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Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz: Recent Interviews

A selection of questions and answers from recent interviews with the Prelate of Opus Dei, published in different media outlets. In these interviews, Msgr. Ocáriz discusses topics such as the upcoming centenary, the role of the laity in spreading the Gospel, responses to criticisms and errors, and Opus Dei's commitment to serving the Church.

10/26/2024

The following questions and answers are organized by topic:

- Path toward the centenary
- Fidelity and change
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- The laity
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**PATH TOWARDS THE CENTENARY
OF OPUS DEI**

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 consider the needs and challenges facing the Church and the world. We want to deepen our understanding of 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 outward (toward the Church and the world) and inward (toward Opus Dei itself), in the hope that these perspectives will converge in a moment of grace.

(Interview with Avvenire, 30-VI-2024)

How is Opus Dei preparing for the centenary of its foundation?

Blessed Álvaro del Portillo used to pray, “Thank you, forgive me, help me more.” I think this is an excellent inspiration for the centenary. To thank God for the gifts received and the holy lives of so many people over these hundred years; to be sorrowful for the mistakes made; and to ask for His help for the future, as we can do nothing without God.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

In your opinion, what have been the lights and shadows over these nearly one hundred years of history?

Opus Dei has been, and continues to be, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Ad charisma tuendum*. I see the Work as a light that inspires many people to discover Jesus Christ in the ordinary tasks of daily life: work, family, social relationships. I would

say these are the main lights, with God as the protagonist, intervening in history.

Among these lights, I would like to remember so many members of the Work who have walked this earth striving to do good, with their virtues and shortcomings. Today, around a thousand members of Opus Dei pass away each year. In most cases, they are simple, ordinary, anonymous people who have tried to sow peace and joy around them, sometimes in difficult situations.

At other times, these individuals have been publicly recognized as examples for the faithful, like Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri, the first lay faithful of Opus Dei to be beatified, a chemist who carried out a broad apostolate of friendship in Spain, Mexico, and Italy. Or, more recently, the Guatemalan pediatrician Ernesto Cofiño, a doctor

and father of a family who was declared venerable by the Church in December 2023. Among other things, Dr. Cofiño dedicated himself to helping malnourished children and impoverished families in his country, creating numerous dining facilities and aid centers, and engaging in a wide-reaching evangelization effort among his relatives, colleagues, and friends.

At the same time, the history of Opus Dei also includes shadows and mistakes, because it is made up of fallible human beings. Good intentions do not save us from mistakes, and we need to accept the possibility of error with humility. In particular, it pains us to know of people who have been in contact with the prelature and have been hurt by a lack of charity or justice: situations of insufficient emotional support, mistakes in the process of incorporation, neglect in

accompanying people who left Opus Dei, and so on. We must learn from these errors and continue improving, with God's help.

(Interview with El 9 Nou, 24-IX-2024)

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FIDELITY AND CHANGE

What has remained constant, and what has changed within Opus Dei over time?

Within Opus Dei, there is a fundamental spirit, a meaningful message about holiness in the midst of the world, that has not changed. It is the unchanging core that gives it purpose, because, as is the case with institutions, Opus Dei exists to preserve and share a specific message over time.

At the same time, from the beginning, the founder, St. Josemaría, was clear about the need to keep this spirit intact, while also recognizing that forms can – and should – change over time. In the last hundred years, both society and the Church have evolved significantly, and Opus Dei has evolved as well, as part of both the Church and society. Transformations brought about by phenomena like globalization, the advance of women in the public sphere, new family dynamics, and so on, are reflected within Opus Dei as an institution and in the real lives of its members. Knowing how to adapt, and shaping any change around the essentials, is necessary in order to remain faithful to our mission.

For various reasons, changes have occurred over these years in the legal framework, in certain apostolic methods, and in many other perhaps less visible but important aspects.

For example, there has been a clear emphasis on the separation between governance and spiritual direction, measures have been adopted to better ensure full freedom and voluntariness in the incorporation processes, and practical ways of expressing the call to live the virtue of poverty within the world have been updated.

(Interview with *El 9 Nou*, 24-IX-2024)

Pope Francis called for strengthening the essential charism of Opus Dei. How would you characterize that charism in a few words?

Summing it up in a few words, I would describe it as the search for God, the encounter with God – arms open to all – and helping many others to have this same encounter in ordinary life, at work, in the family, and on the street. In Pope Francis' words, it is about “spreading

the call to holiness in the world, through the sanctification of work and family and social commitments.”

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

This charism was shaped nearly a hundred years ago, in a very different world. Should it undergo updates and changes over time?

Society and the Church have evolved greatly in the last hundred years, and so has Opus Dei, because it is part of both. We are not indifferent to phenomena like globalization, the advancement of women in the public sphere, new professional and family dynamics, and so on. As St. Josemaría said, ways of doing and expressing things change, but the essence, the spirit, remains. Knowing how to change, in this sense, is essential to remain faithful to our mission. The key is to shape any change around the essentials, around that core or

charism that we cannot alter,
because, like any charism, it is a gift
from God.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*,
28-VII-2024)

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THE FUTURE OF OPUS DEI

**What do you envision for Opus Dei
in the next 50 years?**

Looking to the future, I would like
Opus Dei to be a source of friendship,
of faith expressed through action,
and of freedom of spirit and
creativity to carry out the Church's
mission of evangelization and
contribute to building a more just
society.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

What are the most significant milestones in Opus Dei's institutional development? Where is it heading in the 21st century?

I would say the most significant milestones are the least visible ones: the grace of God at work in thousands of people who respond positively to following Jesus Christ in the middle of the world. Or the countless stories of repentance, of conversion, that happen among members of Opus Dei and those who participate in its apostolates.

On an institutional level, I would recall the canonization of the founder on 6 October 2002. In front of the crowds gathered in Rome, St. John Paul II referred to Josemaría Escrivá as “the saint of ordinary life.” This phrase is also a guide for the future of Opus Dei, which you asked

about: what truly matters are not activities, structures, or numbers, but, with God's grace, helping many people find God in the street, in the factory, in the hospital, and so on, or, in the words of our founder, to "turn the prose of each day into heroic verse."

(Interview with *El 9 Nou*, 24-IX-2024)

What is the current situation of Opus Dei's development worldwide? Are there specific plans to expand, in view of the centenary? In which countries are the challenges greater?

[...] External obstacles sometimes come from the secularization of our environment and from certain lifestyles that make it difficult to build lasting families or understand celibacy or vocations dedicated to service and care, etc. There are also challenges every Christian in the world must face, such as the risk of

worldliness. Where there is no shared context of faith, it requires special sensitivity to live consistent with one's family or vocational commitments.

There is a vast cultural and religious diversity in different places. It's one thing to live a Christian vocation in predominantly Muslim cities like Mombasa (Kenya) or Surabaya (Indonesia) and quite another in Lisbon (Portugal) or Warsaw (Poland). As those in Opus Dei who live in these places know well, evangelization is a long-term endeavor, stretching over decades, like in China or South Korea. In these countries, alongside challenges, there is also a strong ecclesial vitality that translates into conversions, baptisms of young people and adults, etc.

Additionally, Opus Dei has been undergoing a restructuring of its regions in recent years to improve it

government and apostolic activity
[...]

(Interview with *El Debate*, 22-VI-2024)

Opus Dei includes people of all ages. As father and as prelate, how can you encourage intergenerational cooperation within the Work?

In my home, in Rome, we have a range of ages: from a 102-year-old to someone still in his 30s. Among many things, the older ones bring experience, and the younger ones enthusiasm and vitality. When young people look at the elderly (or older generations) with affection and understanding, and when the elderly do the same for the young, families and different social environments are filled with hope. For instance, nowadays, the demands of work on families require grandparents' help in raising children. Meanwhile, the

physical limitations of the elderly often require help from the young. We should approach intergenerational life with affection, aware that it sometimes involves sacrifices on both sides.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

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THE ROLE OF THE LAITY IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

What does the service that a member of Opus Dei can provide to the Church consist of?

The specific vocation of members of Opus Dei – overwhelmingly laypeople, with only 2% priests – calls them to a personal encounter with Christ in their family, work,

social relationships... knowing that the pursuit of holiness is not for supermen or -women but for real people, who have strengths and weaknesses. Today, I would particularly highlight certain expressions of this service that a member of the Work can provide within the Church: caring for others (within the family, at work, and so on) and sowing communion and fraternity in the Church and in the environments they move in. The holiness “on the street” that St. Josemaría preached drives us to seek dignified solutions to the problems of each context and each time.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

What would you say is the primary contribution the institution makes to the life of the Church?

The main contribution of Opus Dei is to accompany laypeople (98% of its

members) so that they can become protagonists of the Church's mission of evangelization in the world, one person at a time. Laypeople are not mere recipients or secondary actors; they are protagonists of evangelization, able to bring the warmth and friendship of Christ wherever it is most needed: to classrooms, neighborhoods, soccer fields, hospitals, offices, families, to the poor and the rich... everywhere. Laypeople form the vast majority of the Church, and it is to them that Opus Dei's evangelizing efforts are particularly directed.

It's a mission of spiritual accompaniment, of bringing Christian life to fullness, without interfering in their legitimate earthly choices. Their actions in society, their successes and their failures, are their responsibility, not that of the Church or Opus Dei. Attributing the political, business, or social initiatives of its

members to Opus Dei would be clericalism.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

In a recent interview with the Italian newspaper *Avvenire*, you said, "There is still much to be done to rediscover the role of the laity." What has yet to be done? And, before that, what is or should be the role of the laity in the Church?

As the Second Vatican Council emphasized, laypeople are entrusted by their very vocation with the task of bringing Christian vitality to temporal matters: work, family, business, culture, and so on. They live in the world, engaging in every field and profession, from the sports field to the scientific lab; from cinema and entertainment to politics, agriculture, education, economics... Their role is to contribute to

sanctifying the world by reflecting a bit of Christ's love in every place and circumstance; and here, much remains to be done. I'm thinking, for instance, about the formation of laypeople in bioethics and social justice, their awareness of being protagonists in evangelization, their ethical responsibility at work, in peacebuilding, education, and finance... It is baptized men and women who are out there and who should bring forth the holiness of God, which ultimately leads to humanizing the world. The mission of the laity is not limited to "filling roles" in Church structures.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

Opus Dei consists mainly of women, most of whom are married. How can greater value be placed on those who decide to give their lives to God through

marriage? What unique richness do women bring to the development of the spirit and charism of Opus Dei?

Marriage is a path to holiness; in Opus Dei, all members (married, single or celibate) share the same vocation, mission, and responsibility. Those who are married live with the awareness that their love for God is expressed through their family, friendships, and work in the world. This has an enormous transformative potential for service. With regard to women (who, as you noted, form the majority), St. Josemaría understood that the Work would be incomplete without them. This makes sense, because we could not understand Opus Dei without their irreplaceable contribution, just as we could not understand family, work, or social life without them.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

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VOCATIONS

The Catholic Church today is experiencing a significant decrease in vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and various movements. Does this phenomenon affect Opus Dei as well?

In more secularized countries, we share the same challenges as the rest of the Church. In places where the Church is growing (I think of Nigeria, Brazil, the United States...), Opus Dei is also growing. Specifically, we see an increase in lay men and women who, inspired by St. Josemaría, wish to seek holiness and are open to

forming a family. On the other hand, fewer people are embracing celibacy, a gift from God that perhaps is less understood today, though it enriches the Church greatly. As of now, over 1,000 members of Opus Dei pass away each year; even so, thanks to God, we see a small increase in total numbers. In the context of Church life, what matters is union with God, not numbers or structures.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

Pope Francis has described the crisis or decline in vocations as a “hemorrhage for the Church.” You gave your life to God from your youth, and later chose to become a priest, which only 2% of Opus Dei members are. Why is it more difficult today for people to consider the vocation to apostolic celibacy?

The world today faces the challenge of believing once more in commitment, in a lifelong love that brings joy and freedom. Many people see commitment as a limitation, but in reality, God always opens luminous horizons before us. It is an anthropological and cultural crisis, mainly affecting the Western world; in other parts of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, vocations to the priesthood or other celibate vocations are flourishing. I would say that it is essential to recover the virtue of hope.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

Many people are intrigued by the youth of some vocations to Opus Dei, sometimes even before the age of 18. Are young people truly free to decide their vocation and join Opus Dei as young as 16?

Freedom is an essential requirement for any vocation. Joining Opus Dei is only possible at 18, the age of majority. If someone feels they have a vocation, they can begin a process of discernment before that, but with the clear understanding that they are not yet part of Opus Dei, and only with the express permission of their parents.

From the time that someone requests admission to the Work until their definitive incorporation, there are several formative stages that last at least six or seven years. Each year, the person must express their desire to continue. It's not an automatic process, but a profound call to personal discernment and freedom, far deeper than most life decisions.

The Church acknowledges that young people can discover their vocation and fully respond to God's call of love. Carlo Acutis will soon be

canonized, and he died at 15; Blessed Laura Vicuña at 13; Saint Dominic Savio at 14; and Saint Thérèse of Lisieux decided to become a Carmelite in her teens.

The activities of spiritual formation that Opus Dei promotes among young people, with parental involvement, are seeds that help them to know and witness their faith, to love their family, to serve others, to be good friends, and to prepare to be good professionals and citizens. Most discover that their vocation is in marriage, some in lay celibacy, and perhaps others in the priesthood or religious life.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

The Jubilee of Youth will be celebrated in Rome next year. What do you think is the biggest challenge young people face today

in seeing a life close to God as an attractive ideal?

Christ is the only answer to the deep questions young people carry in their hearts, and it is God the Father's love that, when they open themselves to it, can heal their wounds and frailties. Perhaps we adults should ask ourselves whether we are truly able to understand young people, accompany them closely and lovingly, and make the Christian message comprehensible, taking into account each individual's circumstances and mindset. Naturally, the witness of a coherent life is also essential in showing the beauty of a life with Christ.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

“There is room in the Church for everyone, everyone,” Pope Francis stated at WYD 2023 in Lisbon. What exactly does this openness in

the Church mean, and how can Opus Dei help convey this message?

Saint Paul writes that God desires all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The Church's message of salvation is an invitation to all without exception, and the Pope has highlighted this universality as a central axis of his teaching. Saint Josemaría spoke to his spiritual children of having open arms for everyone. In a time of polarization, divisions, and walls, followers of Christ have a very clear path to follow.

(Interview with *Semana*, 17-VIII-2024)

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CRITICISM AND MISTAKES

Some people recognize members of Opus Dei for their contributions to society, such as schools, universities, and social works. However, the institution also faces negative narratives. Why do you think these narratives arise, and how can they be countered?

Sometimes, I think these narratives you mention help us to avoid the temptation of thinking we don't have anything to correct, and even more, they keep us from feeling self-satisfied or special because things go well. Like everyone else, we need to reflect on the good we wish to accomplish and on what we actually do. In fact, our founder reminded us that the Work should live "without human glory."

On the other hand, it's natural for there to be different perspectives because there are many ways of doing and understanding things,

which may be more or less appealing. From this viewpoint, when faced with the narratives you mention, it may be most important to highlight that the purpose behind any initiatives of members of the Work is to serve others. This is truly the heart of all the projects you mentioned. I'd like anyone who visits these activities to see that they aim to sow peace and joy, with each person contributing their own talents, striving to value others, and working together to overcome the many injustices and sorrows of life.

But I insist: opposing views can be helpful when they are sincere, whether they come from people unfamiliar with the Work, from those close to us, or from people who, for various reasons, are no longer part of our family. They allow us to seek forgiveness and to make improvements.

Personally, I am pleased to see that almost every day of the year, we receive a request for admission from people who were previously part of Opus Dei but, for one reason or another, had distanced themselves. News like this is a blessing from the Lord, which in some way overcomes certain excessively polarized narratives.

(Interview with *Semana*, 17-VIII-2024)

Why has part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy sometimes seen Opus Dei as a rival or parallel institution, when its members are also faithful of the territorial dioceses?

I generally perceive appreciation from the hierarchy and other Church institutions. Members of the Work are aware that they navigate in the same “boat” of the Church, in which

different spiritualities and sensibilities coexist. [...]

I can think of many examples of Opus Dei initiatives (in Rome and worldwide) from which, by the grace of God, vocations have emerged for various Church institutions. And vice versa: for example, the diocese of Florianópolis (Brazil) recently began the beatification process for a young man from the Work, who conducted extensive evangelization efforts within that diocese and came to the Catholic faith through retreats organized by another ecclesial group, Emmaus.

From a canonical perspective, as you mentioned, Opus Dei's lay members are faithful of their dioceses just like any other Catholic. And in practical terms, many of them actively participate in parish catechesis, premarital courses, service initiatives like Caritas, youth

activities, and more. Similarly, I receive numerous requests from diocesan bishops asking for a particular priest to collaborate in a parish, a hospital, or a diocesan service. Whenever possible, we are happy to help.

If there has been tension with some Church institution, it may stem from imperfect human relationships, which we should try to address day by day, with normality. Sometimes, misunderstandings may also arise from the historical difficulty of making space for new realities that bring a “novelty” that may initially seem surprising. I like to think that these are things of the past.

(Interview with *El Debate*, 22-VI-2024)

You have publicly asked forgiveness for the “faults and sins of Opus Dei members.” What are those faults and sins?

Each individual knows their own faults and sins. At the same time, we cannot ignore that some people who used to belong to Opus Dei or who have come into contact with the Work have felt hurt by certain approaches or have lost trust in those leading or in the institution itself.

Taking into account that Opus Dei's mission is to walk a path of holiness and encounter with Christ, it causes me personal pain to consider that some people have not found happiness on this journey. It's an invitation to a sincere examination to identify the causes, see how to make amends in each situation, and assess what can be improved.

The reasons for these wounds vary greatly. What pains me most is that we have not always been able to accompany people well in discerning their vocation, in spiritual guidance,

or during a difficult family or personal situation.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

Opus Dei is often described with three adjectives: conservative, powerful, and secretive. Why is that, and what adjectives would you prefer to be used to describe Opus Dei and its work?

Everyone has their opinions and their reasons for perceiving things the way they do. If some people perceive it this way, it may be because there's something objective and/or subjective that creates that impression. In part, it is each member's task to make Opus Dei better known; to live their vocation authentically. It's something great and wonderful, though I understand that it requires a perspective of faith to grasp fully. Still, I think that, humanly, anyone who knows Opus

Dei up close will see regular people, with virtues and flaws.

I'd like us to be known as joyful, simple, and serene people; peaceful people who are easy to befriend, open-minded, and understanding. I'd like people to recognize the diversity of Opus Dei's faithful, not only the few who gain public attention. They would see that each person strives to live their faith deeply, coexisting with their own shortcomings and trying to use their talents to serve their families, friends, and society.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

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REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

Opus Dei is embarking on a real “journey,” at the Pope’s invitation, to rediscover the freshness and strength of its charism. What is being discovered on this journey?

In all the countries where Opus Dei is present, we hold what are called “regional assemblies” every 10 years. These are precious moments of dialogue and reflection. What emerges is a desire to return to the essentials, to the charism, finding the best ways to live and communicate it in today’s circumstances. For instance, one of the themes arising from these assemblies is the wish to root the apostolic work of the Work increasingly in sincere friendship and in the transformation of the heart, rather than in structures, projects, or activities.

(Interview with *Avvenire*, 30-VI-2024)

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 this decision, in a synodal style?

Like the Church as a whole, Opus Dei is a family, and when a family needs to make an important decision (regarding challenges or priorities), everyone is heard. We reached out to the Secretariat of the Synod, which encouraged us to treat the Prelature's regional assemblies as a special time of listening. Each assembly included local-level meetings, discussion groups, questionnaires, and intergenerational exchanges. This process coincided with the participation of many Opus Dei members in their dioceses' phases of the Synod on Synodality.

(Interview with Avvenire, 30-VI-2024)

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STATUTES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Does the Pope's measure [the *motu proprio Ad charisma tuendum*] dissolve Opus Dei's distinctiveness within the Catholic Church?

Allow me to politely disagree. The specific character of Opus Dei is found in its charism or spirit, rather than in its “juridical garb.” At its core is the universal call to holiness through work and the ordinary realities of life. The Pope, in *Ad charisma tuendum*, refers to this message as a “gift of the Spirit received by St. Josemaría,” that is, as a charism. I repeat: this is the relevant specific characteristic. In fact, with this *motu proprio* Pope Francis confirms the bull *Ut sit*, with which John Paul II erected Opus Dei as a prelature: he modifies two

accidental aspects and confirms the essential charism.

Characteristic of Opus Dei is something as ordinary as work: the relevance of work as a place of encounter with God, whether in Silicon Valley or the slums of Kinshasa, whether working as an engineer in the Madrid subway or as a teacher in a school on the outskirts of any metropolis.

Opus Dei does not wish to be an exception within the Church. Its juridical proposals have sought the formula that best fits the reality of lay people who, through a vocational call and with the pastoral care of priests, want to follow Christ in the realities of their families, work, social life, etc. within the framework of their respective particular churches. The fact that until now it has been the only personal prelature may have been perceived as

something "exceptional," but it is certainly not that. On the contrary, I think it would be very good if there were other personal prelatures that would contribute to the evangelization of many areas that especially need Christian inspiration.

(Interview with *El País*, 26-VI-2023)

How is the review of the Statutes progressing?

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, three

men and one 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.

(Interview with Avvenire, 30-VI-2024)

Were you surprised by Pope Francis' decision to change some aspects of Opus Dei's structure? Do these measures change the position of Opus Dei within the Church? And is that why Opus Dei is now revising its statutes?

The Holy Father gave us some advance notice about the *motu proprio Ad charisma tuendum*. The main changes in that document affect structural and organizational aspects (such as the fact that the Prelate will no longer be a bishop, among other things) but do not alter Opus Dei's mission or essence. The modification of the Statutes is a response to the Pope's request, and

we are currently working on this with the Dicastery for the Clergy in a climate of dialogue and trust.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

How do the new papal provisions affect Opus Dei? Do they impact the day-to-day life of the institution?

The legal and the day-to-day are intertwined realms, but they each have their own distinctions. In the daily lives of the laity, who are deeply involved in worldly matters, the new provisions do not change how they live out their vocation in Opus Dei. Regarding Opus Dei as an institution, we are working with the Dicastery for the Clergy to adapt the statutes, as requested by the Holy Father in the motu proprio *Ad charisma tuendum*. Since we are still studying these adjustments, I cannot anticipate the outcome. I can assure

you, though, that this work is proceeding in a spirit of dialogue and trust, as befits the Church as the family of God.

(Interview with *El Debate*, 22-VI-2024)

How did you interpret the change in Opus Dei's link to the Holy See, as indicated in the motu proprio *Ad charisma tuendum*? The Pope suggests that the organization's authority should rely more on its charism than on hierarchical authority.

Charism and hierarchy complement each other in the Church; they are not two alternative concepts but complementary. Charisms have their *raison d'être* in the service they render to the Church as a whole. Hence, to spread them in the Church and the world, they are usually translated into institutional realities.

The discernment of charisms corresponds to the authority of the Church, and Opus Dei has depended on the authority of the Church in each of its institutional steps. With the reform of the curia, Pope Francis has promoted changes in numerous institutions and organisms to favor a more dynamic evangelization. That is the purpose of the *motu proprio* you mention. Therefore, we are working to respond faithfully to the Pope's request knowing, for example, that what is essential is not whether or not the Prelate wears a pectoral cross, but that the faithful of Opus Dei and other people are able to fully live this charism within the Church.

(Interview with *El País*, 26-VI-2023)

Isn't it clericalizing an institution of the Church whose primary mission is for laypeople? To what extent could these measures affect

the laity's goal of being holy within the world?

The message of Opus Dei is primarily directed toward lay men and women, men and women in the world, who have been the vast majority within Opus Dei since its inception. In the same way that charisms should not be absolutized, neither should law. This is why Opus Dei has undergone various institutional solutions to find the most suitable formula that combines, on the one hand, safeguarding the charism and, on the other, a legal structure that gives it a place in the Church and reflects its nature without restricting or stifling it.

(Interview with *El Debate*, 22-VI-2024)

Opus Dei has bishops and archbishops worldwide; wouldn't it be appropriate for the Prelate to also be a bishop?

To clarify, the few bishops and archbishops who come from Opus Dei worldwide belong to their own particular churches and, therefore, answer solely to the Pope; they have no other superior. I think the fact that Blessed Álvaro and Monsignor Javier Echevarría received episcopal consecration was beneficial for reinforcing ecclesial communion during those years, from 1991 to 2016. Currently, what's essential is to faithfully follow the Pope's guidance rather than debating whether it would be more or less appropriate.

(Interview with *El Debate*, 22-VI-2024)

Many see in the Vatican's decision the elimination of a privilege, a certain demotion, and a gesture of a more progressive Church towards a more conservative world as well as a manifestation of

an old conflict between the Jesuits and Opus Dei.

Pope Francis was asked a similar question, and he pointed out that it was a worldly interpretation, inappropriate to the religious world. I think that too often there is a tendency to read reality in terms of power and polarization, with groups that oppose and do not understand each other. However, in the Church, the logic that should prevail is that of service and collaboration. We all row in the same boat, open to be helped to improve.

Regarding the old conflict you mentioned, I can personally tell you that I am a former student of the Jesuit school in Madrid, and I am very grateful for the formation and example I received from the Jesuits.

(Interview with El País, 26-VI-2023)

When St. Josemaría sought Opus Dei's legal approval in 1946, the response was that the Work was ahead of its time by a century. Now that Opus Dei is nearing its centenary, do you think the reform of its Statutes requested by the Holy See relates to that response given to the founder?

In 1946, Opus Dei was present in only four countries, but today it's in 70. At that time, a message directed primarily to laypeople about the pursuit of holiness in the world seemed anticipatory, even though it's deeply rooted in the Gospel. Time and universalization have made this charism more widely understood. As I've said before, the Second Vatican Council opened the door to this deeper understanding. I can assure you that the current modification of the statutes requested by the Holy Father is being carried out precisely with this fundamental criterion of

aligning with the charism, which today is more understood and shared. Law, essential as it is, follows life and the embodied message, to provide support and continuity.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

The Pope's request for an annual report on the status of Opus Dei (instead of every five years) — could this reflect a need for greater transparency and closer oversight, following abuse cases in various areas of the Church? Were the existing controls insufficient?

The change in reporting frequency results from the shift to a different Dicastery. Now Opus Dei's immediate interlocutor is the Dicastery for the Clergy, where reports are submitted annually rather than every five years, as was done with the Dicastery for Bishops. Regardless, there is no doubt that the Church, including

Opus Dei as part of it, is improving in how it transparently and understandably communicates the most relevant aspects of its activity and motivations. Transparency, when properly understood and applied, builds trust, which, as you pointed out, has been seriously questioned due to abuse cases. Since 2013, Opus Dei has had a protocol for the protection of minors and vulnerable individuals, formalizing prudent measures that had been practiced for decades within the Work. This protocol is similar to that of many other institutions and incorporates the most recent Church guidelines on the matter. Additionally, there are ongoing efforts to establish special channels for healing and resolution to welcome those who want to be heard.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

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CHURCH

The founder, St. Josemaría, often reminded us of the need to “serve the Church as the Church wants to be served.” How can we interpret this famous statement today?

I would say that the meaning of that phrase has not changed since the day it was spoken: love for the Church and the Pope is in the DNA of St. Josemaría'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.

(Interview with *Avvenire*, 30-VI-2024)

In recent times, society's perception of the abuses committed within the Church has changed. How does the Opus Dei Prelature view this most important issue?

This is very sad. In addition to underlining how regrettable these abuses and crimes are (just one case causes so much pain!), I would also like to highlight the work done in recent years by the Pope and the Holy See through clear provisions: today, thank God, the universal Church and most Church institutions have protocols and guidelines to eradicate and effectively combat these abuses, which leave deep and sometimes irreparable wounds.

The protocols of the Prelature, for example, date back to 2013 and I updated them in 2020. They are designed to generate awareness of the rights and needs of minors and

vulnerable people, and thus avoid any risk of exploitation, sexual abuse, or mistreatment in all the activities that are carried out in the centers of the Prelature, and which we hope will also inspire all the activities that take place in institutions that receive some kind of pastoral support from Opus Dei.

Because of human nature, these types of measures cannot guarantee that nothing bad will ever happen whether in the Church or society, but they certainly contribute to creating a new culture and a clear reference. Anyone who commits a crime of this kind now knows where he stands.

I would add that for understandable reasons, public opinion has focused on these abuses in the Church although it is something much more generalized in society. There are social spheres in which this sad and regrettable reality is more

widespread. There are many concrete cases of priests, but compared to the thousands and thousands and hundreds of thousands of priests who have given their lives working, they are proportionally few. But yes, it must be fought with whatever means possible.

(Interview with *El País*, 26-VI-2023)

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SOCIETY

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of St. Josemaría's catechesis in Latin America, you are revisiting this region. Do you think the reality of Opus Dei in Latin America aligns with what Escrivá dreamed of at that time?

When St. Josemaría was in America, he encouraged dreaming of great adventures in Christian service.

Without overlooking the difficulties and human errors, I thank God for the development of Opus Dei in Colombia and throughout the continent. At the same time, God's logic allows us to view human results, numbers, and external successes or failures with greater perspective, since what is really essential is facilitating encounters with Jesus Christ in many people's hearts, and that is something only God can truly see.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

You have come to Colombia under different circumstances: as a visiting professor, as an assistant to the Prelate, and now as Prelate. What changes do you see in Colombian reality, and what

aspects of society require improvement?

Without going into details or concrete suggestions, because I do not know the country's situation in enough depth, I see South America as a region full of contrasts and great challenges. The Church and the Pope urge us to overcome divisions, prioritize the most needy, and accompany families' lives of faith with renewed hope. I believe these are three areas in which all Catholics have a great deal to contribute. Therefore, I would encourage the laity to participate in public spaces to promote these three areas, seeking the common good alongside others who may not share our faith but are committed to human dignity.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

The last visit of the Prelate of Opus Dei to Colombia took place in 2015,

by your predecessor, Javier Echevarría. The national context of that trip was that we were on the brink of signing a Peace Agreement. Today, in a turbulent world, we continue seeking the end of the war. What makes peace so difficult to achieve in society?

Peace requires human effort, but above all, it is a gift from God. Violence destroys that gift and prevents us from walking together towards the future and the common good. Without peace, the integral development of individuals is difficult, and societies remain stagnant, especially in the most vulnerable sectors. The great trap of peace is violence, which always prioritizes personal ends over the common good. Peace is a gift from God that we must ask for together. We can all contribute to building peace in our hearts and relationships, often through small

acts of pacification in our own homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

(Interview with Semana, 17-VIII-2024)

Our country [Chile] is experiencing changes in religious matters. The Bicentennial survey from UC shows a significant decrease in young people's adherence to the Catholic religion. Should we assume that Catholics are becoming a minority group?

I do not live in Chile, so I do not know the situation in depth, but I would dare to say that it would be a mistake to take a defensive stance, which is a natural reaction when one finds oneself in a minority. On the contrary, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we should feel as our own the aspirations, needs, and sufferings of all people and work shoulder to shoulder with them.

After the hurricane caused by the abuse crisis, for example, many Catholics have taken the path of accompanying those who are wounded, and the Church in Chile has implemented prevention measures and promoted environments of trust and freedom, which are essential for regaining its vigor in society and crucial for preventing these crimes from happening again. A Church wounded in its members can still convey Christ's message and has much to contribute: helping, collaborating, and healing, without seeking personal or institutional gain or rushing to solutions. This is the path I see the Church in Chile has embarked on: a way to regain credibility and, above all, to bring the closeness of Jesus Christ to many people.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*,
28-VII-2024)

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BIOGRAPHY

You were born in 1944 in exile, in Paris. Today, we remember the dramatic moments that Europe was experiencing then, which your family lived through in exile in France. Did this experience mark you in any way?

During the Spanish Civil War, my father served in the Republican army, which meant that, at the end of the conflict, he had to go into exile in Paris. He was a military veterinarian and had an initial job caring for the animals of a circus. Shortly thereafter, he found work in a laboratory and was able to bring the family with him. Thank God, the reprisals that my father suffered upon returning to Spain a few years

later were mild, and he was able to develop a career in animal biology research. As for me, I was a child and lived through all of that without being very aware of it. Still, perhaps reflecting on that experience vaccinated me against the seduction of any type of violence and against the temptation to identify religion with specific political options.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

You studied physics and then theology, a singular combination. What aspects of physics have illuminated your religious path?

Both physics and theology are, each in their own way, knowledge of reality: they are not only not contradictory but also complementary. I cannot say that studying physics opened my eyes to the reality of God, as I was already a believer by family tradition and

personal conviction. However, investigating concrete physical reality helped me to see the world from a different perspective as created by God.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

In your youth, you lived alongside St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei. In this everyday context, which of his traits stood out to you?

I arrived in Rome in 1967 and lived in the same house as him until his death in 1975, but there were about 200 of us living there. Despite the numbers, each of us felt very loved, surrounded by his joy and affection. On one occasion, in front of many people, he asked me a question and immediately realized he had put me in a tight spot; without giving me time to respond, he added a side comment that made my answer

unnecessary. These little details repeated daily. Above all, I was struck by his union with God, which was evident when you heard him speak while preaching or in a family gathering. On a human level, I would emphasize his love for freedom and his good humor.

(Interview with *El Mercurio de Chile*, 28-VII-2024)

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