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Interview in 'Avvenire' (Italia): "Much remains to be done to rediscover the role of the laity"

Interview with the Prelate of Opus Dei in the Italian newspaper "Avvenire", on the occasion of his recent meeting with the families of FAES schools in Milan.

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Opus Dei is embarking on a real “journey,” at the Pope’s invitation, to rediscover the freshness and strength of its origins. On this journey, what is coming to light?

In all the countries where Opus Dei is present, so-called “regional assemblies” are held every 10 years. They are precious moments of dialogue and reflection. One discovers the desire to go to what is essential, to the charism, finding ways to live it and communicate it better in the present circumstances. For example, one issue that emerges from these assemblies is the desire to base the apostolic effort of the Work more and more on sincere friendship and the transformation of hearts, rather than on structures, projects or activities.

The method you have mentioned for this reflection is a broad consultation in which all the

members of Opus Dei and also other people who are not part of the Prelature are taking part. Can you explain to us the reasons why, in synodal terms, you have chosen this option?

Like the Church as a whole, Opus Dei is a family, and when a family has to make an important decision (challenges or priorities) everyone is listened to. We contacted the Secretariat of the Synod, which encouraged us to experience the regional assemblies of the Prelature as a special time of listening. Each assembly had meetings at the local level, with discussion groups, questionnaires, intergenerational exchanges. This process was simultaneous with the participation of many members of Opus Dei in the diocesan phases of the Synod on synodality in their respective dioceses.

Opus Dei is also heading towards the centenary of its foundation. What steps are planned and what is expected from this long preparation?

In the years leading up to the centenary, we want to question ourselves on the needs and challenges of the Church and the world. We want to deepen our identity and study how the Work can contribute to the sanctification of ordinary life through its charism. During this time, therefore, we will look at the whole of our apostolic horizon (the Church and the world) and at the inner part that is the Work, in the hope that both will converge in a moment of grace. When I think of the centenary of Opus Dei, a prayer that Blessed Alvaro addressed personally to our Lord comes to mind: “Thank you, forgive me, help me more”. In a

certain sense, at the present time we should all be living this aspiration.

How is the revision of the Statutes going?

As the Pope said, the aim is for the adjustments to preserve the charism and nature of Opus Dei, without constricting or stifling it: for example, by underlining its secular character, and the fact that more than 98% of the members are lay people, men and women who live their vocation in the world, in their family or workplace. To this end, a series of meetings are being held between representatives from the Dicastery for the Clergy and four Opus Dei canon law professors, one of them a woman. As we are still in the middle of this process, I cannot give more details. But I can assure you that the work is taking place in a climate of dialogue and trust.

Secularity, so characteristic of Opus Dei, with the central idea of the sanctification of work and daily life, is one of the most important features of the Church in the whole of the post-conciliar period: it is as if the “treasure” of the Work had become the patrimony of all Catholics. Does this feature, so important in its spirit, say something new to Opus Dei today?

I remember that on the day of St Josemaría’s canonization, a well-known trade union leader in Poland told journalists that, as a representative of the workers, he was celebrating because they had a new “patron saint.” In reality, the sanctification of work is a treasure that Jesus showed us during the thirty years of his hidden life, by working and thus supporting his family. St. Josemaría reminded people of this with particular force.

Today, however, although this message has become the heritage of the whole Church, much remains to be done to rediscover the fundamental role of the laity, their responsibility in the Church and their infinite possibilities for the evangelization of society.

Almost all members of Opus Dei are lay people, who are therefore immersed in the realities of the world, attentive to what is happening, both the great wounds of humanity and the new opportunities opening up. How does the Work participate in the changes and sufferings of our time?

The ongoing wars, the problem of loneliness and poverty and, in general, the suffering of so many people cannot remain a matter of current news, but must involve everyone. In his catecheses in South

America, St. Josemaría encouraged thousands of people to have a big heart, imitating Christ on the Cross, who had his arms wide open to welcome everyone, without distinction. This is how each member of the Work should act to alleviate suffering, bringing God's love to the most remote corners of society. God entrusts to all the baptized the divine task of building up the world (the family, the neighborhood, progress, the arts, leisure) as his children.

Secularity also means being prepared to face new challenges. What do you expect from the members of the Work and what do you see emerging in the world at their initiative?

The initiatives of the members adapt and arise according to new needs. For example, in Madrid the Laguna hospital has been set up to care for the terminally ill; people of the Work

with their friends in Colombia have created a group to support prisoners; I hear of other members of Opus Dei in Eastern European countries who take in families who are victims of war. I am also especially happy about an initiative of families who help other families to live a Christian life, supporting one another and extending this help to other friends, to other couples. These are some examples of ways to combat material and spiritual poverty, and they remind us of what St. Josemaría did from the beginning with the sick and needy in Madrid in the 1930s, trying to involve the first young people who followed him. But the response to the new social challenges is made specific especially through professional work, trying to generate relationships of justice (working conditions, payment of taxes...), of service, of friendship. The social dimension of Christian life, although with different manifestations, should

challenge us all to try to transform our lives into self-giving, into sowing peace and joy.

Escrivá often reminded his spiritual children of their duty to “serve the Church as the Church wants to be served.” How do you understand this well-known phrase of his today?

I would say that its meaning has not changed since the day it was uttered: love for the Church and the Pope is in the DNA of St Josemaria’s message. From a practical point of view, this leads to helping as effectively as possible in the dioceses where the members of Opus Dei live and to which they belong. For example, there are many lay people who actively collaborate in catechesis or pre-marriage courses in their parishes, in service initiatives such as Caritas, in activities with young people, and so on. In the same way, I

receive many requests from diocesan bishops which ask this or that priest to collaborate in a parish, in a hospital, in a specific service to the diocese. Whenever possible, we are happy to help out.

What is the importance today of a typically lay initiative such as the schools of the FAES group (Famiglia e Scuola: Family and School), in which people linked to the Work and many of its friends, also non-believers, take part?

Fifty years of this institution is an important heritage at the service of the family in the education of children. I am delighted with this milestone and I encourage families to continue along this path, with the friendliness and decisiveness that are so typical of Italians.

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