

# Procedures Carefully Followed

The following statement was released concerning the beatification of Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer

11/13/2001

*The following statement was released on Tuesday, 12 May, by Cardinal Angelo Felici, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, and Archbishop Edward Nowak, Secretary of the same, concerning the beatification on 17 May of Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the*

*founder of Opus Dei. The statement was released in Italian.*

As everyone knows, on 17 May a ceremony has been scheduled for the beatification of the Venerable Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. The announcement has brought great joy not only to the members of Opus Dei, which the Servant of God founded, but to all who have come to know his spirituality and work.

Nevertheless, opposition has been expressed and this was foreseeable, given the spread of Opus Dei's members and of the work they do in service to the Church. There were also some insinuations about the procedure followed in this specific case by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. These insinuations are completely groundless, as a precise knowledge of the cause's *iter* shows, one which we will now give.

## **I. The introductory phase of the cause**

After the Servant of God's death in Rome on 26 June 1975, the reputation for sanctity which he enjoyed while living became increasingly widespread. Over the next five years the postulation was able to collect, in two volumes of 428 and 390 pages, many testimonies about the basis and extent of this reputation. The same postulation published another volume with a report, signed by those concerned, of 1,500 favors attributed to the intercession of Mons. Escrivá (currently the written reports of the favors and graces received have reached 70,000). In addition, approximately 6,000 postulatory letters were sent to the Holy Father, written by, among others, 69 Cardinals, 1,228 Bishops and 41 General Superiors of religious orders and congregations, as well as by many heads of state and

government, some of whom knew the Servant of God personally or, at least fulfilled the conditions given in the Instruction issued by the Congregation of Rites on 15 January 1935.

The *Motu proprio Sanctitas clarior*, in force from 1969 to 1983, laid down—as is also provided for in the current norms—that, in order to verify the persistence and firmness of the reputation for holiness, a cause could only be introduced five years after the Servant of God's death. Mons. Escrivá's cause began on 19 February 1981, thus in accordance with the law, after receiving the prior *nihil obstat* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which was confirmed by the Holy Father.

## **II. The instructional phase**

Beginning in May of 1981 and continuing for six and a half years, two simultaneous processes regarding the life and virtues of the Servant of God were prepared, one in Rome and the other in Madrid (the latter for texts in Spanish). According to the practice in force at the time, very detailed questionnaires were prepared by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which also took into consideration the criticisms of those opposed. Their publications in opposition to the Servant of God were handed over to the postulation. In all, 960 sessions were held and 92 witnesses were heard, all of them *in visu*, a third of whom knew Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer for periods of between 20 and 40 years. The interview of one witness took 60 hearings and the procedural depositions are contained in approximately 11,000 typewritten pages. Furthermore, the documents are the result of research conducted

in 390 archives and collected in 11 volumes.

More than 50% of the texts come from outside Opus Dei, and the tribunals also examined some former members of Opus Dei. Moreover, the postulation was careful to indicate the names of persons openly opposed to the cause and to propose that some of them be questioned by the tribunals; regarding one of them, the tribunal decided that she had to be excluded from testifying, since it considered her to be unreliable and unsuitable to appear before an ecclesiastical tribunal: the relevant decision was made with the express approval of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

A very important proof for judging a person's holiness comes from his or her writings. Those of the servant of God Mons. Josemaría Escrivá de

Balaguer were examined by four theological censors, two for the published writings and two for those unpublished. Here are some of their judgements:

- "Escrivá possesses the strength of the classics: the character of a Church Father";
- "He will remain in the history of spirituality", "at the level of the great figures of Tradition";
- "You can see that these writings preceded and anticipated the more important decisions of Vatican II... They presented the ideal of the common Christian life in direct and fruitful contact with the Gospel, as has never been seen before in the Church's history";
- "[The writings] document the heights of the mystical life which he reached at a very early age";

— "The example and message of the founder of Opus Dei impress one as evidently a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church".

Regarding the documentation presented, some of the theological Consultors said the following:

- "The array of proofs in this cause is so abundant that one could not ask for more";
- "Study of the processes' acts show the unexceptionable rigor with which the instructional phase was conducted";
- "We have at hand an extraordinary quantity of data which helps us arrive at a certain judgement concerning a figure of exceptional stature";
- "The rigorous and detailed documentation of even the smallest detail leaves nothing in the dark, and

to have heard some discordant voices gives soundness and credibility to the whole exposition";

— "The instructional phase appears exhaustive: the information which can be inferred from all the depositions covers the entire course of the Servant of God's life. One is struck above all by the quality of the witnesses examined and by the long acquaintance which the majority of them had with the Servant of God... The convergence and explicitness of the testimony regarding the heroism attained by the Servant of God has the nature of a definitive proof".

### **III. Examination by the Congregation**

The final session of the tribunal took place in Rome on 8 November 1986. The decree on the validity of the processes was issued on 3 April 1987, and Fr. Ambrosius Eszer, O.P. was appointed Relator. Immediately a

group of specialists in theology, canon law and Church history, with the assistance of specialists in informatics, began working on the *Positio super virtutibus*, i.e., the systematic exposition of what resulted from the process.

In the customary presentation the Relator of the Congregation stated:

"We have reached a well-founded conviction about the completeness of this *Positio*: any supplementary studies could not make a significant addition to the judgement which the Consultors can make, based on the material presented here for the purpose of a sure evaluation of the Servant of God's heroic practice of virtue".

In June of 1988 the *Positio* was handed over to the Congregation, which entrusted it to the theological Consultors for their study in March of 1989. This interval was not

exceptional, particularly if one keeps in mind that the cause was already preparing two processes on alleged miracles. After another six months, i.e., on 19 September 1989, the special *congressus* of the Consultors took place, with the General Promoter of the Faith presiding. The theological Consultors, in conformity with the Regulations [*Regolamento*], were appointed by the Secretary of the Congregation in agreement with the Promoter of the Faith, after also consulting the Cardinal Prefect, due to the importance of the cause. Out of respect for its own role, in consideration of the cause's high visibility, and in justice to the Petitioners [*Actores*], the Congregation made great efforts to guarantee an objective and impartial judgement, one untainted by considerations extraneous to the cause itself. Two Consultors abstained. Their arguments were examined by the Relator, who gave

ample and exhaustive elucidations. According to a decision of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, made *in congressu* in 1986, one of the suspensive *vota* was not published because the person abstaining had not taken part in the Consultors' discussion.

Here are some of the judgements of the other theological Consultors:

— "I think it is providential that the cause of this Servant of God was completed with exceptional speed, less than 15 years after his death, so that the figure of this intrepid apostle who was most faithful to the Church may be raised up in the face of the grave phenomena we are sadly witnessing. All the difficulties which first appeared to me and which could cause some perplexity I have seen disappear like snow in the sun";

— "One continues to be amazed at the colossal and many-sided figure of

the Servant of God and to give spontaneous thanks to Providence for reserving to this century, which is drawing to a close, the presence of a priest and founder who fully embodied one of the fundamental teachings of Vatican II, that is, the universal call to holiness, and became its apostle and incomparable exemplar";

— "The appropriateness is demanded by the ecclesial benefits which will come from proposing a figure, who, like the Servant of God, spread in the Church a message of sanctification in daily life precisely for ordinary people: In a secularized society like ours, the appeal to the value of work in union with Christ as a way of holiness seems to us not only opportune, but pastorally necessary".

Another Consultor, after discussing "the advantage and interest of the Church in his possible elevation",

concludes: "[This is the cause] of a contemporary of ours which stands out among those causes which, in addition to having the processes on the miracles already prepared, give greater emphasis to the presence of heroic sanctity in all countries and among various social groups".

Another one said: "I believe that the Servant of God is a great gift from God to the Church of our time ... I see him as a great master of the spiritual life not only for the faithful, as a standard-bearer of the universal call of the faithful to holiness, but also for the clergy and religious in this rather critical period of the Church's life".

The ordinary congregation of Cardinals and Bishops in session on 20 March 1990 gave a unanimous judgement on the heroic nature of his virtues.

In regard to the relatively short time that it took to arrive at the discussion

regarding the heroic nature of his virtues, it should be emphasized that the norms currently in force do not establish any interval between the death of a Servant of God and the discussion in question, whereas the preceding norms required a period of at least 50 years. Nevertheless, even under the previous discipline some dispensations were granted: thus, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini was beatified 21 years after her death, and the beatification of St. Therese of the Child Jesus took place 25 years after she had passed away.

#### **IV. The declaration on the miracle**

The alleged miracle presented for the beatification occurred in 1976 and the relevant process was instructed by the diocesan curia of Madrid in 1982.

The meeting of the Medical Board regarding the alleged miracle was held on 30 June 1990. It has been said

that one of the doctors on the Board was connected with Opus Dei. There is nothing unusual about that: in fact, when the heroic nature of a Servant of God's virtues is being examined, it also happens that a member of the order or congregation which he or she belonged to is among the Consultors. In the case of a miracle, the Secretary and Undersecretary of the Congregation attend the doctors' meeting, as do the General Promoter of the Faith and an official appointed "*ad hoc*". Moreover, both the doctors and those who attend the meeting, such as the theological Consultors, are bound by oath, which is a guarantee of objectivity. The subsequent *congressus* of the theological Consultors on 14 July 1990 also gave a unanimous judgement on the authenticity of the miracle, as the congregation of Cardinals and Bishops did later.

We would like to close these remarks by repeating the conclusion of the *votum* which the Promoter of the Faith, following a prolonged and in-depth investigation, gave in the special *congressus* of the theologians meeting to examine the heroic virtues: "On the basis of the testimony given in this process, I am of the opinion that the strongest proof for the authenticity of the high level of mystical life which the servant of God achieved comes precisely from his daily effort to identify with the divine will and from that humility which, ... after 50 years of intensely lived priesthood, enabled him to consider himself still a stammering child".

In conclusion, we believe it is our duty to point out that, before proceeding to the beatification, the Holy Father wanted to entrust to a special Commission the task of

verifying whether one could proceed to this beatification confidently.

After careful reflection, the Commission gave the Holy Father its opinion in favor of the planned celebration.

**Angelo Cardinal Felici** *Prefect*  
**Archbishop Edward Nowak**  
*Secretary*

L'Osservatore Romano

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