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Msgr. Mariano Fazio: “We Christians are in the world to transform it”

An interview with Msgr. Mariano Fazio, auxiliary vicar of Opus Dei, on the Italian TV200 programme “Di Buon Mattino,” speaking about his book, “Protagonisti del bene comune. San Josemaría Escrivá e i cristiani nella società contemporanea.” This is a translated transcript of the conversation, in which he explains how St. Josemaría’s message on holiness in ordinary life invites Christians

to engage with society, work
with professionalism, and
contribute to the common good.

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Monsignor, good morning and
welcome. Ladies and gentlemen:
Msgr. Mariano Fazio, auxiliary vicar
of Opus Dei.

The book is entitled *Protagonists of the Common Good: St. Josemaría Escrivá and Christians in Contemporary Society*. It is a way not only of revisiting Escrivá's legacy, but also of showing its place in our reality, because being Christian does not mean being apart from the world, but living in the world.

Indeed. I felt it was important to write a book about the common good because we speak so little about it today. We live in a very individualistic society, and I think that raising awareness of Christians' responsibility to help build a society more in keeping with God's plan is quite urgent.

In what sense did the founder of Opus Dei give Christians a kind of “compass,” if I can put it that way, or directions?

Above all, his message was the universal call to holiness. This was quite a widespread idea at the beginning of the twentieth century, but what was specific was the message that God calls the majority of Christians to grow in holiness in the middle of the ordinary circumstances of life.

And the Lord asks us for consistency there. We must be good Christians not only in church, in the chapel, or in Catholic associations (though there too!), but above all in the family, at work, in our social relationships, and so on. In short, to be Catholics one hundred per cent. He used a particular image: unity of life. We cannot have a double personality, being Catholics in church, and only

protecting our own interest elsewhere. We should bear witness in every dimension of life.

The importance of the lay vocation is also highlighted in all of this. It is for everyone, not only those who embrace a priestly or religious vocation.

Absolutely. The Lord calls everyone to holiness. He gives some the priestly or religious vocation, but we all have a vocation to holiness, and in the great majority of cases this is lived out in the ordinary routine of daily life. I think this is also the most central message of the Second Vatican Council. Yesterday I learnt that Bishop Varden, who is preaching the retreat to the Pope and the Roman Curia, highlighted this very aspect of the Council: the universal call to holiness.

So the book is not so much a collection of theological rules, but rather a way of deepening Christians' real commitment in the world. Could you give us any concrete pointers?

It is difficult to summarise, but it seems to me that above all, we must love the world without being worldly. Pope Francis spoke a great deal about the temptation of worldliness. We are in the world to transform it, and in order to change a reality, one must first love it. So we must love the world in order to try to transform it and make it more in keeping with God's designs for our society.

Next, we need social responsibility: to realise that each of us, in our different situations, is responsible for changing this world, helping the poor and vulnerable, bringing Gospel

message to all the structures of society, and so on.

And also the capacity for dialogue. I see this as fundamental. Today we live in a society — not only in Italy; around the world — of profound polarisation, and we have lost the ability to dialogue.

The Christian must be a person of dialogue, open and respectful towards everyone. Moreover, it is not enough simply to live out justice — although that is a fundamental starting point — because justice needs to be completed by charity. We are human, and so we will always be limited, but I believe that, following in Christ's footsteps, we can build a society where, through charity, life can be more beautiful and we can live with greater peace, serenity, and hope.

Here's a word that is a bit unfashionable today: *professionalism*. The Christian vocation also entails being professional, but that is something that is not always directly associated with being a Christian.

Without a doubt. Saint Josemaría spoke a great deal about the sanctification of work. And how does one sanctify work? First and foremost, by working well. Any solicitor, architect, housewife, doctor, or civil servant must above all have a strong spirit of service: *I am here, exercising my profession, in order to serve others*. I think this also changes social relationships enormously. And then, working well means being a good doctor, a good architect, a good nurse. Working well also means studying, learning continuously, and so on.

I believe this will also greatly assist the evangelisation of society, because seeing a Catholic who is also an excellent professional is a very attractive witness. We cannot be devout believers and mediocre professionals.

St. Josemaría used to say that we must place Christ at the summit of all human activities, not out of vanity or a sense of superiority, but in order to serve everyone else. Thus, the sanctification of work.

Uniting faith, service, work, and action also means having an element that binds all these parts of the human person together.

Yes. I recall that many years ago, before John Paul I's election, he wrote some articles, in the *Messaggero di Sant'Antonio*, I believe. The final article was about St.

Josemaría, and he quoted Étienne Gilson, a great French Thomist philosopher, who said: “The mediaeval cathedrals were built by faith, but also by great architects and great mathematicians.” Faith and mathematics must be brought together, and I think this is a very appealing and very timely message.

Speaking of holiness in everyday life, in work and in daily living, also calls to mind the “saint next door” Pope Francis spoke about. You were a friend of Pope Francis. To close our conversation this morning, might you share a personal memory of him?

I have many memories. One comes to mind just now. On one occasion I was with him and told him I had made two trips; one to Côte d'Ivoire and another to the Philippines. The Pope said to me: “Well, I can see you are

going round the world!” I replied: “Yes, but it is your fault, because you say that we need to be close to all people. In Opus Dei we have many people throughout the world, and so I had to make these journeys. But have no fear, because I make the most of my travels to speak a great deal about the Pope.”

His expression changed slightly, becoming a little serious, and he said to me: “It would be better to speak less about the Pope and more about Jesus.” I replied: “Understood. Thank you.”

This shows the centrality of Christ, as well as the humility of the Pope.