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How and why did you found Opus Dei?

Msgr. Escrivá was interviewed by Time magazine journalist Peter Forbath on 15th April 1967. In that conversation, he talked about 2nd October 1928, the day Opus Dei was founded. We offer some excerpts from that interview.

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Peter Forbath: Would you describe how and why you founded Opus Dei and the events that you consider the major milestones in its development?

Msgr Escriva: Why? The only explanation for things that are born of God's will is that He has wanted to use them as an expression of His desire to save all men. From the first moment, the Work was universal, catholic. It was born not to solve the concrete problems facing Europe in the nineteen-twenties, but to tell men and women of every country and of every condition, race, language, milieu and state in life (single, married, widowed or priest) that they can love and serve God without giving up their ordinary work, their family life and their normal social relations.

How was it founded? Without any human means. I was a twenty-six year old priest with nothing but God's grace and good humour. The Work was born very small. It was only a young priest's desire to do what God asked of him.

You asked me about milestones. For me every time the Work helps someone to draw closer to God and therefore become more of a brother to their fellow men, it is an important milestone in the history of Opus Dei.

I could also mention some crucial dates. Although they may not be the most important, I will give you a few approximate ones from memory. Early in 1935 we were ready to begin working in France, as a matter of fact in Paris. But then the Spanish Civil War broke out, and afterwards the Second World War and we had to put off the expansion of the Work.

But since expansion was necessary, the delay was minimal. In 1940 our work in Portugal began. After a few preliminary trips in previous years, practically coinciding with the end of the hostilities it began in England, Italy, France, the United States and Mexico. Afterwards the rhythm of

growth and expansion became more rapid. From 1949/1950 on: in Germany, Ireland, Holland, Switzerland, Argentina, Canada, Venezuela and the other European and South American countries. Simultaneously we began in other continents: North Africa, Japan, Kenya and other East African countries, in Australia, the Philippines, Nigeria.

I also like to recall, as notable dates, the numerous occasions on which the Popes have shown more tangibly their affection for our Work. I have resided in Rome since 1946, so I have been fortunate enough to know personally Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI. All three of them have always shown truly paternal affection for us.

Peter Forbath: How do you explain the enormous success of Opus Dei,

and by what criteria do you measure this success?

Msgr Escriva: When an undertaking is supernatural, its 'success' or 'failure' in the ordinary sense of the word is relatively unimportant. As Saint Paul said to the Christians at Corinth, what matters in the spiritual life is not what others think of us, or even our own opinion of ourselves, but God's opinion.

Undoubtedly the Work has spread all over the world. Men and women of close to seventy nationalities now belong to it. To tell the truth, it is something that surprises me. I cannot provide any explanation for it. The only explanation is the will of God, for 'the Spirit breathes where He will' and He makes use of whomever He sees fit to sanctify men. For me it is an occasion for thanksgiving, for humility and for

asking God for the grace to serve Him always.

You also asked by what criteria I measure and judge. The answer is very simple: sanctity, fruits of sanctity.

Opus Dei's most important apostolate is the testimony of the life and conversation of each individual member in his daily contacts with his friends and fellow workers. Who can measure the supernatural effectiveness of this quiet and humble apostolate? It is impossible to evaluate the help we receive from a loyal and sincere friend or the influence of a good mother over her family.

But perhaps your question refers to the corporate apostolates carried out by Opus Dei, supposing that their results can be measured from a human or technical viewpoint: whether a technical training centre

for workers contributes to the social advancement of its pupils, whether a university offers its students an adequate cultural and professional formation. If that was your intention, I would say that their results can be explained in part by the fact that they are undertakings carried out by carefully trained professionals who are practicing their own profession. This implies, among other things, that these activities are planned in every case in the light of the particular necessities of the society in which they are to be carried out, and adapted to real needs, not according to preconceived schemes.

But let me repeat that Opus Dei is not primarily interested in human effectiveness. The real success or failure of our activities depends on whether, in addition to being humanly well-run, they help those who carry them out and those who make use of their services to love

God, to feel their brotherhood with their fellow men, and to manifest these sentiments in a disinterested service of humanity.

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