opusdei.org

Tomás and Paquita Alvira: Early Married Members of the Work

Tomás and Paquita were among the earliest married members of Opus Dei. Tomas ran a boarding school for orphans, was a college professor, and helped found a network of primary and secondary schools. Paquita was also a high school teacher and principal, and dedicated herself to her family.

09/21/2024

This sketch of Tomás and Paquita Alvira is from John Coverdale's book and podcast "Encounters: Finding God in All Walks of Life." *Encounters* presents profiles of people living Saint Josemaria's message of finding God in everyday life.

Each week a new podcast episode is released with a new profile. You can subscribe to it on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Amazon Music, Pocket Casts, Podcast Addict, Podcast Republic, iHeart, Castbox, or wherever you listen to your podcasts (RSS feed).

You can purchase the entire book from Amazon or Scepter Publishers.

Tomás Alvira, the first married member of Opus Dei, was a soil scientist, a high schoolteacher, and a university professor of education. His wife, Paquita, a very early

member of the women's branch, worked as an elementary school teacher and principal, but after the birth of their first child, she became a full-time homemaker. The Archdiocese of Madrid has opened causes of canonization for both of them. This chapter devotes more space to Tomás than to Paquita, not because his life illustrates more about the vocation to Opus Dei than hers does, but simply because his career as an educator led his colleagues to leave a record of many details of his life. Paquita's life taken as a whole is inspiring, but because it unfolded largely in their home we know far less about its details.

Getting Started

Tomás graduated from college with a degree in chemistry during the turbulent period just before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. He found a job teaching in a small

public school in a rural town. Despite his youth and his reputation as a practicing Catholic, in 1935 his mostly anti-Catholic left-wing colleagues unanimously elected him director of the school.

In July 1936, Tomás went to Madrid to take national exams for a permanent position in the public high school system. A few days before he was scheduled to return home to Zaragoza, war broke out between right-wing, pro-Catholic Nationalists led by General Franco and left-wing, anti-Catholic Republicans.

Tomás found himself trapped in leftist Republican-controlled Madrid, where being a practicing Catholic could easily lead to being assassinated. One day on the street, he met the Republican mayor of the town where he taught. The man gave him his phone number in case Tomás

found himself in trouble. Their professional relationship and the affection of the mayor's eleven-year-old daughter for her teacher trumped their political differences.

On another occasion, a Socialist colleague who had traveled to Madrid with Tomás for the exams and with whom he was sharing a room, decided to enlist in the Republican Army. At their last meeting, he asked Tomás to give him his watch. He explained his unusual request by saying, "I think that the watch is the thing I will look at most frequently and it will remind me of you. I want you to know that I will never shoot to kill someone on the opposing side. They are your people, and I don't want anything to separate us."

For more than a year, Tomás frequently went to study with a college classmate, José María

Albareda. In Albareda's apartment, he met Isidoro Zorzano and Juan Jiménez Vargas, two of the first members of Opus Dei. On September 1, 1937, Albareda introduced him to the founder, Fr. Josemaría Escrivá. Tomás was impressed with "the forceful personality of that young priest, the supernatural vision that informed everything he said, his optimism despite the difficult situation, his admirable serenity, and his affectionate dealings." Tomás recalls that "from the day I first met him, I put my soul in his hands."

At the time, all the members of Opus Dei had embraced apostolic celibacy. They urged Tomás to join Opus Dei and do the same. Escrivá, however, understood that Tomás had a vocation to marriage. He told him that for the moment Opus Dei could only have celibate members, but that the time would come when he could join as a married man.

Early Years

In the fall of 1937, Tomás joined Escrivá and several other members of the Work in a perilous effort to cross the Pyrenees Mountains into France and, from there, enter the Nationalist zone of Spain. Several days into the grueling trek through the mountains, Tomás collapsed, exhausted. The group's guide wanted to leave him behind, but Escrivá objected vigorously. Turning to Tomás, he said, "You'll come with us, like everyone else, to the very end." With this encouragement, Tomás summoned up the energy to continue and successfully crossed into the Nationalist zone.

At the end of the civil war in 1939, Tomás won a position as a science teacher in the newly established Ramiro de Maeztu Institute in Madrid. The school had been created by the Spanish government to serve

as a model for other Spanish state-run schools. In addition to teaching at Ramiro de Maeztu, Tomás was active in the Institute of Soil Sciences of the Higher Council of Scientific Research (CSIC), directed by his friend José María Albareda. Tomás also served as deputy director of the CSIC's Institute of Pedagogy.

In June 1939, he married Paquita Domínguez, whom he had met years earlier in Zaragoza. He was thirty-three and she was twenty-seven. She continued to teach in the Zaragoza area until the fall of 1941. The first of their nine children, José Maria, was born in 1940 but died of measles when he was four. Many years later, Paquita wrote to a great-niece who had just lost a young child:

I understand your state of mind, asking the Lord how he could have done this to you. What I'm going to say may seem absurd, but the reason

is that God had confidence in you. He knew that you would continue loving him and having confidence in him and would realize that through this evil he would give you many good things. That is what he did with Tomás and me. When we were happy seeing our José Maria running around, when he was most beautiful, God took him from us to heaven in a few hours. It seemed to us that we would never again have anything to look forward to in life. The pain was enormous, but God is a Father and always provides for our good, even though we do not understand. Try to have the security that everything that has happened will fill you with blessings and good things. You have in Heaven the best of your love, an angel who will watch out for all of you. Ask the most holy Virgin of the Pillar to give you the strength that you so much need now, and joy will soon become once again the characteristic feature of your life.

In 1947, the Holy See approved new statutes for Opus Dei. They made it possible for married people to belong to Opus Dei, with an ascetical bond to the Work, living its spirit and participating in its apostolate. Tomás joined Opus Dei on February 15, 1947, thereby becoming its first married member.

Director of a Boarding School for Orphans

Tomás's work at the Ramiro de Maeztu Institute, where he became deputy headmaster, and in the CSIC's Institute of Pedagogy, soon won him an outstanding reputation in Spanish educational circles. In 1950, the commander of Spain's Civil Guards, a militarized national police force similar to the French Gendarmerie Nationale or the Italian Carabinieri, asked Tomás to direct the Infanta María Teresa Institute, a boarding school in Madrid for five hundred

orphans whose fathers had been civil guards.

At first, Tomás was inclined to reject the offer. He was deeply committed to the Ramiro de Maeztu Institute and very happy working there. The Infanta María Teresa Institute was a deeply troubled institution with a depressing atmosphere. The boys, who ranged from six to eighteen years of age, were housed in dormitories of one hundred beds each, with a number over each bed. All their heads were shaved, and they were subject to severe discipline with frequent corporal punishment. Gangs of older boys terrorized the younger students.

The conditions and traditions of the school were diametrically opposed to Tomás's ideas of education. He had always conceived of education as a joint effort of parents and teachers, but here all the students were

orphans. He gave great importance to freedom, but discipline, not freedom, was the keynote in this military school in Franco's Spain. The teachers were dispirited, and the level of instruction was low.

Tomás did not immediately reject the offer, however, because he saw that if he could turn the school around, he would greatly improve the lives of five hundred boys. He talked it over with Paquita and thought and prayed about it a great deal. Eventually, with Paquita's support, he to accept the appointment with two conditions: complete freedom to act and the right to directly consult with the head of the Civil Guard, who had ultimate authority over the institution.

The Alviras moved to the director's house on the grounds of the school with their then-five children, ranging in age from nine to two. During the

seven years they lived at the school, they would have three more children. The house was considerably larger than their previous apartment and had a garden, but at first, it had no heat and they had to wear their coats indoors. Living on the grounds permitted Tomás to get to know the students better and to be more aware of everything that happened at the school. Eventually, he would know a large percentage of the students by name. He congratulated them on the feast of the saint each child was named for (their "name days") and birthdays and often inquired about their families. On more than one occasion, he spent a large part of the night at the bedside of a sick student.

The first, and in many ways most difficult, task, was improving the attitude and working conditions of the faculty. Tomás's strategy was to set goals and objectives but give

individual teachers wide latitude in achieving them. Remarkably, within a year he had transformed the faculty. A professional magazine published an article entitled “An Example for the Teaching Profession to Meditate On.”

Tomás also set about improving the physical conditions of the school and the boys’ living quarters. He began by taking down the numbers over their beds and working to clean up the school. Eventually, he replaced the one-hundred-bed dormitories with apartments for eight students each, comprised of two bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room, and a small terrace. He encouraged the students to decorate their rooms with personal objects that might remind them of their family and their hometown. Not content with transforming the physical environment, he also changed the structure of the school, opening it up

to sons of active-duty civil guards so that not all the students would be orphans.

When Tomás took over, attendance at Mass and the Rosary were obligatory. He made them voluntary. At first, very few students attended. The students who did come to say the Rosary said it very quickly, rushing through the prayers and the closing litanies. One day Tomás came by when they were saying the litany and interrupted them, “My sons, don’t you realize that you are paying compliments to your mother the Virgin, calling her Mystical Rose, Morning Star, Tower of Ivory, House of Gold. .. Say those things with affection, as if you were talking with your mother.” Years later, one of the boys said that this was “the most beautiful thing I have heard, and I carry his words in me. When I pray the Rosary, I always remember him.” Little by little, thanks in large part to

the efforts of the chaplain, the number of boys attending Mass and the Rosary grew. Working with the chaplain, Tomás also made the celebration of major Church feast days more important in the life of the school. After seven years, Tomás resigned as director of the Infanta María Teresa Institute and returned to Ramirode Maeztu. He left behind him a completely transformed institution. Thirty-eight years later, at an assembly of school alumni, the thousand men present gave him a ten-minute standing ovation. According to a long-term collaborator and close friend, the seven years in which Tomás served as head of the Infanta María Teresa Institute:

seem to have been years in which Paquita and Tomás grew exceptionally in their closeness to one another. Work and family were intimately intertwined. Tomás came

home from his experiences in the school with no intervening time at all—no time to switch gears or recuperate. He was a positive, optimistic person, but many of his days at the school, especially in the first months, were difficult. Coming home to Paquita restored him. She understood the situation, and fully accepted that he might leave the house at any hour of the day or night to look in on the school. She shared his concerns. As time went on, the students became aware of her affection for them, and she won their hearts.

Shortly after he returned to the Ramiro de Maeztu Institute in 1957, Tomás became assistant headmaster for education, a position he held until his retirement in 1976. After the headmaster permanently lost his voice, Tomás's role expanded to the point that many people thought of

him as the de facto head of the school.

Founding Private Schools

In the early 1960s, St. Josemaría began encouraging Spanish members of Opus Dei who had school-aged children to start schools. The purpose was to give their children an excellent education while also transmitting the spirit of Opus Dei, particularly a love of freedom and a spirit of hard work. The first such school, Ahlzair, opened its doors in Córdoba in 1963. That same year, Tomás Alvira and another member, the well-known pedagogue Victor García de Hoz, started an institution to give guidance and support to these schools: *Fomento de Centros de Enseñanza*[Development of Educational Centers].

Following the principles developed by Alvira and García de Hoz, the schools strive for academic

excellence through personalized education. They stress the central role of parents in their children's education and involve them in all aspects of school life. Religious and spiritual formation in *Fomento* schools is entrusted to Opus Dei, and participation in religious classes and activities is completely voluntary.

Thanks in large part to Alvira's dedication, optimism, and drive, *Fomento* grew rapidly. Today, it sponsors thirty-five schools with twenty-four thousand students spread throughout Spain. In 1975, *Fomento* reached the point that it felt the need for a teachers' college that would train new teachers, not only in basic pedagogy but also in character development and promoting an atmosphere of freedom. Although Tomás was almost seventy years old, he took on the task of founding and developing this new institution,

which received government approval in 1978.

Founding Private Schools

Tomás was a born teacher who took a deep personal interest in his students. In his view, the two key elements to successful teaching were, first, loving the students and, second, helping them experience the joy of learning. A teacher whom Tomás interviewed for his first job recalls that "he was not interested in whether I knew how to teach but rather in whether I liked to educate, whether I was in love with my profession." A seasoned teacher, giving a talk to young teachers, stressed the need to be understanding with students. After the talk, Tomás said to him, "Much more, Antonio, much more. We have to go way beyond understanding. We have to love them unconditionally. Otherwise, education doesn't sink in

and becomes something small." When teachers complained about their students' shortcomings and about how difficult it was to win them over, Tomás would respond, "But, have we tried loving them?"

Tomás's love for his students was not merely a matter of words. One former student recalls: "He couldn't do enough for his students. How often he paid for textbooks or asked for used ones from students who had already graduated! He bought sandwiches for boys he realized were hungry but gave them in such a way that they didn't regard it as charity but as payment for some job or service done in the classroom." One of his high school students was certain he wanted to become a bullfighter. Rather than treating his aspiration as a childish dream, Tomás put him in contact with a friend of his who was a former bullfighter and arranged for the boy

to work there so he could form an accurate idea of what a bullfighter's life is like.

In the classroom, he was guided by the principle that "we have to accustom students to feeling the joy of making an effort to achieve what they desire. Joy in study is one of the most important goals that an educator can aim at." Later in life when he was the head of *Fomento*'s school for teachers, Tomás formulated this as the characteristic feature of what he called the "Full-Life Class." A "Full-Life Class" is "one in which the teacher tries to awaken in the students the desire to know, a love of attaining knowledge, considered as a good in itself. We shouldn't try to get the students to study by presenting them with a possible reward or punishment; we must get them to want to know."

Tomás cared for not only the students and teachers but everyone who was connected with the school. During the many years in which he was deputy director of the Ramiro de Maeztu school, for example, he made an effort to get to know each of the janitors. He habitually spent time with them and took a sincere interest in their families and needs. At Christmas, he visited each of them at home to wish them a Merry Christmas and spend some time with their family. Often, he would take one of his children with him on those visits.

For many years, a poor old man used to sell candy and snacks just outside the school. When Tomás learned that one of his children had given the old man a hard time, he was deeply upset and spanked his son, something he never did. On another occasion, when the old man failed to show up for several days, Tomás

made inquiries and learned that he lived alone, had no close relatives, and was in the hospital. Tomás took one of his sons to visit him in the hospital.

A Bright and Cheerful Christian Home

St. Josemaría often proposed the ideal of creating a "bright and cheerful Christian home." The Alviras worked hard, and successfully, to achieve this goal. Their home was characterized by a joy that a family friend characterized as "contagious, or better, radiant." Although both Paquita and Tomás preferred classical music, they cheerfully listened to the Beatles at high volume and even did a little rock and roll dancing with their children. The entire family celebrated both birthdays and name days, even of children who had

grown up and were living in a foreign country.

They also celebrated the major religious feast days, including the Feast of Our Lady of the Pillar, the patroness of Zaragoza. Although the Alviras lived in Madrid for many years, on her feast day the family always awoke to music from Zaragoza; the house was decorated, and celebrations continued all day long. At Christmastime, Tomás transmitted to the children his enthusiasm for building a crèche. They all worked on it together. One of his daughters recalls:

There was a wonderful atmosphere of joy and festivity in the whole house, with Christmas carols playing in the background. When we finished building the crèche something unforgettable happened. We put out the lights in the living room (where the crèche was) and left

lit only the little lights that illuminated the crib scene. Then we sat on my father's knees, and amid our great expectation, he told us the story of the coming of the Son of God into the world.

The Alviras' style was to give the children a great deal of freedom, but also to demand that they take responsibility for their decisions. One daughter testifies that she does not remember her parents ever forbidding her—or any of her brothers and sisters—anything.

We always felt free, but responsibility was a very important factor. It was something they had explained to us, but that you really learned by living. In cases of doubt about doing something, you knew that you could do it, but you weighed the pros and the cons. At times they gave you some facts to consider in deciding if it was worthwhile.

Another daughter recalls a time when her father refused to allow her to attend a particular camp. Without giving reasons he simply said, serenely but clearly, “You should not go there.” She remembers because she was quite disconcerted by his refusal without giving any explanations, since he habitually explained his decisions. Yet another daughter sums up her home environment saying, “I never felt afraid of my parents. I told them very openly where I went. My parents knew everything I did, and I always felt that they trusted me.”

When someone got out of line and had to be corrected, Tomás and Paquita rarely lost their tempers or raised their voices. When one of his daughters came home with a miniskirt, Tomás asked her with a smile, “My daughter, why did you buy a skirt a couple of sizes too small for you? Here’s some money. Go with

your sister and buy a skirt that fits you and give that one to one of your little sisters." On the rare occasions when he did lose his temper, Tomás would apologize publicly to the entire family.

Trust and mutual confidence were essential in the Alvira family. On one occasion one of the children borrowed some of his father's markers without telling him. Soon, Tomás needed the markers and spent quite a bit of time looking for them. When Paquita saw that the child had them, she told him to bring them to his father. When the boy returned the markers to his father, Tomás did not raise his voice or show irritation over the time he had wasted looking for them. He simply said, "My son, if you need something ask me for it." His son recalls that he added, "alluding to what he had deepest in his heart and what he knew most mattered to each of us, 'Could it be

that you don't feel comfortable with me?'"

Tomás's usual style was dialogue. When the children asked questions, particularly about topics of morals or religion that were being discussed in society and at school, he didn't simply answer their questions. Rather, he made them think. One of his daughters says that he "never wanted us to accept blindly his principles or ideas. In our home, there was an extraordinary climate of freedom, precisely because there was so much love and trust. I can't remember anything ever being forced on me or any of my siblings." Nonetheless, she also says that when he did speak, usually at the end of a dialogue, "What he told us had such authority and certainty that the things he said were engraved in our heads, giving us security."

For many years, even after car ownership became quite widespread in Spain, the family did not own a car. One of his daughters recalls what happened when she asked her father why they didn't have a car.

He looked at me closely and, with the air of someone who had thought about it well, he said: "My daughter, don't forget what I'm going to say to you. There is one thing fundamental in this life: knowing how to be in your place." I don't recall his adding anything else. I understood that I had to go beyond the question of a car to understand my parents' attitude. If they had wanted to, we would have had a car. But it was not the right moment nor was it indispensable. For that reason, it would have been out of place for us at that moment. There were other priorities. I understood that my parents didn't let themselves be carried away by the

desire of doing what everybody else was doing.

The Alviras had nine children. All eight of those who survived childhood went to college, so money was always short. Paquita handled the family's finances. For about four years when things were particularly tight, Tomás worked as the human resource manager for a bank in addition to his work as an educator. Often the younger children wore hand-me-downs from their older siblings, but Paquita would spruce them up, so they didn't look old or worn.

A good part of the peace and joy that characterized the Alvira home came from Paquita's and Tomás's deep love for each other. One of the children recalls Tomás saying, "I have always tried to surprise your mother and to love her more each day." When they went to a movie, Tomás would

choose one he thought Paquita would like, even if he wasn't especially interested. He often spoke to the children about their mother's gifts, especially her artistic talent, and about how she had put those talents aside to dedicate herself fully to raising them.

At eighty years old, Tomás wrote on the back of a photo he gave Paquita, "How much happiness God has given us." A young woman who met Tomás toward the end of his life observed:

When I met him, the main idea I came away with was that he was a man deeply in love with his wife. This was obvious in his old age, which really made an impression on me. The refinement, the tenderness, the exquisite tact that he employed when he looked at her, spoke to her, or just referred to her, reflected an intense love for her that did not seem to have lost any of its vigor in an

entire lifetime. At that moment I understood clearly that his vocation to matrimony consisted in falling more in love with his wife each day. .. He is a yardstick for measuring the affection and self-giving that can be lived in marriage.

Paquita and Tomás transmitted their love of God and piety primarily by their example. One of their children recalls:

From when I was very little, I considered visiting the Blessed Sacrament something natural, a custom that formed part of being a Christian, because my parents always did it. If we went out with them to go shopping or for any other motive, before returning home we entered a church. In summer, we used to all go together to the church of the [small town where the family spent the summer] to make a visit.

Another childhood memory involved weekday Mass:

When I turned fourteen, I began to realize that my father went to Mass very early every morning, always at the same time. From when I was little, I recall him seated in a chair reading. Now I understood that early in the morning he was spending some time in prayer. When I realized all this, I asked him to wake me up so I could go with him. I think this was his ordinary way of teaching: to do things and let his coherent life sink into us. Everything that he said was backed up before by what he did.

Looking back years later, a daughter said about her parents:

With their example and their words, they helped us to discover the secret of the incomparable joy of an authentic Christian life: the intimate, constant, and loving presence of God in our existence, the loving vital

encounter with Jesus Christ. Seeing my parents, I have understood that Christianity is not a theory ,but a joyful life with Christ. It is possible. It is not an unattainable ideal. It is the path of the fullness of happiness.

Both Paquita and Tomás hoped that their children would receive from God a vocation to Opus Dei. When they told St. Josemaría about their desire early in their marriage, he urged them to pray a lot for their children and "to leave them in peace." They took this advice very much to heart, and never so much as suggested that any of their children attend activities at an Opus Dei center. When one of their daughters told Tomás that she had joined Opus Dei, he limited himself to asking with great affection, "My daughter, do you understand well what you have done? Did you do it freely? Are you content?" When she replied "Yes," he kissed her and that was that.

Eventually, all the Alvira children joined Opus Dei. When the last child became a member, Tomás asked one of the older children to "help me give thanks to God. What have I done to deserve such a wonderful thing? My time to live is too short for thanking God enough."

Tomás's Old Age and Death

In 1981, at age seventy-five, Tomás underwent surgery for prostate cancer. He said to one of his children, "I entered the operating room holding the hand of the Blessed Virgin and our Father [St. Josemaría]. You can't be safer than that." The surgery was successful, but afterward, his family and colleagues urged him to slow down or retire. When one of his colleagues raised the issue, he answered, "Doesn't the Constitution say that every Spaniard has a right to work? You must have noticed that it doesn't say anything

about age. Therefore, I intend to exercise my right up to the end." When one of his children broached the same subject, he cited a different authority: "I have read in the Bible that God made man to work, but I haven't found any passage that indicates that man should work until he is seventy." Only at age eighty-two did Tomás officially retire.

A few years after his retirement, Tomás began to suffer debilitating effects of the prostate cancer that had spread to his bones, but he continued writing. He also continued going to daily Mass, despite the effort it cost him. If anyone suggested that he didn't need to go to Mass, Tomás responded that his sacrifice was very small compared to the great sacrifice of the Mass.

When he could no longer go, a priest brought him Communion each day. "It's something magnificent, truly

magnificent," he said, "to have the Lord in my house."

As the end approached, he commented to one of his daughters, "They tell me no, but it looks to me like the end is near. Whatever God wants will be what happens, and that's what I want. But I'm not downcast. I offer everything for the Father [the Prelate of Opus Dei], but I ask the Lord to take me." Tomás died on May 7, 1992. At his wake, a very close friend and collaborator found himself thinking, *Thanks, Tomás. How well you did everything! Thank you, Lord. What marvelous things you do among men.*

Paquita: Mother and Homemaker

Paquita's father died when she was only two, and her mother faced severe economic challenges in raising five children. At that time in Spain, Paquita's education would normally have ended with grade

school, but a teacher convinced her mother that it would be a shame for such a talented girl not to go to high school. Her mother asked the other children if they would be willing to make the sacrifices necessary for Paquita to continue her education, and they agreed.

When she finished high school, Paquita obtained the highest score of the one hundred students who took the entrance exam for teachers' college. This won her a scholarship that made it possible to obtain her teaching degree. In exams for a position in the national corps of teachers after graduation, she again finished in first place. In 1934, at the age of twenty-two, she began to work in a three-teacher school in Sástago, a small village about fifty miles from Zaragoza.

Paquita and Tomás were married just after the end of the civil war in

June 1939, but they could not make ends meet without Paquita's salary so, for the next two years, she remained in Sástago and he in Madrid. Finally in fall 1941, she resigned her position and joined Tomás in Madrid. It would have been possible for her to find a teaching position in Madrid, but their first child had been born in 1940 and they were hoping to have a large family, so she decided to become a full-time mother and homemaker.

Paquita was fully aware that she was extraordinarily talented and better educated than most women of her generation in Spain. She could have had a successful career in education or some other field. She did not, however, consider that turning her attention primarily to taking care of her family meant wasting her time or talents. Paquita was convinced, as she wrote, that "work in the home can be just as professional as any job

a woman can hold outside the house." In addition, she saw, as she wrote in a magazine article, that "taking care of the house and the children with a spirit of sacrifice, taking care of the details and trying to live in the presence of God provide an occasion for living all the Christian virtues."

Paquita found housework fulfilling because she did not do it out of a sense of duty. Each one of the things she did was done for someone concrete. One of her daughters recalls:

My recollection is of work well done and done with joy. Some women don't like to take care of the house because they've heard their mothers complain about having to do so. Mama transmitted to us a very high concept of the value of work in the home, putting one's head into it and filling it with affection.

A cousin observed:

I have seen her give herself totally to her family, forgetting about herself, without complaints or laments, without ever referring to the tiredness that raising such a large family must have brought with it. Rather her smile and her welcoming expression seemed to manifest her own happiness and that of her family.

Paquita took advantage of the time when the children were in school to do housework, go shopping, and visit friends. She also played an important role in starting and running many apostolic activities connected to Opus Dei. One of her daughters wrote: "She was never a woman shut up in the house. She always had very open horizons." She tried to keep up with

current events and to be well-informed so she could talk with her

older children about everything. But, as one of her biographers says:

When it came time for the troop of children to arrive home, the door would burst open with cries of "where's mama?" And she was always to be found just a few steps ahead with nothing else to do but listen to them. She understood each one of her children and continually accompanied them as they grew from infants into little soccer players or teenage girls wearing their first high heels.

A niece who spent several summers with the Alvira family recalls that their house "was always filled with joy. It was a home where one could feel the presence of God. Without spending much, they celebrated everything: some pickles and a few chips were enough to make for a good time."

Precisely because it was a happy home where a spirit of freedom reigned, the children's friends liked to come to the Alvira apartment to study and have an afternoon snack. Even though the house was crowded with the eight Alvira children, Paquita always welcomed them.

A Woman of Virtue

One of Paquita's outstanding characteristics was her cheerfulness. A friend commented, "I recall her as always being happy. I used to think to myself, *she must have concerns, but it's evident that she resolves them with God. Otherwise, it wouldn't be possible to always be like that*." Another friend said, "I enjoyed being with her. When I was with her, time went by quickly. She was like a magnet for me." One of her daughters expresses a similar experience: "She was always happy. Hers was a quiet, not a noisy

happiness. Her smile was permanent. She knew how to laugh openly, and her smile was contagious."

Late in life, Paquita wrote to a niece telling her about how much she had enjoyed the fact that all the children had been able to come home for their parents' fiftieth anniversary. The niece responded:

How well you know how to appreciate and thank the Lord for the happy moments! I admire you! You don't say anything about the suffering you must have experienced when they left or how empty the house felt. Your strength is extraordinary and undoubtedly the Lord is with you. I tell you sincerely that you are an example.

Paquita had a big, welcoming heart, and people who spent any time with her soon noticed her warm affection. One friend found that "getting to

know her was like finding a second mother. I felt very much at home with her and she with me. She had very special affection for me. When I was with her, I was happy. Her life was always an example for me, and when she died, I thought that the best person I had ever known had died."

Another friend said that Paquita:

transmitted peace and joy with her words, with her gestures, and with her smile. When I visited her, I poured out my heart talking about what was worrying me at the moment. If I told her about someone who was making me suffer, she downplayed the matter and helped me to forgive them. She always talked about others with affection and a positive sense.

One of the women who got together with her in her home to make vestments for Opus Dei oratories in

the Third World says: “I was won over by the environment I found. She created it, orienting the conversations and making you notice that she loved you, that you were not indifferent to her. .. Her self-giving to others was obvious. She was always looking after everyone. In her house, you were really at home.”

For many years, Paquita’s sister-in-law lived with the Alviras. Paquita treated her so affectionately that some people who saw them together thought they were sisters.

One of her daughters who spent the nights with her during the final weeks of her life testified: “Being so loved gave me incomparable joy. Her affection was profound and disinterested. Her expression of thankfulness and joy when I arrived in the evening and the joy I felt in seeing myself loved that way made

me think many times about what the love of God in heaven would be like."

A Woman of Prayer

When Paquita first came into contact with Opus Dei, she found it hard to imagine how the mother of a large family could find time for the practices of piety that make up the plan of life of a member of Opus Dei. Gradually, however, she learned how to find the time. In a letter to a young mother who had raised the same objection, she shared her secret:

You can do the prayer or read a spiritual book, while you rock your baby in the cradle. You can pray the Rosary when you go to the park with your children. You can find time to go to Mass when your domestic helper or your husband is at home. And during the whole day, you can be in the presence of God, offering your work and your tiredness with joy.

Paquita was not content with simply finding time for getting to Mass or praying the Rosary. She actively sought ways of praying better and cultivating a deeper sense of God's presence. She confided to one of her daughters that, after the children's baptisms, "I placed each of you next to my heart, and there adored the Blessed Trinity in you, thinking, *Now it really is a fact that the Holy Spirit is inside this daughter or son of mine*." On one occasion, when she sensed a special need to thank God, she felt that she didn't know how to do so well. So, she said, "I looked for a trick that I think must please the Lord. I asked his mother that she be the one who thanked him in my name because naturally, everything tastes better if it is your mother who tells you about it."

She had great devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially to Our Lady of the Pillar, who is venerated in

Zaragoza. On many occasions, she was heard to say, “What would we do without her?” In May, during the last year of her life, she arranged with a florist to deliver a fresh rose every day for the image of Our Lady in the Opus Dei center where she attended formational activities.

For a number of years, Paquita suffered from severe insomnia, but she filled the time praying the Rosary. She would sometimes comment, “Last night I tried to unite myself to all those who suffer.” When the breakup of Yugoslavia led to war in Bosnia in the early 1990s, Paquita spent the night thinking of all that the women in Bosnia were suffering and sending them what she could—the help of her prayer. One day she said to her daughter Pilar, “Today I have been a Bosnian woman, all day. I thought it would be the most powerful way for me to pray to Our Lady for those women.”

Paquita suffered a serious stroke on April 20, 1994, that left her in a deep coma. She died on August 29, 1994, two years after Tomás. Her cause of beatification, along with that of her husband, was opened by the archbishop of Madrid in 2009.