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# 40 Years Since the Apostolic Constitution "Ut Sit"

On 28 November 1982, Pope John Paul II erected Opus Dei as a personal prelature through the Apostolic Constitution "Ut sit," which was delivered to Blessed Alvaro del Portillo (the first Prelate of Opus Dei) on 19 March 1983.

11/25/2023

In 2022, Pope Francis modified Articles V and VI of "Ut Sit" with the

Motu Proprio “Ad charisma tuendum” (14 July 2022) and confirmed the essential aspects of that Apostolic Constitution.

On this anniversary, here are some responses from Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz to questions about the Motu Proprio “Ad charisma tuendum” and the subsequent revision of the Statutes of Opus Dei, from recent interviews with various journalists.

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***We know that work has begun with the Dicastery for the Clergy to prepare the proposal to modify the Statutes to send to the Holy Father. How are you living this period?***

We seek to follow the provisions of the Holy Father with sincere filial obedience and with the desire — as Pope Francis himself reminded us —

that they serve to strengthen the essential aspects of Opus Dei contained in its charism. This is what I expressly requested in several messages addressed to the members of Opus Dei: to be very united, in this sincere obedience, following the example of St. Josemaría and his two immediate successors. It is the Holy Spirit who guides the Church. Therefore, these are also moments to live with peace and serenity.

(*Agencia Ecclesia*, Portugal,  
19-10-2023)

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***Can the relationship of the laity with the Work change? Does this “specific vocational call” have to find its own theological and canonical status in the Church?***

In the Church, life comes first, then the norm; that is, to use Pope

Francis's words, reality is superior to the idea.

God planted the seed of a message in St. Josemaría's heart. What was that message? That of rediscovering the vocational value of the ordinary life of the faithful. God entrusts men and women with the divine task of building up the world (the family, neighborhoods, work, progress in society, art, entertainment...) as children of God in Jesus Christ.

Within the founding inspiration, this message had to be announced and lived with a specific spirit, with the help of an institution, Opus Dei. And from the beginning, with increasing development over time, this institution was a family within the People of God, composed of women and men, lay people and priests, with unity of vocation, formation, and spirit, with complementary and non-competitive interaction with dioceses

and parishes, while its lay members remain fully faithful to their dioceses and parishes. Therefore, this reality predates the canonical framework and is the reason for the existence of Opus Dei.

(*Agencia Ecclesia*, Portugal,  
19-10-2023)

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***The measure [motu proprio] seems to dissolve the specific character of the Work within the Catholic Church. Is that correct?***

Allow me to kindly disagree. The specific character of Opus Dei lies in the charism or spirit, rather than in its “legal framework.” 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 “the gift of the Spirit received by

Saint Josemaría,” that is, as a charism. I repeat: this is the truly relevant specific character. In fact, with this *motu proprio*, Pope Francis confirms the apostolic constitution *Ut sit*, with which John Paul II established Opus Dei as a prelature; it modifies two incidental aspects and confirms the essential charism.

What is characteristic of Opus Dei is a trait as ordinary as work: the relevance of work as a place of encounter with God, whether in Silicon Valley or in the suburbs of Kinshasa, whether working as a subway operator in Madrid or as a teacher in a school on the outskirts of any metropolis.

Moreover, Opus Dei does not want to be an exception within the Church. Its legal proposals have sought the formula that best fits the reality of lay people who, through a vocational calling and with the pastoral care of

priests, want to follow Christ in the realm of family, work, social realities, etc., within the framework of their respective particular churches. The fact that it has been the only personal prelature until now may have been perceived as “exceptional,” but it is certainly not that. On the contrary, I think it would be very good to have other personal prelatures that contribute to the evangelization of numerous areas particularly in need of Christian inspiration.

(From the interview granted to *El País Semanal*, 27-8-2023)

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***Some members of the Prelature expressed their questions and concerns about this matter in the media and on social networks, not always — let's put it this way —***

***peacefully. Do you understand those outbursts, especially those that talk about an attack? Are you afraid that some people might instrumentalize Opus Dei to fuel opposition to the pontificate?***

It is understandable that questions, doubts, and concerns arise, also due to certain interpretations that have been published with a worldly tenor, as if this were a matter of “gain or loss of power,” something that makes no sense in the Church.

In my first letter as Prelate, I wrote: “Part of our mission in the great family of God’s sons and daughters is to increase mutual appreciation among the faithful in the Church and all the very varied groups that can exist there.” And I quoted a phrase from the Founder: “The principal apostolate we Christians must carry out in the world, and the best witness we can give of our faith, is to help



bring about a climate of genuine charity within the Church.”

In this regard, I have recalled on occasion the example I saw in then-Cardinal Ratzinger, whose love for the Church and the Pope, strong and founded in faith, went beyond mere emotion. In a delicate moment for the unity of the Church, which some were endangering at that time, I heard him say from the depths of his heart: “How do they not realize that without the Pope, they are nothing!”

(*Agencia Ecclesia*, Portugal,  
19-10-2023)

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***Some people perceive the  
elimination of a privilege, a  
certain degradation, and a gesture  
of a more progressive Church  
towards a more conservative part.***

***It's seen as 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, far from the religious approach. I think that too often there is a tendency to interpret reality in terms of power and polarization, with groups opposing each other and not understanding one another.

However, in the Church, the logic that should prevail is that of service and collaboration. We all row in the same boat, open to being helped to improve.

Regarding the old conflict you mention, personally, I can tell you that I am an alumnus of a Jesuit school in Madrid, and I am very grateful for the education and example I received from the Jesuits.

(From the interview granted to *El País Semanal*, 27-8-2023)

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***How are the statutes you submitted to the Pope designed, and how have you worked on this issue? What is going to change from now on?***

In April, we held a general congress of Opus Dei in Rome, where a proposal for adjustments to the statutes was outlined, in accordance with the explicit request of the Pope, to be submitted to the Holy See. Two fundamental criteria have guided us in this task: fidelity to the charism of St. Josemaría and adherence to the will expressed by the Holy Father. As the Pope requested in the *motu proprio*, we made an effort to express the charismatic dimension of Opus Dei more clearly; it is lived and realized in communion with particular churches and with the bishops who preside over them. However, the approval and

promulgation of these changes belong to the Holy See, so you will understand why I don't provide additional details.

(From the interview granted to *El País Semanal*, 27-8-2023)

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***Can this moment help to recover the original charism proposed by St. Josemaría Escrivá?***

It is not a matter of recovering it, because it has not been lost or distorted; it is a matter of deepening and continuing our effort to live it faithfully. In this sense, we trust in responding to the call of the Holy Father: to care for the charism of Opus Dei so that we can carry it into the future with the same freshness with which St. Josemaría transmitted it to us. That is, to commit ourselves more to “the task of spreading the

call to holiness in the world, through the sanctification of work and family and social commitments” (Motu proprio *Ad charisma tuendum*).

(Agencia Ecclesia, Portugal,  
19-10-2023)

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***How did you interpret the change in the relationship with the Holy See established by the Pope through the motu proprio Ad charisma tuendum? The Pope says he wants its authority to be ‘based on charism more than on hierarchical authority.’***

Charism and hierarchy complement each other in the Church; they are not opposites, but complementary terms. Charisms have their reason for being in the service they provide to the Church as a whole. Therefore, to spread them in the Church and in

the world, they are often translated into institutional realities.

It is up to the authority of the Church to discern charisms, and Opus Dei has depended on the authority of the Church in every one of its institutional steps. With the reform of the Curia, Pope Francis has promoted changes in numerous institutions and organisms to foster a more dynamic evangelization. That is the purpose of the *motu proprio* you mention. Therefore, we are working to respond faithfully to this request from the Pope, knowing, to give one example, that the essential thing is not whether or not the Prelate wears a pectoral cross, but that the faithful of Opus Dei and others can fully live this charism within the Church.

(From the interview granted to *El País Semanal*, 27-8-2023)

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