección de Empresas* (PADE). It is interesting to know that

the man who crafted that first management program, Antonio Valero, was in his 30's at that time. In his memoirs, he said that his plan seemed too ambitious and unrealistic to his professional colleagues. So, he scaled it down (calling this new version "Plan B"). But he asked that both plans be submitted to the Chancellor of the University of Navarre, of which IESE was part, being its business school.

What the Chancellor approved was the original plan, "Plan A". Valero received the corrected text of his plan in March 1958, with the characteristic vigorous handwriting of the university Chancellor, the future St. Josemaría Escrivá., with the directive: "Begin the program in autumn". Upon learning that he was tasked to implement the plan that he himself made, Valero recalled that he had butterflies in his stomach.

St. Josemaría must have experienced a similar feeling thirty years before, when he saw that God wanted him to carry out Opus Dei. “I had only twenty-six years of age, the grace of God, and good humor”, he would describe his situation on that fateful day, 2nd October 1928, 80 years ago. All his life, as much as he could, that young priest would avoid saying “I founded Opus Dei on that day”. He preferred to be impersonal about that singular event: “Opus Dei burst into the world on that 2nd of October of 1928”; “On that day”, he would say, “the Lord founded His Work; he started Opus Dei”. At times, he would say “I saw Opus Dei on that day.”

What did St. Josemaría see? He was in the midst of a spiritual retreat (Sept 30 to Oct 6) at the Vincentians’ headquarters in Madrid. Three years later he described it like this: “I received an illumination about the entire Work (Opus Dei), while I was

reading those papers (i.e., his personal notes). Deeply moved, I knelt down — I was alone in my room at a time between one talk and next — and gave thanks to our Lord, and I remember with a heart full of emotion the ringing of the bells of the Church of Our Lady of the Angels.”

To stress even more the fact that the “Work” he was doing was God’s, and not his, he wrote in 1934: “The Work of God (Opus Dei) was not dreamed up by a man Many years ago our Lord gradually revealed it to an inept and deaf instrument, who saw it for the first time on the feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, the 2nd of October 1928.”

Peter Berglar, the German biographer of St. Josemaría, observed that his humility was such that “without doubting the truth of what he had seen, and without doubting

his call to accomplish the Work of God as he had seen it, he tried to fulfill his mission without drawing attention to himself.... He set about checking to see whether an organization or movement like the one he had in mind already existed somewhere in Europe. If he had found one, he would have sought admission immediately, ‘to take the last place and to serve’.” The search proved futile. The reluctant Founder’s “Plan B” had to be shelved.

What was God’s “Plan A” for “His Work” all about? Berglar puts it this way: “When ordinary Christians, the infantry of Christ’s army, take seriously the call to sanctity and identification with Christ in the midst of the world, then this familiar truth (i.e., “This is the will of God: your sanctification” — *Thessalonians* 4:3) has the force to change individuals and the world”. “Awareness of this unity (sanctity,

work, apostolate)”, Berglar explains, “protects Christians from a ghetto mentality, a defensive isolation, and ensures their effective presence in the world All baptized Christians are integrated into the world; when they try to imitate Christ, they fashion the world from within, *according to God’s plan*. This is the vocation of the laity”.

When Antonio Valero put in writing his ideas in his “Plan A”, he recalled that he did so with one guiding light in mind — the magnanimous heart of St. Josemaría. It could be said that God’s omnipotence works marvels in this world of ours depending on whether he finds magnanimous individuals — ordinary lay people willing to embark on great projects at the service of all souls, with not much resources except their hopes fixed on heaven’s help and their minds simultaneously focused on the task at hand. St. Josemaría had the

custom of sending out his spiritual children to plant the seed of Opus Dei in new countries equipped with only a few things: a crucifix, an image of the Virgin Mary, and his priestly blessing. He did so to impress on their minds that their only trustworthy assets are prayer and their generous hearts.

That is how Opus Dei began in the Philippines and in Kenya, the two countries where I have been privileged to verify the truth of St. Josemaría's convictions. Forty or fifty years ago, as St. Josemaría sent out those young men and women in their mid-20's to face the challenges of a great spiritual adventure, he was surely feeling in his paternal heart what he himself experienced in 1928 — God counting on the good will and puny collaboration of those youth to make His Redemptive plans come true.

I recently saw a book on the life of a Spanish educator, Mr. and Mrs Tomas Alvira. Alvira was the first supernumerary member of Opus Dei. The Archbishop of Madrid recently opened the first phase of the couple's process of beatification, whose life as exemplary parents and citizens could very well be the lives of countless couples. So many Christian couples could be canonized if, as faithful children of mother Church, they live out God's "Plan A" for their marriage and family relations. For, as St. Josemaría assured us, *"Many great things depend, don't forget it, on whether you and I live our lives as God wants"*.

Joseph Duran // BusinessWorld

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