

documentation

INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE IN BRITAIN
6 Orme Court, London W2 4RL - Tel: 020-7221 9176 - Fax: 020-7243 9400 - E-mail: info@opusdei.org.uk

DOSSIER

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OPUS DEI AND FREEDOM

*“Interpret, then, my words as what they are: a call to exercise your rights every day, and not merely in time of emergency. A call to fulfil honourably your commitments as citizens, in all fields - in politics and in financial affairs, in university life and in your job - accepting with courage all the consequences of your free decisions and the personal independence which corresponds to each one of you. A Christian **lay outlook** of this sort will enable you to flee from all intolerance, from all fanaticism. To put it in a positive way, it will help you to live in peace with all your fellow citizens, and to promote this understanding and harmony in all spheres of social life.”*

St Josemaría Escrivá to students at the University of Navarre, 8 October 1967
(*Conversations*, 117)

Questions and answers

Personal Testimonies

What they say:

- Álvaro del Portillo
- Salvador Bernal
- José María Casciaro

In the Words of St Josemaría Escrivá:

- Pluralism
- Freedom and temporal affairs
- The Freedom of lay people in the Church

The Adventure of Freedom

This Dossier has been prepared by the Information Office of Opus Dei in Britain.
For more information visit the internet site <http://www.opusdei.org.uk>



FOREWORD

“Respect for its members’ freedom is an essential condition of Opus Dei’s very existence.” This statement by the founder, St Josemaría Escrivá, is the key to the answer to many questions about the Prelature. Questions such as: Does Opus Dei take a position in public debates within the Church or in politics? Do the members act as a group in social life? Do the directors of the Prelature give them advice as to how to vote, or indications to support a particular ideology or ecclesiastical current of thought? The great stress on freedom which is an essential element of the message of Opus Dei gives a round “no” to these questions. As St Josemaría expressed it, “Without that freedom, no one would come to the Work. Even more, the Work has never intervened in politics and, with God's help it never will; but if it were to, I would be its number one enemy.”

At the same time, this fact about Opus Dei sheds some light on criticisms which have sometimes been made about supposed secretiveness. Article 88, Paragraph 3 of the Statutes of Opus Dei determines that the members “in the exercise of their profession, and in the social and political sphere, etc., enjoy, within the limits of the Catholic faith and morals, the same full freedom enjoyed by their Catholic co-citizens”, and that “the authorities of the Prelature should abstain completely from giving advice or indications on these matters.” In accord with these norms, the social activity of each member of Opus Dei is a personal matter for which only he or she is responsible. The Prelature has nothing to do with it.

What, then, is the role of Opus Dei? Neither more nor less than the following: to give its members, and all those who participate in its activities, the spiritual formation they need to be able to live as authentic Catholics in the place where they find themselves, using their personal freedom and responsibility. The formation they receive has an influence in their lives, which means that, as committed Catholics, they identify with Catholic doctrine and put it into practice, acting ethically and with integrity in their social affairs, taking an interest in and dedicating themselves to the people around them, above all those who are most in need.

This issue of Documentation deals with various aspects of freedom in relation to Opus Dei. A knowledge of these aspects can assist greatly in understanding the spirit of the Prelature.

Andrew Soane
Director, Information Office of the Opus Dei Prelature in Britain

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What do individual members do?

For the most part they do their job and live their family and social lives like everyone else, doing exactly what they would do if they were not in Opus Dei. The spirit of Opus Dei encourages them to make these daily tasks worthy to offer to God and a better service to family, friends and society. In this way they try to grow in Christian virtue in and through their work and other day-to-day activities, and encourage others to do likewise.

To achieve this they frequent the sacraments and give some time each day to prayer, spiritual reading and other acts of devotion. They try to practise Christian self-denial – mostly in small things – at work in family life, in putting others first, in attention to detail and so on. They attend a retreat every year, as well as classes or courses on the faith and on aspects of developing a spiritual life.

Are members involved in politics?

Members can be involved in any honest activity they like. Many will have little or no interest in party politics; some will. If they do play a role, they do so without in any way representing Opus Dei but as free and responsible individuals, following their own lights and answerable in exactly the same way and to exactly the same people as anyone else. Opus Dei takes no interest in any member's political actions, nor assumes any responsibility for them.

Do members tend to have a common view on political or social matters?

No. Opus Dei's role and aims are confined strictly to the spiritual and apostolic spheres. On any issue on which the Church has not defined a position (for example, on the vast majority of political, social and economic issues) members of Opus Dei, just like other Catholic citizens, make up their own minds with complete independence, adopting whatever views seem best to them. Opus Dei cannot and does not get involved, ever.

Is Opus Dei right wing or conservative?

Members of Opus Dei are interested in sanctifying their work, not in promoting a 'party' theological line. If by *right wing* and *conservative* you mean trying to adhere to the Church's teaching, then the answer is yes. But if you are thinking in party political terms, then Opus Dei is neither right nor left wing because each member decides for himself on such matters and a very wide range of opinion on any political issue will be found among members.

In matters spiritual and doctrinal members are naturally guided by the Church's teaching, just like other Catholics, when this has been defined on any given issue. But, for example, even in matters theological and philosophical there is no Opus Dei school of thought and members are as free as other Catholics to explore old or new approaches.

At another level, many aspects of Opus Dei's spirit, far from being conservative, could be considered radical and revolutionary, characteristics which partly account for some of the misunderstandings experienced by Opus Dei, especially in the early years.

Extracts from the leaflet Questions People Ask, published by the Opus Dei Information Office

FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

Why freedom?

One of Opus Dei's traits, so often underscored by its spokesmen and even more so by the founder, is love for freedom. Holding freedom in such high regard is closely linked to Opus Dei's inherently secular outlook. It means that in all professional, political, social, and similar matters, each member acts according to a well-formed conscience and accepts responsibility for all consequences of his decisions and actions. He or she learns not only to respect but positively to love and promote true pluralism, the variety of everything human. The Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for Bishops on August 23, 1982, says: "As regards choice in professional, social, political matters and so on, the lay faithful belonging to the prelature enjoy, within the limits of Catholic faith and morals and Church discipline, the same freedom as other Catholics, their fellow citizens; as a result, the prelature is not responsible for the professional, social, political, or economic activities of any of its members."

Opus Dei's commitment to freedom is not a matter of tactics or shrewdness. Rather, it is the logical consequence of Opus Dei members' awareness that they share in the one mission of the Church, the salvation of *all* souls.

It is true that the Christian spirit lays down certain general ethical principles for temporal action: respect and support of the Church's teaching authority; noble and loyal behavior that fosters charity; understanding and respect for others' opinions; true love of one's country, free from narrow nationalism; promoting justice; readiness to make sacrifices in the interests of the civic community, and so forth. However, on the basis of these principles each Christian person can choose, from among the different possible solutions or options open to him, whatever he thinks best. St Escrivá states: "With our blessed freedom, opus Dei can never be, in the public life of a country, something like a political party. There is and always will be room within Opus Dei for all the outlooks and approaches allowed by a Christian conscience. It is furthermore prohibited that the directors should bring any influence to bear." Only the hierarchy of the Church has the authority to establish a specific norm of behavior for all Catholics, in the rare event that the Church's welfare should demand such a monolithic maneuver.

This program of personal holiness and apostolate in ordinary life, especially in the professional world, cannot be successful without the freedom that is the birthright of men and women created in God's image.

Freedom is essential to Christian life, especially when each person assumes full responsibility for his own affairs.

Christianity is of its nature a religion of freedom. This was patent to Opus Dei's founder. "God wants us to serve him freely—'where the Lord's spirit is, there is freedom' (2 Cor 3:17)—and, therefore, any apostolic action that does not respect freedom of consciences would certainly be wrong." Some people fear that promoting freedom could undermine the faith. That would indeed be the case if the freedom in question were an aimless freedom: lawless and irresponsible. Such freedom would really be license equivalent to thinking that anything pleasing, anything one felt like doing, was morally good even if it involved rejecting God. This may be the end-result of what is called "freedom of conscience," not to be confused with "freedom of consciences." With Leo XIII, St Escrivá declared: "I defend with all my strength the freedom of consciences, which means that no one may licitly prevent a person from worshipping God." While man has a serious duty to search for truth, no one may compel him to practice a faith he has not received nor to profess it in a particular way where God leaves us free to choose.

Opus Dei attacked

The total respect for freedom as inculcated by St Escrivá from the very beginning of Opus Dei was not always well understood. Perhaps, Spain in the 1940s and '50s was not ready for it, particularly in clerical circles. Certain spiritual trends of the time, born of various theological schools, ascetical approaches, and apostolic viewpoints had created deep divisions among the Spanish laity and gave rise to a certain "messianic" tendency. Each little group claimed it had "the solution" to all the world's problems. This is what St Escrivá called "the pseudospiritual one-party mentality," with everyone thinking that his principles and attitudes are the only valid ones and consequently should be adopted by all. It is then only a short step—easily taken—to regarding others' views as pernicious or heretical.

Thus, the opposition that arose from 1929 on (see *Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá*, nos. 33, 64-66) can be explained by a misunderstanding of Opus Dei's basic message. Nobody believed it possible to strive for holiness in the world. The year 1939 saw an increase in criticism and persecution of Opus Dei by "good people," who, as the forgiving founder said, "did so much evil while perhaps thinking they were doing God a service."

Some attacks were made in the confessional or from the pulpit. Others were served up by the press or by those good people in their visits to the families of Opus Dei members. No little anxiety was caused when parents were told that their children "could go to hell," because they had been "led to believe" that one could be holy in the world. Students were sent to spy on Opus Dei centers and to denounce the heresies and deviations that took place there. One day, St Escrivá's first book, *The Way*, was publicly burned in a convent school in Barcelona, where the provincial governor had issued a warrant for the arrest of its author. The founder was also denounced before the special Tribunal for the Repression of Masonry (a post-Civil War institution). It was described as a "Jewish branch of freemasonry" or "a Jewish sect connected with freemasonry." Later, St Escrivá was accused before the Holy Office, now the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, after the Holy See had granted Opus Dei its definitive approval.

The founder suffered because of the obstacles placed in the way, above all, because of the harm caused to souls, not least the souls of the "good people" instigating the attacks. In spite of everything, he never lost his serenity; he was not even particularly surprised by this development. "A picture that is all light and no shadow would not be a picture!... So, misunderstandings and opposition serve a purpose." What lay behind the misunderstandings and even the campaigns against Opus Dei? Interestingly enough, they were born of a clash between two outlooks (one religious and the other secular) that should have complemented one another. From a few ecclesiastical corners, they spread to others usually hostile to the Church. They still crop up from time to time.

Freedom and work

The freedom of Opus Dei members is seen first of all in their everyday work. They freely choose their own line of work and then freely set about choosing the means wherewith to do it as well as they can. Members are accountable only to whoever is over them at work—for example, the owner of the company or the head of a government department. But they never answer to the Work's directors.

If Opus Dei does not interfere in their work, still less does it exploit members' professional clout to obtain privileges or preferences of any kind. Such a move would run counter not only to the spiritual nature of the institution but to the basic fair play expected of any honest person, Christian or not. St Escrivá put it pointedly: "Opus Dei is an apostolic undertaking. Its only concern is with souls. Fortunately, our spirit does not permit us to behave like a mutual-help organization."

The only influence Opus Dei has on its members' work is through the spiritual coaching it gives them, which impels them to become increasingly aware of the Gospel's implications and to strive to be more faithful to it in their daily lives.

While God's Work tries to make members increasingly sensitive to questions of social justice, at the same time, it leaves the door open to a wide variety of solutions. For the founder, "the Catholic solution" to many problems facing the world does not exist. Any solution will be Christian if it respects natural law and the Gospel. He, therefore, stressed not the material aspect of the solution but the spirit that should impregnate it.

With this emphasis, he energetically encouraged each individual to shoulder his responsibilities. It would be criminal to "remain passive when confronted by all the injustice, social and personal, that the depraved human heart can cause." St Escrivá denounced a situation so often found in society: "So many centuries of people living side by side and still so much hatred, so much destruction, so much fanaticism stored up in eyes that refuse to see and in hearts that refuse to love! The good things of the earth monopolized by a handful of people...the world's culture limited to cliques...And everywhere a hunger for bread and education...Human lives—holy, because they come from God—treated as mere things, as statistics at best..."

A businessman, for example, motivated by this concern, will be opposed to unfair competition, fraud, or price hikes due only to a monopoly. Rather, he will favor honesty in commercial dealings; he will pay special attention to his employees' problems and living conditions. He will always try to be just in relations with his workers and so on. In turn, a Christian worker will strive to fulfill all his duties faithfully. Like-minded citizens will exercise their rights and shoulder their responsibilities with an eye to the good of others and the country.

The influence of Opus Dei's spirit on society is far from insignificant. But in the last analysis, it boils down to whatever personal influence individual members may acquire through their professional achievements and their standing in their particular occupation.

A desire to contribute to the solution of social problems—and here a Christian has much to offer—leads some Opus Dei members to join with other citizens to bring about apostolic initiatives that have considerable social impact.

In reply to "organized defamations," St Escrivá said it would be absurd to think that Opus Dei as such could manage mines, banks, or any other commercial ventures. The founder realized that a partisan minority will refuse to understand the practical consequences of freedom. They "would like us to explain things in their way—in terms of power

struggle and pressure groups. When we don't, they continue to allege deception and sinister intrigue."

Opus Dei members, of course, resent such insinuations. For them, it is unthinkable that they should use their membership in the prelature for personal aims, professional advancement, or social climbing, as if Opus Dei were some sort of old boys' network. Neither can membership be used to impose one's opinion on others. The other members would simply not tolerate it. They would insist that the opportunist "change his attitude or leave the Work. This is a point on which no one in Opus Dei will ever permit the slightest concession. It is their duty to defend not only their own personal freedom but also the supernatural character of the activity to which they have dedicated their lives. That is why I think that personal freedom and responsibility are the best guarantee of the supernatural purpose of God's Work."

If some Opus Dei members occupy important positions or have high social standing, they do so, thanks to their own efforts to sanctify their work—never to pressure from Opus Dei or favoritism from other members.

Freedom and politics

Those who do not believe that religious ideals and moral values can unite politically diverse people in a common undertaking could well reflect on a sociological reality: Opus Dei members belong to 87 nationalities and all social classes, races, and cultures, throughout the six continents. Each of them lives with his own family and works in his pertinent environment. How could an institution impose on such heterogeneous and widely dispersed individuals a single political criterion, a dogma if you will, in an area as relative and debatable as politics? How could a Kenyan be asked to model his conduct on that of an Australian, a Guatemalan, a Filipino, a Singaporean, or that of someone from Luxembourg?

Indeed, St Escrivá repeatedly stressed that by its very nature, "Opus Dei is not tied to any person, any group, any government, any political idea." In an instruction drawn up for Opus Dei directors, he told them not to talk about politics and to show that in Opus Dei "there is room for all opinions that respect the Church's rights." He added that the best guarantee that directors will not interfere in matters of opinion is the members' awareness of their freedom. "If directors were to impose a specific criterion in temporal affairs, the other members who thought differently would immediately rebel—and rightly so. I would see myself having the sad duty of blessing and praising those who firmly refused to obey, and of correcting with holy indignation directors who wished to exercise an authority they can never have."

Moreover: "A long time ago, I wrote that if Opus Dei had been involved in politics, even for an instant,

in that moment of error I would have left Opus Dei. One can't give the slightest credit to a news item that mixes Opus Dei up in politics or economics or temporal affairs of any kind. On the one hand we operate in the light of day, always reflecting strictly spiritual aims. On the other hand, Opus Dei men and women enjoy, in all matters the Church leaves to their judgment, complete personal freedom, respected by all, and consequently they are fully and personally responsible. Therefore, it's impossible for Opus Dei to involve itself in activities not directly spiritual and apostolic."

The pluralism found in Opus Dei poses no problems. As early as 1930, the founder wrote that pluralism is "a sign of good spirit, of the uprightness of our common action, and of respect for the legitimate freedom of each individual." It is worth noting that in Spain, in particular circumstances long since passed, the presence of three members in a Franco cabinet gave rise to interpretations that seemed to ignore the fact that, at the same time, other Opus Dei members were in the vanguard of the opposition and sometimes were victimized by the arbitrariness of the same Franco government.

A journalist from *Le Monde* asked the founder in 1972 if one could speak of an Opus Dei "conspiracy." "Impartial observers think not. There would need to be some kind of ideology and there is none. The civic freedom its members enjoy seems to be the reason for its success."

Respecting freedom

Opus Dei members who choose to take an active part in political life do so with complete freedom. They receive no instructions or recommendations of any kind. Opus Dei's only influence is on the same level here as in work generally—to remind them of the need to act in accordance with their faith. This should be seen "in the care you take to practice the supreme commandment of charity, overcoming all human passion, in the thoughtfulness with which you express your points of view as you study issues, avoiding heated arguments; by your respect for complete freedom of opinion in all spheres of human activity; by the understanding—frankness—with which you treat those persons holding opposite views."

This attitude of respect explains why you find in Opus Dei such a wide range of people. This variety also stems from the fact that Opus Dei's apostolate is not restricted to persons of a particular social condition or way of thinking: it reaches out to all men of good will who wish to avail themselves of its spiritual coaching. Those who approach the prelature are drawn by the strength of a deep faith lived and undaunted by human obstacles. The majority of prelature members "in all countries are laborers, housewives, shopkeepers, clerks, and so on: that is,

people whose jobs carry no special political or social weight.”

Respect for freedom in temporal affairs must also extend to matters that affect the faith and call upon Catholics to obey the Church. “I don’t understand the use of pressure either to persuade or to impose,” the founder said in this context. “A person who has received the faith always feels that *he* is the victor. Error is fought by prayer, by God’s grace, by talking things over calmly, by study, and by getting others to study! And, above all, by charity.”

Other spheres of freedom

Research: Without laboring the point, I would like to refer to what the founder said about freedom in scientific research. In October 1967, he conferred honorary degrees at the University of Navarre on academics who included Jean Roche, rector of the Sorbonne. St Escrivá recalled the university’s role to serve man and be a leaven in society. “It must seek truth in all spheres, in theology just as in the humanities and the natural sciences...and in other branches of learning.”

The attitude of a Christian scientist consists in pursuing research with an open mind and no shirking of effort. This is not always easy. In a similar ceremony in 1974, in honor of Prof. Jerome Lejeune of Paris and Bishop Hengsbach of Essen (Germany), St Escrivá declared that “scientific objectivity rightly rejects all ideological neutrality, all ambiguity, all conformity, all cowardice: love of truth absorbs the entire life and work of a man of science.” He must beg for divine assistance, aware that the discovery of new knowledge is the fruit of God’s will, who thus reveals himself progressively to men.

To be truly scientific, all research must necessarily lead to God. The founder did not mean by this that theology should invade the realm of academic research. On the contrary, he denounced any claims that would reduce the autonomy of scientific inquiry. This was a logical result of his love for personal freedom, for autonomy in temporal affairs, and for the rights of people to go about their work—in this case their search for truth—in an upright way.

St Escrivá defended “the personal freedom of every layman to take, in the light of Church-taught principles, all the decisions, theoretical and practical, he considers most appropriate and most in line with his own personal convictions and aptitudes. These would include, for instance, decisions regarding different philosophical or political theories, different artistic or cultural trends, or the problems of professional and social life.”

Theology: In the more restricted sphere of theology, Opus Dei members can freely contribute to the doctrinal apostolate by means of their research and speculation. They can enrich the treasury of wisdom

with new knowledge and suggest new solutions for new problems as well as old. They accept in advance that they must submit to the higher judgment of the Church and stay within the limits of her teaching. They have exactly the same freedom as all other Catholics to form their own opinions in philosophy, theology, scripture, canon law, and the like. They can have disciples, but they cannot form a school to which the other Opus Dei members are obliged to belong. The creativity and freedom of choice of each member is fully respected.

This being said, all the prelature’s faithful respect the general law of the Church forbidding books harmful to faith and morals. Whenever for good reasons, such as, say, research for a dissertation, they must read such books, they are quite happy to seek advice beforehand and later to write critical articles by which others benefit from their opinions and analysis.

St Escrivá often commented that Opus Dei’s fully secular spirit and approach gives its members a special facility to seek truth in freedom. That very freedom, united to charity, leads them to desire and defend the personal freedom of all men.

What I have said about freedom would be incomplete if I did not make one further point. When asked about the “liberation” the world craves for, the founder replied without the slightest hesitation: “Free yourself from sin. Free yourself from the chains of your evil passions. Free yourself from vice. Free yourself from bad company. Free yourself from indifference. Free yourself from disfigurement of soul and body.” He himself fostered many initiatives in favor of the underprivileged, but this did not prevent him from saying that “to want to free oneself from pain, from poverty, from wretchedness is splendid, but it is not liberation. Liberation is the opposite. Liberation is...to accept suffering with joy, to accept illness gladly, to accept a stifling cough with a smile!”

Personal responsibility

Underlying this affirmation of freedom, we always find in the founder’s teachings the other side of the coin: personal responsibility. Freedom and responsibility are equally important, he argued. They are like “two parallel lines.” Without freedom there can be no responsibility, and without responsibility there is no freedom. Now that so many try to shrug off the consequences of their deliberate acts, Opus Dei members must be ready to take full responsibility for their own actions, and all that follows from then, since nobody can make our choices for us.”

For the founder, it was intolerable that any member of the prelature (or other Christians, for that matter) should implicate Opus Dei or the Church—or even worse claim to act in their name—when merely expressing personal views. Legitimate though they be, opinions can never be put forward as dogmas.

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

Opus Dei was the first institution of the Catholic Church to obtain permission to have non-Catholics and non-Christians as co-operators. What do they think about Opus Dei? Here are a few testimonies.

Without losing my identity



At the end of this 20th century, which has been so violent, I see a need to nourish the spirituality of the human person, and to put aside the materialism and opportunism which has produced such bitter fruit. Therefore I have felt the need to become a cooperator. In addition, without losing my Jewish identity, God is now someone closer for me, more a part of my daily life. This has helped me to know the Catholic Church better, for which I have great esteem.

Rosa Luisa Giberstein is of Polish origin and lives in Costa Rica. She is a university professor.

Through my son

I was born in 1915 of Scottish and American descent and am an Anglican. From my youth I was part of the swimming team of the Rosario Athletic Club and swam in the competitions. There I met my future husband. When Eduardo, one of our sons, decided to study Agricultural Engineering in Buenos Aires, he went to live in a student residence entrusted to Opus Dei. He made many good friends there and, while still a student, became a Catholic. Shortly thereafter he asked for admission to the Work. Today he is a priest. I am happy because I see he is always happy.



Elsie Taylor de Varea lives in Rosario, Argentina. For many years she worked as an English teacher.

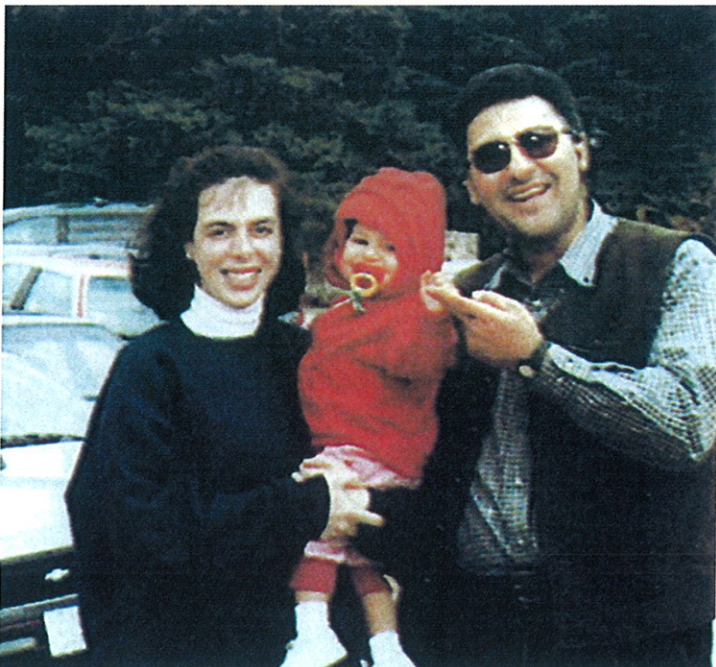
I can help people all over the world

“I am a Buddhist.” “It all began some eight years ago, when a friend invited me to Woodlands, a center of Opus Dei in Ealing [just outside London]. A few years after this meeting, my husband, who was an Anglican, died suddenly. In Woodlands I found great spiritual support. I started praying and felt the comfort God gave me. It was then that I became a cooperator. I like the idea of being able to help others by my collaboration—I can help people all over the world without leaving Ealing.”



Li Langley was born in Penang, Malaysia. Now she lives in London and has two children and three grandchildren.

An appealing goal



Being Jewish, I believe in God, and therefore in man and his spirituality. Any initiative guided more by spiritual than material motives automatically gets my support. In the educational undertakings promoted by people of Opus Dei, I have found men and women prepared to work to inject spiritual life into this world of ours. I find this idea very appealing. Being a cooperator has been a great help to me; my life has been enriched and the fact that I am Jewish has been no obstacle.

Ben Haneman is a doctor living in Sydney, Australia.

WHAT THEY SAY

I. Álvaro del Portillo

Cesare Cavalleri, columnist of the Italian newspaper Avvenire and university lecturer of communication science at the University of Genoa, interviewed Bishop Álvaro del Portillo, St Josemaría's successor at the head of Opus Dei, on the life of the founder. Here we publish a passage from Cavalleri's book, Immersed in God (Scepter, Princeton), where Bishop del Portillo explains what St Josemaría thought about freedom, civil rights, communism and Nazism.

“A Passionate lover of Freedom”

With regard to communism and Marxism, the Father was always faithful to the very clear teachings of the Church's magisterium about these ideologies. He would state his position, in public, whenever the circumstances required it. His view was not based on the sufferings which he personally experienced under the communist dictatorship in Spain – he had forgiven those responsible, from the very beginning – but was based, rather, on his awareness of the atheistic foundation and the inhuman and antireligious nature of their doctrine.

From the early sixties on, especially in his catechetical activities on the Iberian peninsula and in Latin America, and in response to the wide diffusion among the faithful of currents of opinion which tried to reconcile Marxism and Christianity, the founder echoed repeatedly the teachings of Pope Paul VI, as well as the condemnations contained in documents issued by the relevant departments of the Roman Curia.

This passage from a homily given in 1963 illustrates very clearly his attitude towards communism: “For this reason, it is urgent to repeat (and here I am not speaking politics, I am simply pointing out the Church's teaching) that Marxism is incompatible with the Christian faith. Can there be anything more opposed to the faith than a system which is based on eliminating the loving presence of God from the soul? Shout it aloud, so that your voice is clearly heard, that in order to practise justice we have no need whatsoever of Marxism. On the contrary, because of its exclusively materialistic solutions, which know nothing of the God of peace, this most serious error raises all kinds of barriers to the achievement of happiness and understanding among men. It is within Christianity that we find the good light that will enable us to answer all problems: all you have to do is to strive sincerely to be Catholics, *non verbo neque lingua, sed opera et veritate*, not with words or with the tongue, but with works and in truth (1 John 3:18). Speak up fearlessly, whenever the occasion arises (and if necessary, look for such opportunities), without being in any way shy” (Friends of God, no.171).

By the end of the thirties, the majority of Spaniards, having lived through the unfortunate experience of the civil war, had deep reservations regarding communism. The same thing did not happen with regard to Nazism. As a matter of fact, not only did the official propaganda, for one reason or another, conceal the crimes of National Socialism, but the Spanish government even prohibited publication of the papal document condemning Nazism. Hence, our Founder had to speak out against Nazism, on a number of occasions, as part of his priestly ministry. Precisely because the regime in Germany was looked on with sympathy in some governmental circles, he felt it his duty to put on guard those who were overlooking the aberrations of Nazi ideology. He warned against not only its totalitarian nature, but also its discrimination against – and persecution of – Jews, Catholics, and others, and the paganism so characteristic of Nazi racism. He made great efforts to make known the contents of the papal document condemning Nazism, and to spread it privately (...)

On January 9 1992, a man by the name of Domingo Díaz-Ambrona wrote to me from Madrid: “I knew the future saint during the Spanish Civil War. At that time I had taken refuge, with my wife in the Cuban embassy. While we were there, she gave birth to our daughter Guadalupe, on September 3, 1937, in Riesgo Hospital, which no longer exists, but which at that time was under the protection of the British

flag. Due to the situation our country was in, we could not have our baby baptised, and we mentioned this to a dear friend of ours, José María Albareda.

“A few days later, José María told me that a priest friend of his would come on a certain day to administer baptism to the little one. Trusting in the security afforded by the British flag, I invited the godparents and some other friends to the ceremony. The priest arrived at five in the afternoon, two hours ahead of schedule, stayed just long enough for the baptism, and left. Everything happened so quickly that we didn't even ask him his name. It was only afterwards that I found out it was Fr Escrivá. His behaviour was a lesson in prudence for all of us in those difficult circumstances. I tried to get him to stay, but he replied, ‘Many souls have need of me.’

“I afterwards learned that throughout that time, even though his papers were not in order, and the social and political climate was very risky for any priest, he carried out an intense apostolic activity. He heard many confessions – sometimes risking his life in the process – and gave courses and retreats, constantly changing his residence; he also gave spiritual guidance to a group of nuns who were suffering the effects of the persecution.

“As I said before, at the time I did not know who he was. I learned that much later, from a chance meeting in a train on the Madrid-Avila line, in the month of August, 1941. I was travelling with my wife and our four-year-old daughter; Fr Josemaría happened to see us, and he recognised us. He came to our compartment and said ‘I baptised this child.’ We exchanged greetings, he identified himself, and we spent some time discussing the historical situation we were involved in. We knew we were living at a decisive moment in European history – I remember being anxious to reach our destination at Navas del Marqués, so I could hear the latest radio reports about the advance of German troops into Russia.

“I mentioned to him that I had just returned from a trip to Germany, and that I had noticed how afraid Catholics were to express their religious convictions. This was giving me some doubts about Nazism, although, as was the case with most Spaniards, the negative aspects of the Nazi political system and philosophy had escaped me. That was because of the deceptive propaganda which made Germany appear to be the power which would finally annihilate communism. I asked him his opinion.

“For the reasons I have given, I was profoundly surprised at the time by the decisive answer he gave. Here was a priest who had accurate information about the position of the Church and of Catholics in Germany under Hitler's dictatorship. Fr Escrivá spoke very forcefully to me against that anti-Christian regime, and with an energy that clearly showed his great love of freedom. It is necessary to explain that it was not easy, in Spain at that time, who would condemn the Nazi system so categorically or who would denounce its anti-Christian roots with such clarity. And so that conversation, taking place as it did at such a historically significant moment, before all the crimes of Nazism had been revealed, continues to impress me profoundly.

“Afterwards, when I told my friend José María Albareda about this meeting, I learned that I had spoken with the founder of Opus Dei.

“I am not a member of Opus Dei, but my personal experience leads me to state that anyone who has anything contrary to say about the thought of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer on this matter is only trying, in vain, to obscure of the sanctity of life of this future saint: he was a passionate lover of freedom.”

That is an incontrovertible testimony that only confirms what common sense would have told us anyway. The Father did, of course, make all the necessary distinctions between Nazism and the German people. In fact, he always had a special affection for that nation – it was a sentiment he had inherited from his father – and he was profoundly grieved to see it subjected to that aberrant dictatorship. His grief became all the greater when World War II broke out.

II. Salvador Bernal

Opus Dei and Elections

The Founder of Opus Dei would give a simple reason for a Christian's commitment in life which overrides any type of conditioning or shady deals. It was: "Because this is what I want to do". His love for freedom was, I think, together with his good humour, the dominant feature of the human personality of Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer.

This was my impression the first time I came into contact with Opus Dei in 1956, at a centre in Gurtubay Street in Madrid. I then gathered that a passion for freedom was not exclusive to my unforgettable teachers at the Academia Audiencia close to the Ateneo, but the patrimony of all Christians.

When I got to know Monsignor Escrivá one day in September in 1960, surrounded by university students in the tiny garden of the Colegio Mayor Aralar in Pamplona, someone asked when would Opus Dei go the countries of the East. The quick answer was: "As soon as there is a minimum of freedom."

"God cannot be loved when there is no freedom", he would say. The option of choosing or rejecting him is the supreme manifestation of liberty, and arguably, the deep root of the other human rights, as can be deduced from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, which is so favourable to the dignity of persons.

'Freedom, a Gift of God' is the title Josemaría Escrivá gave to a homily of 1956, in which he evokes the manner in which Jesus spoke to the people of Palestine, without imposing himself on any one, as happened with the young rich man. "If you wish to be perfect..." The young man went away sad: "He lost his happiness because he refused to hand over his freedom to God." On the contrary, a Christian self-giving is a joyful bond, a loving spontaneity, the liberty of sons and not of slaves.

I remember the energy, full of understanding, with which the founder explained in Tajamar School to the people of Vallecas, Madrid, one Sunday in 1967, what freedom of conscience really was: No one can choose for us, each soul is master of its own destiny. His words excluded completely any form of anonymity, whether in one's own personal interior struggle or in front of others. Each one plays his own future. That is why in the Prelature of Opus Dei each one speaks for himself, does not use the plural we; the members of the Work don't go as a group, but open out like a fan.

Without freedom it is impossible live in peace among our fellow citizens. Some have interpreted maliciously those words of *The Way* about 'holy coercion' which makes demands on the apostolic and spiritual responsibility of all Christians, so as not to be led by a spirit of comfort or indifference. One can hear the echo of the *compelle entrare* – compel them to go in – with which the parable of the Gospel convokes those that are invited to the Great Wedding. That 'coercion' has nothing to do with politics, or entail any physical or moral violence. What it does is to reflect the vigour of a Christian example, which acts as a channel for the grace of God. When Monsignor Escrivá wrote in point 397 of *Furrow* those grave words on dictatorial authoritarianism, he was miles away from proposing human servitude.

Freedom, therefore, in political and social life. And the same openness is to be welcomed in science and culture. There should be no room for any type of fideism. Neither should any room be given to any form of clericalism or fundamentalism, because there can be no dogmas in temporal matters.

This same freedom applies as well – it could not be otherwise – to theology and the ecclesiastical sciences.

There is no Opus Dei 'school of thought', not even in the Faculties of Theology or Canon Law in Navarre or Rome.

Monsignor Escrivá was deeply moved when considering human liberty, that great privilege of man, which is present in all the mysteries of faith, taking into account its chiaroscuro. He did not cease to refer realistically to those sad proclamations that led to disastrous enslavements. He directed Opus Dei with prudent pastoral norms. Far removed from any kind of anthropological pessimism, he always showed a deep love for the personal spontaneity of others, for he was convinced that understanding and mutual trust form the basis for living together in harmony, and with a plurality truly filled with freedom.

I am writing this article at a time of elections, and it might be worth repeating the question they asked Monsignor Escrivá in the Gayarre Theatre of Pamplona, in October 1964: What position do the members of Opus Dei adopt in the public life of a country? The answer, which was received with a spontaneous ovation, began with those true words: "Whatever they want!"

Salvador Bernal is a Spanish journalist, and author of a book translated into English bearing the title of Msgr Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, a Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei (Veritas, Dublin, 1977). This is a translation of an article published in Diario 16, Madrid, Spain, on 17 May 1993, the first anniversary of the Beatification of Josemaría Escrivá. It was written at a time when party political campaigns were taking place in Spain before elections.

III. José María Casciaro

José María Casciaro was born in 1923 in south-east Spain. At the age of sixteen he met Fr Josemaría Escrivá, and joined Opus Dei a year later. He moved to Madrid at the age of seventeen to pursue his studies. It was during this period that he lived with St Josemaría. Casciaro later obtained doctorates in Arts and in Theology. He was ordained in 1951, and worked for many years in the USA as a priest and author of theology books. He died in 1995.

The extract below is taken from his memoir, It Is Worthwhile – Three years with the Founder of Opus Dei: 1939-1942, (Scepter, London), pp.117-118.

“Do Whatever you Like”

When the train had started I asked him, “Father, what can I do in Madrid now?” His reply was swift: he said immediately, “In Madrid you are to do whatever you like.”

I did not actually understand his answer in its fullness. I did not have any plan but was just looking forward to going back to the Jenner Street residence for a few days to be there, quite simply, with the Father, Pedro, and the other people of the Work. Although I did not understand his reply, it made such an impression on me that I have never forgotten it.

Later on I began to understand those spontaneous words. They showed his respect for everyone’s freedom, and especially that of his sons in the Work, and also something really admirable, which is the trust the Father had in us. “I trust the word of a son of mine

more than the unanimous testimony of a hundred notaries”, I heard him say on several occasions. Later, too, I was able to appreciate the theological depths of his attitude: he trusted his sons’ truthfulness, our integrity in living our lives in God’s sight, and the fact that we were seeking the Good for completely supernatural reasons.

From this perspective, I understood that “whatever you like” does not mean doing whatever one happens to fancy, without more ado; it means taking the initiative to aim at the true Good, to choose what an honest, truthful conscience suggests at each moment, without becoming unduly complicated by rules, but taking care to form that conscience in accordance with the rules of the faith. In short, it means doing what is right, out of a

conscious decision to do it, because it is what God wants, not because we are forced to or just because we feel like it.

Blessed Josemaría’s love for freedom was something that impressed me right from the start. More so, perhaps, at that time, when it was not a subject that was much talked about. Other values were underlined, such as service and sacrifice for one’s country, self-denial in suffering, heroism to the point of risking one’s life in defence of high ideals, and so on. But I always heard Blessed Josemaría speak of freedom and responsibility; the Christian freedom that Jesus Christ brought us by his redemption, the freedom of those who are and feel that they are God’s children; and respect for other people’s freedom, a truly deep dimension of the broad spectrum of freedoms.

IN THE WORDS OF ST JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

The Founder of Opus Dei was interviewed by journalists from several newspapers and magazines, about current issues in the Church and in society. St Josemaría gave his opinion clearly and without beating about the bush. Some interviews, including those with Time, Le Figaro and the New York Times, have been published in the book Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá (Scepter, Princeton, 2002). In these conversations St Josemaría spoke about different aspects of freedom.

Pluralism

Because the Work's aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of freedom, of love for the personal freedom of all men. And since this is a sincere love for freedom and not a mere theoretical statement, we love the necessary consequence of freedom which is pluralism. In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered. When I see among the members of the Work so many different ideas, such a variety of points of view in political, economic, social or cultural matters, I am overjoyed at the sight, because it is a sign that everything is being done for God, as it should be.

Spiritual unity is compatible with variety in temporal matters when extremism and intolerance are shunned and above all when people live up to the Faith and realise that men are united not so much by links of sympathy or mutual interest but above all by the action of the one Spirit, who in making us brothers of Christ is leading us towards God the Father.
(Conversations, no.67)

No one has a right to impose non-existent dogmas in temporal matters. Given a concrete problem, whatever it may be, the solution is to study it well and then to act conscientiously, with personal freedom and with personal responsibility as well. (Conversations, no.77)

Opus Dei is a spiritual and apostolic organisation. If one forgets this fundamental fact, or refuses to believe in the good faith of the members of the Work who affirm it, it is impossible to understand what we do. And this very lack of understanding can lead people to invent complicated stories and secrets which have never existed. (...)

Any reasonably well informed person knows that there is nothing secret about Opus Dei. We do not wear a habit or badge because we are ordinary Christians, not religious. We do not all think the same way because we admit the greatest possible pluralism in all temporal matters and in debatable theological questions. A more accurate knowledge of the facts and the disappearance of unfounded fears have put an end to a situation in which false accusations were lamentably frequent. It is not surprising, however, that every now and then someone tries to stir up old myths. The fact that we strive to work for God, defending the personal freedom of all men, means that we will always meet with the opposition of all the sectarian enemies of freedom. And they will be all the more aggressive if they are religious fanatics or people who cannot stand the idea of religion.
(Conversations, no.30)

Freedom and temporal affairs

Opus Dei has nothing whatever to do with politics. It is absolutely foreign to any political, economic, ideological or cultural tendency or group. Let me repeat that its aims are exclusively spiritual and apostolic.

The only thing it demands of its members is that they lead a Christian life, trying to live up to the ideal of the Gospel. Therefore it never becomes involved in any temporal affairs. If someone does not understand this, it may well be because he does not understand personal freedom, or because he is incapable of distinguishing between the purely spiritual ends for which the members of the Work are associated and the vast field of human activities (economics, politics, culture, art, philosophy etc.) in which they enjoy complete freedom and act on their own responsibility.

From the moment in which they first approach the Work, all its members are fully aware of their individual freedom. If one of them ever tried to exert pressure on the others to make them accept his political opinions, or to use them for human interests, they would rebel and expel him without a second thought.

Respect for its members' freedom is an essential condition of Opus Dei's very existence. Without it, no one would come to the Work. Even more. The Work has never intervened in politics and, with God's help it never will; but if it were to, I would be its number one enemy. (Conversations, no.28)

In Opus Dei, we always strive to be in full agreement with Christ's Church in our opinions and sentiments; *sintire cum Ecclesia*. Our doctrine is no more and no less than what the Church teaches all the faithful. The only thing which is proper to Opus Dei is its characteristic spirit, that is to say, its concrete way of living the Gospel, sanctifying oneself in the world and carrying out an apostolate through one's profession. As an immediate consequence, a member of Opus Dei enjoys the same freedom as any other Catholic to form his own opinions and to act accordingly. (...)

Being Catholic does not imply belonging to a closed cultural or ideological group, and much less to a particular political party. From the very beginning of the Work, not only since the Council, we have striven to live broad-minded Catholicism. (Conversations, no.29)

I have never asked anyone who belongs to the Work what party he supports or what political ideas he holds; and I will never do so. It would seem to me a violation of his legitimate freedom. And the directors of Opus Dei, the world over, follow the same rule of conduct.

Nevertheless I am aware that among the members of the Work, in Spain just as in any other country, all shades of opinion are represented and I have no objection whatsoever. I respect them all, as I will always respect any temporal decision made by a man who tries to act according to the dictates of his conscience.

This pluralism is not a problem for the Work. Rather it is a sign of good spirit that bears witness to the legitimate freedom of each individual. (Conversations, no.48)

The majority of Opus Dei members are of modest means and social position: manual workers, farmers, clerks, housewives, office workers, engineers, teachers, etc. A much smaller number are engaged in the world of government and business. All of them act exclusively on their own authority. They are completely autonomous in their work and answer personally for their actions.

The aims of Opus Dei are strictly spiritual. The only thing it asks of its members, be they socially influential or not, is that they strive to lead a fully Christian life. It never gives them instructions on how to carry out their work. It does not attempt to coordinate their activities, nor does it make use of the positions they may hold. (Conversations, no.49)

The Freedom of lay people in the Church

All those who exercise the priestly ministry in the Church should always be careful to respect the autonomy which a Catholic layman needs, so that he will not find himself in a position of inferiority in relation to his fellow laymen, and can carry out efficiently his own apostolic task in the middle of the world. To attempt the opposite, to try to instrumentalise lay people for ends which exceed the proper limits of our hierarchical ministry, would be to fall into a lamentably anachronistic clericalism. The possibilities of the lay apostolate would be terribly curtailed; the laity would be condemned to permanent immaturity and above all, today especially, the very concept of authority and unity in the Church would be endangered. We cannot forget that the existence among Catholics of a true diversity of criterion and opinion in matters which God has left to the free discussion of men is in no way opposed to the hierarchical structure or the unity of the People of God. On the contrary, it strengthens them and defends them against possible impurities. (Conversations, no.12)

In 1932, commenting for my sons and daughters in Opus Dei on some of the aspects and consequences of the special dignity and responsibility which Baptism confers upon people, I wrote for them in a document, 'The prejudice that ordinary members of the faithful must limit themselves to helping the clergy in ecclesiastical apostolates has to be rejected. There is no reason why the secular apostolate should always be a mere participation in the

apostolate of the hierarchy. Secular people too have a duty to do apostolate. Not because they receive a canonical mission, but because they are part of the Church. Their mission... is fulfilled in their profession, their job, their family, and among their colleagues and friends'.

Today, after the solemn teachings of Vatican II, it is unlikely that anyone in the Church would question the orthodoxy of this teaching. But how many people have really abandoned the narrow conception of the apostolate of the laity as a pastoral work organised 'from the top down'? How many people have got beyond the previous 'monolithic' conception of the lay apostolate, and understand that it can and indeed should exist without the necessity of rigid centralised structures, canonical missions and hierarchical mandates? How many people who consider the laity as the *longa manus Ecclesiae*, do not at the same time confuse in their minds the concept of Church-People of God with the more limited concept of hierarchy? How many laymen understand that unless they act in tactful communion with the hierarchy they have no right to claim their legitimate sphere of apostolic autonomy?

Similar lines of thought could be formulated with regard to other problems because there is in fact a great deal which remains to be done, as much in the way of doctrinal exposition, as by education of consciences and reform of ecclesiastical legislation. (Conversations, no.21)

But it would never occur to such a Christian to think or to say that he was stepping down from the temple into the world to represent the Church, or that his solutions are 'the Catholic solutions' to problems. That would be completely inadmissible! That would be clericalism, 'official Catholicism', or whatever you want to call it. In any case, it means doing violence to the very nature of things. You must foster everywhere a genuine 'lay outlook', which will lead to three conclusions: be sufficiently honest, so as to shoulder one's own personal responsibility; be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, in matters of free discussion, propose solutions which differ from those which each one of us maintains; and be sufficiently Catholic so as not to use our Mother the Church, involving her in human factions. (Conversations, no.117)

THE ADVENTURE OF FREEDOM

José Ramon Pérez Arangüena is a priest, canon lawyer and philosopher, He is editor of the theological review Palabra and author of several books. The extract below has been taken from La Personalidad del Beato Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (Eunsa, Pamplona, 1994), pp.133-145.

Cornelio Fabro described Mgr Escrivá's attitude to freedom as something "new in Christian spirituality."¹ The theme has been discussed on a number of occasions by various authors, but no one has yet done so in sufficient depth.

Freedom seen as God's gift

*I have spent my whole life preaching personal freedom, with personal responsibility. I have sought freedom throughout the world and I'm still looking for it, just like Diogenes trying to find an honest man. And every day I love it more. Of all the things on earth, I love it most. It is a treasure which we do not appreciate nearly enough.*² St Josemaría Escrivá not only used to speak about freedom; he loved freedom; that is why he defended it. His defence was not so much the revindication of rights when someone trod on them, but rather of freedom in the most radical sense, seen as the greatest gift of God to man, so that it is man himself who acts, and remains the same when he acts. His commitment to freedom had all this theological and anthropological depth, and it included an unchanging decision of not allowing that anyone should trample on the freedom of others in any way.

It is clear that such an ambitious idea of freedom does not imply an escape from reality. Quite the contrary, it gives man the precise measure of the great importance of his position in the world by overcoming the kinds of reductionism that belittle freedom. The various facets of freedom and of the so-called "freedoms" are not to be juxtaposed or badly amalgamated. The whole of their dense content has a common trunk, which is the fact of being God's gift, and this makes its sap reach up to the smallest branches. Consequently it is faith, the Christian faith, that *makes us admire the splendid gift of freedom which gives us power over our own actions and enables us – with heaven's grace – to build our eternal destiny.*³

With this transcendent vision freedom becomes the meeting point of God and man. And with such high perspective the founder of Opus Dei marvelled even more at God, who with that gift *takes a risk with our freedom*⁴ by allowing man to exercise it against his maker; which shows clearly God's extreme respect for his own creatures, to the point of excluding from himself the temptation of tyranny. God is waiting at the meeting point, but man refuses to turn up, or so very often refuses to correspond.

Freedom, what for?

St Josemaría has said that there are *such people who barricade themselves behind their freedom. 'My freedom! My freedom!' they cry. They have their freedom, but they don't use it. They look at it, they set it up, a clay idol for their petty minds to worship. Is this freedom? What use is this treasure to them, if there is no commitment guiding their whole lives?*⁵ These are the people who see freedom as an autonomous concept, detached from all the other human coordinates in the style of the utopian existentialist cry: "freedom for the sake of freedom!" But Jesus Christ said: "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Therefore, there already is some form of concatenation.

¹ C. Fabro, *El primado existencial de la libertad*, in *Mons. Escrivá de Balaguer y el Opus Dei*, Pamplona 1982, p.333

² *Christ Is Passing By*, no.184

³ *Ibid.*, no.99

⁴ *Ibid.*, no.113; cf. *Friends of God*, no.26ff

⁵ *Friends of God*, no.29

If God has given us this gift, it is not merely to be admired in a display cabinet of the museum of our life, but rather that we make use of it for the attainment of the good. ***Thus we come to appreciate that freedom is used properly when it is directed towards the good.***⁶ St Thomas Aquinas wrote: “The highest degree of men’s dignity is that by themselves, and not by others, they should direct themselves to the good.”⁷

Love and self-giving

Love of God marks out the way of truth, justice and goodness.⁸ St Josemaría establishes a relation between freedom and such sublime realities as God, truth, goodness, happiness; and another can be added, which is intimately connected with them, one which is furthermore the existential cause of freedom, namely: love; and beyond that: the love of God. Freedom, he says, ***finds its true meaning when it is put to the service of the truth which redeems, when it is spent in seeking God’s infinite Love which liberates us from all forms of slavery.***⁹

In fact, we do not need to spend a long time meditating on this to realise that only love can suitably activate the exercise of freedom, because it is only then that love is able to unfold all its greatness. Only love can cause – in a noble way – freedom to be envious of it. No other reason can be higher in man, for he has nothing purer, and yet disappointment and scepticism may imprison it in the ego.

St Augustine expressed this intimate union of love and freedom in a famous sentence: “Love and do what you want.”¹⁰ St Josemaría himself said, in perfect agreement: ***Only when we love do we attain the fullest freedom.*** Or conversely: ***Where there is no love of God, the individual and responsible use of personal freedom becomes impossible.***¹¹ And starting from love we understand that he should forcefully repeat that we ought to do things ***for the most supernatural of reasons, because we want to,***¹² with self-determination, we might say with more technical, but less graphic, language.

So we enter the last stronghold of freedom in its personal action: ***Freedom can only be given up for love.***¹³ If the motive of freedom is love and love is essentially self-giving, we are faced with a logical conclusion that perhaps we did not expect: freedom is self-giving, it is to commit oneself to the good out of love, a commitment to love God. ***I opt for God because I want to, freely, without compulsion of any kind. And I undertake to serve, to convert my whole life into a means of serving others, out of love for my Lord Jesus.***¹⁴ Even more, in voluntary self-giving, in each instant of this dedication, freedom renews love.

“It is utterly false to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom.”

This approach implies the overcoming of an old controversy, and St Josemaría affirms in radical terms: ***It is utterly false to oppose freedom and self-surrender, because self-surrender is a consequence of freedom.*** He goes on to explain this with an example: ***Look, when a mother sacrifices herself for love of her children, she has made a choice, and the more she loves the greater will be her freedom. If her love is great, her freedom will bear much fruit. Her children’s good derives from her blessed freedom, which presupposes self-surrender, and from her blessed self-surrender, which is precisely freedom.***¹⁵

Summing up, then, the thought of the founder of Opus Dei, we can say that freedom is the commitment of man to do good out of love. This is a committed freedom (reciprocally promised with God), which is equivalent to self-giving, to constancy, to obedience, to maturity, to the overcoming of fickleness (to which a poor way of looking at things, which is perhaps the most popular one, would want to reduce the greatness of freedom).

⁶ *Ibid.*, no.26

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Epistle of St Paul to the Romans*, chapter II, lecture III, 217

⁸ *Friends of God*, no.38

⁹ *Ibid.*, no.27

¹⁰ *Commentary on the First Epistle of St John*, no.7

¹¹ *Friends of God*, nn.38 and 29

¹² *Christ Is Passing By*, no.184

¹³ *Friends of God*, no.31

¹⁴ *Friends of God*, no.35

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no.30

A foundation for freedom

Let us now deal with the question of the foundation of freedom. From the natural point of view it is obvious that it is founded on creation. This means that the foundation of freedom is the Will of God, who made man with intellect and will, with a rational nature, to be master of his actions. In the supernatural order the foundation is the re-creation by Christ, into the new status he gives us access to by his redemption. This means divine filiation, the awareness that the most radical quality that a creature can enjoy is that of being a son of God by grace (cf. Gal 4:5). The founder of Opus Dei states it very clearly: ***Do not forget: anyone who does not realise that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself. When he acts he lacks the dominion and self-mastery we find in those who love Our Lord above all else.***¹⁶

“Anyone who does not realise that he is a child of God is unaware of the deepest truth about himself.”

All this is closely related to the theology of St Paul. It is well known that St Paul in his letters mentions a number of times this reality of the divine filiation of the Christian. Specifically in his Epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians he contrasts the freedom enjoyed by the son with the fear and restrictions of the slave; the former is at his home and is the heir; the latter is in someone else’s house and subject to the control of his master. By his redemption from sin Christ has won our freedom and has “predestined us to the adoption of sons,” “to share in the freedom of the glory of God’s children,” says St Paul.¹⁷

Slavery or divine sonship, this is the dilemma we face, says the founder of Opus Dei. Children of God or slaves to pride, to sensuality, to the fretful selfishness which seems to afflict so many souls.¹⁸ But there is more to this, because freedom and divine filiation are so closely related that only by means of freedom can a person acquire a full awareness of divine filiation: ***we Christians perceive with a particular clearness all the wealth of our divine filiation, when we realize that we are fully free because we are doing our Father’s work.***¹⁹

With this all the founding aspects of freedom, in their essential nucleus, have been included. What is left belongs to the wide field of the practical use man makes of it.

Formation and personal struggle

We are not more free by being ignorant, but by knowing better, by a greater development of our intellectual faculty, which makes it possible to have a greater capacity to decide in favour of the good. If “the truth shall make you free” it will be necessary to know it, in order to be able to accept it or not; which shows the need for a commitment to acquire formation, so that we really try to be objective and unbiased, and can better discern the welter of possibilities that life presents at every step, demanding a choice. A lack of formation, of proper criteria, leads easily to error, St Josemaría says, ***because choices that prefer error do not liberate. Christ alone sets us free, for He alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life. (Jn 14:6).***²⁰

Freedom is never finally achieved, but rather always subject to the possibility of error, for the very reason that it has to be continually exercised. ***We Christians, says the founder of Opus Dei, have a commitment of love to the calling of divine grace, which we have freely accepted, an obligation which urges us to fight tenaciously. We know that we are as weak as other men.***²¹

Constantly present are the need for a good formation and the maintained effort to keep directing our actions towards God. A good or bad decision affects the direction of our life and therefore of our freedom. It is precisely the possibility of straying, or rather the awareness of our own weakness, that constitutes ***the beginning of the path of the interior struggle which is a lifelong undertaking because, as long as we are on***

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, no.26

¹⁷ *Romans* 8:21; cf. *Galatians* 4:7ff; 5:1; *Ephesians* 1:5

¹⁸ *Friends of God*, no.38

¹⁹ *Christ Is Passing By*, no.138

²⁰ *Friends of God*, no.26

²¹ *Christ Is Passing By*, no.74

*this earth, we will never achieve complete freedom.*²² And even in the case of failing, of moving away from friendship with God, there remains always the recourse to divine filiation, so as to repair freedom and its right use. *Our Father in heaven pardons any offence when his child returns to him, when he repents and asks for pardon. The Lord is such a good Father that he anticipates our desire to be pardoned and comes forward to us, opening his arms laden with grace,*²³ says St Josemaría.

Diversity and responsibility

Personal responsibility is a notion as wide as freedom itself, because it is its necessary counterweight. There is no true freedom where the corresponding responsibility is lacking. St Josemaría said: *personal freedom is essential in Christian life. But do not forget, my children, that I always mean responsible freedom.*²⁴

Responsibility, in so far as it faces up in a mature way to the positive or negative consequences of human acts, ought always to be present in all of them, precisely so that they should be constituted as human acts in the most proper sense. With the components of integrity and sense of duty, responsibility prevents the corruption of freedom into licence. That is why freedom and responsibility *are characteristics of a Christian conscience.*²⁵

The fear of freedom

One of the roots of many present-day evils is the fear of freedom. Together with an existential ideology of the pursuit of pleasure, or of a lifestyle that seeks to satisfy any appetite, there arises the harsh reality of everyday life with more or less serious problems. And the reluctance to face these problems, together with the fear of freedom, leads many to embrace the false freedom of taking the easily available drugs, alcoholic drinks, or some other false means of losing their inhibition; such as suicide in the extreme pathological cases. So they end up with the destruction of freedom, which was in theory what they were trying to obtain by escaping from reality.

“The only ‘freedom’ that can assail the faith is a misinterpreted freedom.”

When freedom is compartmentalised (or made into something partial) it is not difficult for it to be drowned out by the pressure of individual or social interests: one’s own interests, those of others, or both. So we find again the fear of freedom, which often appears in really difficult situations. But even then it is painful that freedom should be denied in the name of freedom, by opting for security for the sake of a false future hope, and giving up in the process what is most valuable in oneself. Freedom contains in its essence a risk; and so it turns out that even in this we have been created in God’s image and likeness. But that risk should not be seen as a danger for the Christian faith. St Josemaría stresses this point: *throughout my years as a priest, whenever I have spoken, or rather shouted, about my love for personal freedom, I have noticed some people reacting with distrust, as if they suspected that my defence of freedom could endanger the faith. Such fainthearted people can rest assured. The only thing that can assail the faith is a misinterpreted freedom, an aimless freedom, one without objective principles, one that is lawless and irresponsible. In a word, licence.*²⁶

In the thought of the founder of Opus Dei, we can conclude, freedom is a notion that embraces everything and is also a nucleus; it is a subject for theoretical reflection, but above all practical and pastoral. At the same, time freedom was for St Josemaría a frequent experience, a joyful one, and something he earnestly looked for as a need; and again an experience so deep that it allowed him to describe the Christian life as *the adventure of freedom.*²⁷

²² *Friends of God*, no.36

²³ *Christ is Passing By*, no.64; cf. *Friends of God*, no.148

²⁴ *Conversations with Mgr Escrivá de Balaguer*, no.117

²⁵ *Christ Is Passing By*, no.99; cf. no.184

²⁶ *Friends of God*, no.32

²⁷ *Friends of God*, no.35