

“It is Worthwhile!” (V): In its Original Purity and Radiant Newness

I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them (Jn 16:4). These words of Jesus during the Last Supper are clearly directed towards the future; they lead us to read his priestly prayer today as addressed to us, as an ever-living personal testament. Much of what our Lord entrusted to his disciples during his final moments here on earth refers to the sending of the Holy Spirit: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come (Jn 16:13).* This focus towards the future should lead us to ask ourselves, at all times: “What does our Lord expect of us Christians today?” This is the question the Prelate of Opus Dei asked, a few months after receiving that mission from our Lord. And he responded: “He wants us to go out to confront the concerns and needs of people today, in order to bring the Gospel, in its original purity and radiant newness, to all men and women.”¹

God continues to give Himself to mankind

The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, the core of God’s Revelation to mankind, happened in a specific place and time in history. But it is not an event that has passed into history, as with other historical events, since the Paschal Mystery continues to bear fruit today. Indeed, the Eucharist, which is the sacramental form of these events, is not simply a remembrance of something that happened in the past; it is a memory in the biblical sense of this expression, and makes this mystery present at all times. It is the handing on – *traditio* – of the merciful love of the Father for the world. Although it makes present once again a specific historical event, the Eucharist shows us that the strength of Easter breaks down the barriers of time and enters into our day and age. And this happens not only with this core of God’s self-manifestation, but in a certain sense with all of Jesus’ teachings. He entrusts us with the mission of handing on – *tradere* – this Good News at each moment in history (cf. *Mt 28:19-20*).

This mission, through which “the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes,”² necessarily implies progress. Although this process is often seen as opposed to tradition, this is a misunderstanding. In reality, both express a harmonic movement: both handing on and progressing mean being open to history. And that is what the Church does when she hands on the life she has been entrusted with to the men and women of every age. The protagonist of this tradition, of this handing on, is the Holy Spirit, who makes the words of Jesus eternally relevant throughout history; and it is also the

¹ Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, Letter, 7 July 2017.

² Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, no. 8.

Holy Spirit who is the protagonist of genuine progress, especially through the life of each of the saints, who “reveal and make known ever new facets of the Gospel message.”³

The freshness of the origins

This way of being of the Church is replicated in each of the living bodies that make up the one Body of Christ. It is also, therefore, the way of being of Opus Dei, “as old as the Gospel and like the Gospel new.”⁴ In the Work, as in the Church, tradition and progress form a harmonious whole, as do holiness and apostolate. Holiness, in fact, is expressed in being faithful to a spirit received from God, and apostolate takes place in the midst of a necessarily changing world. This harmony is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who spurs us both to value the teachings received, and to renew our eagerness to open new paths to bring the Gospel to the hearts of the men and women of our time.

When what is transmitted is a life, a spirit, a way of being, fidelity necessarily means being open to history. What the Church hands on to each age are not objects, inanimate things, but a living form, the “form of Christ,” which has the power to transform each culture from within. Anyone who, when announcing the Gospel, fails to understand the historical situation of those being addressed and of the society in which they are immersed, seeking only to teach an abstract doctrine as fixed once and for all, would not be faithfully handing on the message of Christ.

In the *traditio evangelii*, the handing on of the Gospel, fidelity resembles the continuity of a living, flowing river, which connects us with the freshness of the origins. Benedict XVI stressed how the Holy Spirit ensures “the link between the experience of the apostolic faith, lived in the original community of disciples, and the current experience of Christ in his Church . . . Tradition is not the transmission of things or words, a collection of dead things. Tradition is the living river that links us to the origins, the living river in which the origins are ever present.”⁵

Opus Dei transmits to the world a spirit, a Christian lifestyle, an understanding of our deep filial relationship with God that originates in Baptism. This spirit, like the Tradition of the Church of which it is a part, cannot and ought not be codified and specified in all its facets. Moreover, some specific aspects today will not necessarily continue to be valid tomorrow, since what is transmitted over time is not so much these specific aspects as a filial spirit by which we live in Christ, capable of giving life in each new historical situation. “Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel,” Pope Francis said, “new

³ Benedict XVI, Speech, 19 December 2019.

⁴ Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 24.

⁵ Benedict XVI, General Audience, 26 April 2016.

avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world.”⁶

***Aggiornamento* in each one's life**

Jesus entrusted his disciples with the mission of reaching all men and women and all nations, with an up-to-date knowledge of their culture and social context. To express this challenge, the Italian word *aggiornamento* is often used, which literally means renewing, bringing up to date. It was used, for example, by Saint John XXIII and his successors to refer to the mission of the Second Vatican Council. The original meaning of the term is the need not to lose relevance, to be in tune with the mindset and experience of people today. However, there were those who impoverished its meaning by urging the Church to “catch up” with today's world, to yield to the circumstances of the times. This meant “adjusting” its message to the demands of the various novelties today, and ultimately betraying the message itself.

Saint Josemaría was prompt to challenge this second understanding of the term. On several occasions, he warned that it is not the Church that needs to adapt to the times, but rather each age that needs to discover anew the saving message of Christ: “*Aggiornamento*,” he said, “should take place principally in each one's personal life, so as to bring it into line with the ‘old newness’ of the Gospel.”⁷ He also added that a person who lives the spirit of Opus Dei, to the extent that he or she works in the midst of the world and is fully engaged in the concerns of society, will always be “up-to-date,” thus also helping to “update” its mission.

This dynamic fidelity, the Prelate of Opus Dei said, entails a “natural *aggiornamento*”: that of a person who embodies in his or her own life the spirit transmitted by Saint Josemaría. “It is, above all, in the area of personal apostolate – which is the main kind in the Work – and in guiding professions, institutions and human structures in a Christian direction, that we try to apply initiative and creativity, so as to build a relationship of sincere friendship with many people and bring the light of the Gospel to society.”⁸

People who strive to embody the spirit of Opus Dei are usually predisposed, by their very vocation, to this “creative continuity.” But this disposition is not automatic; it requires “in-depth knowledge of the times we live in, its dynamics and potential, and also of the limitations and injustices, sometimes serious ones, that afflict it.”⁹ If the idea of “adaptation” suggests a series of forces that apply pressure from the outside, requiring a revision based on the new demands of the times, expressions such as “dynamic fidelity” or “creative continuity” evoke rather an activity

⁶ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 11.

⁷ Saint Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 72.

⁸ Fernando Ocariz, Pastoral Letter, 19 March 2022, no. 10.

⁹ Fernando Ocariz, Message, 7 July 2017.

carried out from within, from a vibrant inner life, through which each one thinks and acts creatively, in a constant dialogue with the real world around us.

Creativity is thus closely linked to “professionalism” in the most genuine sense of the term; it spurs the intelligence (*intus legere*, to read within) to strive to penetrate to the depth of things, without staying on the surface. Creativity is the fruit of love for the world and for people, because it implies the effort to seek new paths, without giving in to the ease of literally repeating what has been acquired, which is always less demanding for oneself and less effective for others. Creativity is, finally, the fruit of sincere prayer: only by looking at Jesus, the center of history, can new keys be found to find a path into the hearts of our contemporaries.

The disciple will do greater works than these

When studying how Christian doctrine develops over time, Saint John Henry Newman realized that the body of Jesus’ preaching contained, as a seed, everything Christianity would become throughout history.¹⁰ Thus we can understand how, just as a seed germinates and flourishes depending on the quality of the soil, environment and climatic conditions, Christianity has given rise, throughout history, to apparently new realities that aren’t “absolutely new,” because they were already contained in the seed. But it is clear that these fruits, with their rich colors and fragrances, needed an opportune time and favorable conditions to become possible.

The faith of the first disciples in Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, for example, was the seed that would much later bear fruit in Eucharistic worship outside of Mass, in adoration before the Tabernacle. But all this could not begin to mature until, in the fourth century, Christians began to enjoy favorable conditions for developing Eucharistic worship. All “newness” possesses the seed present at the origin, when the fruit was still invisible.

Something similar happens with the spirit of the Work. Certainly Saint Josemaría received the essence of the charism, the nucleus of what would be transmitted over time. But he couldn’t foresee everything that would come about through that message. Already during his lifetime, he saw new things come about that he hadn’t expected, and it is logical that this continues to happen down through the centuries. Praying aloud during his stay at the Honduran Legation in 1937, he said: “By God’s mercy, I am the first link, and you are also the first links in a chain that will continue down through centuries. I am not alone. There are now souls – and many more will come in the future – who are willing to suffer with me, to think with me, to share with me in the life that God has deposited in this body of the Work, which is hardly born yet.”¹¹

In one of his first trips as Father of this family, Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz said in Madrid that every new stage in Opus Dei “is a good opportunity for each one to decide to begin again, to

¹⁰ Cf. John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

¹¹ Saint Josemaría, *Growing on the Inside*, p. 85

realize, with greater gratitude and responsibility, that the Work is in our hands.”¹² This dynamism inherent in Christian life was already announced by Jesus to his disciples in his priestly prayer during the Last Supper: *Whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do (Jn 14:12)*. Newness in continuity, through which the tree grows and becomes stronger, is ultimately the result of identification with Christ and docility to his Spirit. In God’s plan for mankind, it is the Son and the Holy Spirit who show us why truth and history are not opposed: the Son, Truth in person, is the One towards whom history points and from whom all history receives its meaning; and the Spirit, who guides the Church in her earthly journey, is the One who will lead us to the fulness of the truth.

¹² Fernando Ocáriz, Pastoral Trip to Madrid, June-July 2017, at www.opusdei.org.