

CHRISTIANITY **IN EVERY DAY LIFE**

OPUS DEI **and Its Founder**

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The spirituality of the layman has seen a great development in recent years, particularly around the time of the Second Vatican Council. One of the pioneering contributors to this development was Msgr. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei. Msgr Escriva was born in Barbastro, Spain, on the 9th January, 1902. He was ordained a priest in 1925 and worked in country parishes and later in the poorer districts of Madrid and among university students. He moved to Rome in 1946.

In 1928 in Madrid he founded Opus Dei, which received approval of the Holy See in 1950.

He died in Rome on the 26th June, 1975, in the fame of sanctity.

Opus Dei is an association of Catholic faithful who strive to practise the Christian virtues in their own state in life and through the exercise of their own profession or occupation. In this way they carry out the apostolate of making Christ known by their example and word. The purpose of Opus Dei is spiritual and apostolic.

It now [1979] comprises some 70,000 members from 80 different nationalities.

This pamphlet explains the spirit of the Founder. Its authors, Marie and Tony Shannon, have recently written other popular A.C.T.S. pamphlets on the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, and on Saint Thomas More.

[Since this pamphlet was first published Msgr. Escriva has been beatified and canonized and is now known as Saint Josemaria.]

The Editor.

CHRISTIANITY IN EVERY DAY LIFE

PREFACE

"Opus Dei has arisen in our time as a living expression of the perennial youth of the Church, open to the requirements of a modern apostolate. We consider with paternal affection how much Opus Dei has done and is doing for the Kingdom of God."

The words are those of the late Pope, Paul VI, in a letter given to Monsignor Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, founder of Opus Dei, in a private audience in 1964.

Opus Dei (Work of God) was founded in 1928. It is an international Catholic association of laity. Its only aim is to help people see in their very different kinds of work a common element: that their ordinary daily occupations are the chief means God has given them of serving and loving him. The world, work, and temporal activities are the raw material of lay sanctity.

When Msgr. Escriva began to preach that the layman's duty was to sanctify himself and others in and through the things of the world, many proclaimed the impossibility of this task. Yet at the time of his death Vatican II had incorporated much of what Msgr. Escriva preached in the official doctrine of the Church.

This is not a story of extraordinary events: it is the story of ordinary things, of little things, the things of the moment, done well, done with love.

THE MESSAGE OF MSGR. ESCRIVA

What possible interest can a priest who spent almost half his life in Rome have for busy citizens immersed in the realities of life?

What is the point of another booklet about the lay apostolate? To answer a question with a question: if the world is growing dark is it not because we lay people are not lighting it in the manner of the Christians of the first centuries? As Msgr. Escriva often pointed out, hell is full of people with closed mouths! We cannot content ourselves with taking a passive attitude. On the contrary, we have to say it aloud and pass it on to others that God calls all men to be saints.

There is a tendency perhaps to think of the "lay apostolate" as just that: something in inverted commas; attending the meetings of some society, of helping the parish priest with the finances, of running bible classes.

Certainly these are facets of the lay apostolate. They are apostolic activities engaged in by lay people, but they fall far short of the lay apostolate envisaged by Msgr. Escriva.

His monumental contribution to the spirituality of the Church has been to remind lay people of the special characteristic of their vocation as laity in the midst of secular society (not sent there, but there by right), there in the factory, in the office, in the home, on the sports field, there as the messengers of Christ, not in a clerical or "churchy" way, but in a lay way.

It is not a question of many things, but of doing things well (cf. *The Way*, 333). It is not a question of great talents, but of doing everything for Love (cf. *The Way*, 813). Fundamentally, it is a question of how we can really fulfil Our Lord's command to pray always.

When we are serving God generously, at home, in our work, with our friends, then we are doing an

apostolate. When we are carrying out conscientiously our ordinary duties, then our heart will react generously to extend our apostolate.

The message of Msgr. Escriva was to ordinary people: the reminder that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man to call ordinary people to genuine holiness, ordinary people with "feet of clay", with all our weaknesses that we shall carry with us to the grave.

Msgr. Escriva's message was a passionate avowal of the fact that "each soul is worth all the blood of Christ" (S. Bernal, *A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, p. 274), since each of us is called to an extraordinary destiny. We are called to be saints - all of us - not just priests and religious, and we answer this call through love of God and an apostolate, which should be as constant, continuous and natural as breathing. This is why we exist.

THE VOCATION OF THE LAY PERSON

There is a need for ordinary Catholics, who through their family and friendships, their work and ambitions, form part of the very texture of civil society, to understand that their lives, **just as they are**, are opportunities for meeting Christ, because Christ is present in any honest human activity. That is the lay person's way of apostolate, the lay person's apostolate. The life of an ordinary Christian, which to some people might seem banal and petty, can and should be a holy and sanctifying life. The lives of Our Lady and St Joseph seemed pretty ordinary to their neighbours to judge from the surprise expressed when Jesus began his public apostolate. They had Jesus with them, but so do we.

During that same public apostolate, Our Lord, in his customary direct manner pulled no punches about the four types of Christians: the hardhearted, the superficial, those who are preoccupied with the cares and worries of this world, and finally, the fruitful.

In fact Our Lord, in the parable of the sower and the seed, gave us the criterion by which we can tell whether we are genuine followers of his: are we fruitful? (Matt. 13: 18-23).

Of course it is God's work we are doing by virtue of that call we received at Baptism: "what a pity if in the end you had carried out 'your' apostolate and not 'his' apostolate!" (*The Way*, 967). As it is God's apostolate we might never see the fruits of our apostolic endeavours. Few laymen have been more apostolic than St Thomas More, and yet he had little to show in statistical terms for all his efforts. Our apostolate, or rather, God's apostolate which he has entrusted to us, cannot be measured in earthly terms, but what joy awaits us when those souls greet us in heaven, souls who responded to God's message which we helped to spread to them.

What shame would be ours at the General Judgement if there are souls who can say to God that they had no opportunity of knowing him, of his love for them, souls that were our colleagues at work, our mates in the pub, our rivals in sport, even perhaps some of our relatives. Can we really expect to be saved if we make no effort to save those amongst whom God has placed us?

Obviously God could have decided on any plan to have his message spread. In deciding to use us as his messengers it is almost as if God has chosen the worst possible instruments. Yet as Msgr. Escriva used to remind us, the very inefficiency of the tools makes the glory of God shine through even more clearly. The worse the tools the better the craftsman must be to use them. It is the work of God.

We have to try to become better instruments by prayer and mortification.

"Action is worth nothing without prayer: prayer grows in value with sacrifice . . . First, prayer; then atonement; in the third place, very much 'in the third place', action" (*The Way*, 81, 82). Penance and mortification need not be something negative. We rid ourselves of self so that the void may be filled with Christ.

Nor do we need to look far for penances: "that joke, that witty remark held on the tip of your tongue; the cheerful smile for those who annoy you, that silence when you're unjustly accused; your friendly conversation with people whom you find boring and tactless; the daily effort to overlook one irritating detail or another in the persons who live with you . . . this, with perseverance, is indeed solid interior mortification" (*The Way*, 173). Not that there isn't a place for voluntary mortifications, but "choose mortifications that don't mortify others" (*The Way*, 179).

THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION

Since 1928, Msgr. Escriva has been emphasizing the need for a clear understanding of the Christian vocation, something so well appreciated by the early Christians: "To fulfil the demands of the Christian vocation which they live in common, and as something required of them by the same baptism which they have both received, priest and layman must both aspire equally to sanctity, which is a participation in the divine life" (St Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catecheses*, 21, 2).

This is at the heart of any Christian vocation, which is a call from Christ for someone to go to him - freely. For we are free to ignore the call. The call is there though, for every living person has a place in God's design.

Msgr. Escriva was able to make people aware of this because he himself was so conscious of the fact that he was a son of God, that we are children of God our Father, and he has led many thousands of people to ponder this truth.

God, the source of all love, the author of all parenthood, the creator of all life, loves us more than we love spouse, children or parents (cf. *The Way*, 670, 884, 907, 919). Our human loves are a faint participation in Love, a foretaste of that love we shall possess in heaven when we come to know God.

Without this realization of our divine filiation, life can very easily become nothing more than a game of charades. Without this realization of our divine filiation, we cannot appreciate that life has really begun, that we are on our way to our eternal destiny; at any moment we are only a breath away from that union with God our Father for which we were created and which alone gives meaning to life's joys and sorrows.

As children of God the holiness to which we as lay-people are called is not less than that of the priest, for the lay-person is not a second class Christian. Holiness in the laity, just as in priests, is nothing other than the perfection of the Christian life, the fulness of divine sonship, for in the eyes of our Father God we are all his children, whatever be the function or ministry assigned to each one: "little children for whom, precisely because they are little, the kingdom of heaven has been reserved" (Msgr. Escriva, quoted in A. del Portillo, *Faithful and Laity in the Church*, p.23).

Is it any wonder that the Second Vatican Council asserted so strongly that each one of us, each one of the people of God, has a part to play in his plan? This honour we fulfil in our work whether it be in the home, the office or the factory. Msgr. Escriva "disclosed to everyone that a divine vocation gives meaning to secular existence" (A. del Portillo, "Gebet, Abtötung und gut getane Arbeit", *Deutsche Tagespost*, 10 October 1978). We really can all be contemplatives as we carry out our Christian vocation.

THE WORK OF GOD

Christian fraternity is mainly expressed in the context of our work, which although it is a human vocation, is where we find our divine vocation. In developing the spirituality of Opus Dei, Msgr. Escriva always stressed positively not only the laity's integral part amongst the people of God but also that the laity carries out a mission in the world, right in the midst of temporal structures; not only that one may aspire to holiness from any state in life but also that one looks for holiness precisely in that state.

The Work is an international Catholic association whose only purpose is to help people see in their very

different kinds of work a common element: that their work is the chief way God has given them of serving and loving Him. Its members commit themselves to strive to live all the Christian virtues. Opus Dei provides spiritual sustenance for its members and others, always faithful to the Magisterium, but respecting freedom.

Opus Dei has a minimum of organization, with a collegiate-style central government in Rome, and regional governments which are also collegiate, each headed by a Counsellor.

This minimum of organization is directed fundamentally to one task: to provide the members with the spiritual assistance necessary for their interior lives, and an adequate spiritual, doctrinal, religious and human formation.

Opus Dei, as an organization, endeavours to contribute to the development of an authentic lay spirituality, to the understanding of the proper and specific role of the laity in the Church, a role which is neither ecclesiastical nor official, to the clarification of the duties and rights which the lay-person has by virtue of being a lay-person, to the sanctifying value and dignity of the tasks which Christian men and women both have in society.

Opus Dei has two Sections, one for men and one for women, which are absolutely independent, to the extent of being like two distinct associations, united only in the person of the President General, who is currently [1979] the Very Rev. Dr Alvaro del Portillo. The majority of members are married people. "Some members, very few in comparison with the total number, live together to look after the spiritual care of the others, or to run some apostolic activity; they form an ordinary home, just like any Christian family, and continue at the same time to work at their profession" (J Escriva, *Conversations*, 63). "As far as I'm concerned the vocation to Opus Dei of a railway porter is as important as that of a company director. It's God who does the calling and in the works of God there is no room for discrimination" (*Conversations*, 64).

Fundamentally one **does** Opus Dei: "we give priority to spirit over organization and so the life of the members is not strait-jacketed by directives, plans and meetings. Each member goes his own way. What unites him to the others is a shared spirit and a desire for holiness and apostolate which accompany him as he strives to sanctify his own everyday life" (*Conversations*, 63).

Because the Work's aims are exclusively supernatural, its spirit is one of freedom, of love for the freedom of all men. The necessary consequence of all this is unity in doctrinal matters taught by the magisterium of the Church, and in all other matters pluralism, which is not merely tolerated in Opus Dei, but desired and loved. Personal freedom and responsibility are the best guarantee of the supernatural purpose of the Work of God. In fact, in 1950 Pope Pius XII authorized Opus Dei to receive into the Association as co-operators people who are not Catholics or even Christians, so that some years later in a conversation with Pope John XXIII, Msgr. Escriva was able to joke: "Holy Father, in our Work all men, Catholics or not, have always found a welcome. I have not learnt ecumenism from your Holiness" (*Conversations*, 22).

CORPORATE APOSTOLATE

To the personal apostolic work of its members should be added the growth of the Work's corporate works of apostolate. Some of these in the English-speaking world are Netherhall House in London where students from more than fifty countries reside; Hudson Centre in Montreal for the human and intellectual development of young women; Midtown, a centre for workers in Chicago; Stonecrest Community Centre in Washington for the education of women who lack professional training. In Australia there are Creston and Warrane Colleges at the University of New South Wales; Dartbrooke Study Centre in Roseville; Kenvale, a domestic training school for young women; and a number of youth clubs in various parts of Sydney.

These centres are undoubtedly sources which project the Christian view of life. They are directed as professional activities by ordinary citizens, and they are open to people of all classes, conditions and creeds.

These centres have made many sectors of society appreciate the need of offering a Christian solution to the problems which arise in the exercise of one's work.

Two examples of the corporate apostolate in the non-English speaking world are the Centro Internazionale della Gioventu Lavoratrice in Rome, and the University of Navarre in Pamplona. The former was entrusted to the Work by Pope John XXIII for the professional training of young workers and it was inaugurated by Pope Paul VI. The University of Navarre was founded in 1952 as a university which would express the cultural and apostolic ideals of a group of professors who felt deeply about education. It has eighteen faculties and institutes and has developed close ties with universities of quality throughout the world, including Harvard in the English speaking world. Its operational costs are met by an association of friends of the University who come from all classes of Spanish society. In the homily of the Mass that he celebrated on the campus of the University of Navarre in October 1967, before more than 40,000 persons, Msgr. Escriva advised: "you must foster everywhere a genuine 'lay outlook' which will lead to these conclusions: be sufficiently Christian, so as to respect those brothers in the Faith who, on 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"

(J. Escriva, *Encounter with Christ in the World*, p.11).

THE FOUNDER

Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer y Albas was born in Barbastro in Northern Spain on 9 January 1902. He attended school there and in Logrono. On leaving school he studied civil law at the University of Saragossa and later gained a doctorate in it at the University of Madrid. He also pursued ecclesiastical studies in the Pontifical University of Saragossa which awarded him the Licentiate in Theology. Subsequently he obtained a doctorate in this discipline at the Lateran Pontifical University in Rome

He began work in country parishes after his ordination on 28 March 1925. From 1927 onwards he worked among the poor and the sick among the outlying districts and hospitals of Madrid.

On 2 October 1928, Msgr. Escriva founded Opus Dei: "I started working and it was not easy: souls slipped through my fingers like eels in water. Besides, the lack of understanding was savage, because what today is common teaching the world over was not so then. Anyone who says otherwise does not know the truth of the matter. I had, I repeat, my twenty-six years of age, God's grace and a good sense of humour, and nothing else. But just as men write with a pen, Our Lord writes with the leg of a table to make it clear that it is he who is doing the writing: that is what is so incredible, so marvellous. All the theological and ascetical doctrine had to be created. I found before me a break in continuity, a gap of centuries: there was nothing. Humanly speaking, the whole Work was a crazy venture. That is why some people said that I was mad, and that I was a heretic, and so many other things besides"

(S. Bernal, *A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, pp. 109-110).

He placed great emphasis on the corporal works of mercy and his sons and daughters carry on this tradition. He placed great emphasis on the prayers of the sick and encouraged them to see the important place they have in the work of God. An example of his effect on one of the sick in Madrid illustrates this point.

"He was able to lavish priestly care upon Maria Ignacia Garcia Escobar and did so with extraordinary zeal. She was one of the first women members of Opus Dei and she died in the King's Hospital, on 13 September 1933, in a very holy way. She had tuberculosis of the intestine and underwent a number of operations, and suffered very much. It is moving to read the copy books she wrote in that hospital for the incurably sick, in a style that recalls the Spanish classics. She had asked to be admitted to the Work on 9 April 1932. 'A new era of Love,' she wrote in her diary two days later; but before that date she had already been offering every thing up for Don Josemaria's intention: her fever, her multiple aches, and the intense pain, which at times prevented her from writing for weeks on end. Maria Escobar was well aware that she was doing the Work of God from her hospital bed: 'It has to have secure foundations. Let us try to make these foundations out of

granite, lest there should happen to us what occurred to the building the Gospel talks about, which was built on sand. First the foundations; the rest will come later.' The sufferings of the sick in that hospital contributed to make the foundations of Opus Dei unshakeable."

(S. Bernal, *A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, p.140).

Msgr. Escriva was a domestic prelate to the Pope, consultor to the Congregation of Catholic Education, consultor to the Pontifical Commission for the interpretation of the code of Canon Law, a member of the Pontifical Roman Academy of Theology, the first chancellor of the Universities of Navarre in Spain and of Piura in Peru, as well as the holder of a variety of civil honours.

In meeting Msgr. Escriva in December 1973 we were struck by his warmth and vitality and humour. Our meeting was itself an example of his fatherly concern for all his children, as he had fitted it into a particularly heavy schedule just prior to Christmas, even though we had arrived in Rome without warning. We felt how much his concern that we love our vocation and live it faithfully was based on real affection for us.

His charity was always warm, something noted by the sick and especially the poor in those early days of the Work. His charity was the overflow of a deep interior life which had the Holy Mass as its root and centre. A deep sense of his divine filiation enabled him to face life head on and to inspire others to do the same, to see the purpose of life. Thus in a remote part of Peru a bishop has enabled some Indians to see the value of their part in the grand design of God our father by telling them of the priest who loved the sick, who loved the poor, who loved children, and who showed his love with deeds, often with heroic deeds. This same bishop has translated *The Way* and the prayer at the back of this booklet into Quechuo, the language of these Indians.

The same story has been repeated many times in many parts of the earth. Msgr. Escriva was never worried by humble or small beginnings: "don't judge by the smallness of the beginnings. My attention was once drawn to the fact that there is no difference in size between seeds that give annual plants and those that will grow into ageless trees . . . Don't forget that, on earth every big thing has had a small beginning. What is born big is monstrous and dies" (*The Way*, 820, 821).

For many people Msgr. Escriva's name is best known through his writings, especially *The Way*; this book has gone through ninety editions in more than thirty languages. It is written from a close contact with souls, and helps people to face life square on, in a positive, optimistic manner.

Like St Paul, Msgr. Escriva relished the "glorious freedom of God's sons" freed by Our Lord "from the tyranny of corruption" (Romans 8:21). "Immersed in announcing the gospel message of 'freedom' as 'liberation' from the slavery of sin" (Cornelio Fabro, Professor of Theoretical Philosophy, Perugia University), Msgr. Escriva genuinely faced up to the human and divine meaning of the Redemption, summed up by those words of Our Lord to the apostles at the Last Supper: "I have called you friends" (John 15:15).

In the words of Javier Abad Gomez, a Columbian journalist, who wrote in *El tiempo* (Bogota) on 30 June 1975, four days after the death of the Founder of Opus Dei: "he found room in his great heart not only for those who thought as he did, but also for those who thought or behaved differently. Many people are surely recalling it now, men of letters and workers, intellectuals and farmers, people belonging to the most diverse religions and holding the most contradictory ideological viewpoints" Similar sentiments were expressed by the famous Viennese psychiatrist, Victor Frankl, who is a Jew, when he referred to Msgr. Escriva's "amazing capacity for getting into immediate contact with those he is speaking to"

His human loyalty and sincerity were an expression of his humility, which does not mean something feeble and weak. Rather, his humility was a realization of his place in the divine plan. This was why he was so serene, so immersed in the present, doing what God wanted at each moment, with his head touching heaven, but the soles of his feet firmly on the ground (cf. J. Escriva, *Amigos de Dios*, n. 75). It goes a long way towards explaining in human terms, the remarkable expansion throughout the world of the association he founded.

"Perhaps, one would need greater historical perspective in order to gauge the depth of the imprints the founder of Opus Dei has left. This association of Catholic lay men and women, to which he fully dedicated himself from its beginning in 1928, has gone beyond all human meaning of 'success' from the sociological standpoint, and has become a remarkable apostolic instrument in the midst of society, in all social classes and professions, in all the continents of the world"

(Msgr. Willy Onclin, Dean of the Faculty of Canon Law, Louvain University).

But for Msgr. Escriva the only milestones were the hidden ones recorded in the book of life: "For me every time the Work helps a soul draw closer to God and therefore become more of a brother to his fellow men it is an important milestone in the history of Opus Dei" (J. Escriva, *Conversations*, 32). In the last analysis of course we cannot explain the phenomenon of Opus Dei, for "Christianity is not a search by men for God but a descent of divine life to man's level . . . if we forget this we would reduce a Christian's life to a kind of religious humanism (a purely rational search for a distant God to obtain his favour) or, at the level of human relationships, to a mere sociological or anthropological morality . . ."

(A. del Portillo, *On Priesthood*, p. 58).

PRIESTS IN OPUS DEI

The last quotation is from a book by the current President General of Opus Dei. A civil engineer with a doctorate in that discipline as well as in history and canon law, he was one of the first three laymen in Opus Dei to be ordained a priest.

Of the priests in Opus Dei, some were already members of the Association when they were ordained and they devoted themselves principally, though not exclusively, to the spiritual care of other members; they are, by vocation, secular priests in whatever diocese they find themselves. Others ask to join Opus Dei after ordination; this in no way lessens their being secular priests nor their full dependence on their bishop.

Lay members of Opus Dei who receive Holy Orders do not change their vocation; ordination is simply a calling given to a few members so that they can serve the others in a new way. In 1978, for example, on the feast of the Assumption in Torreciudad, a shrine to Our Lady in Northern Spain, 60 such men, engineers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, philosophers received Holy Orders from Cardinal Koenig of Vienna.

Cardinal Rossi, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, was moved to say of this that "it would be difficult to find anyone else in the history of the Church who has done anything like this. I would say that we are looking at a new pastoral phenomenon. The founder of Opus Dei, during his own lifetime, brought one thousand of his sons to the priesthood: men who, when they were lay people, applied themselves competently to all kinds of skilled occupations and who, later, as he said in a homily in 1973, 'cheerfully silence this competence and concentrate on fortifying themselves through continuous prayer so as to speak only of God, to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments!'"

Work

The theological and ascetical richness of the spirituality of Msgr. Escriva is focussed on the sanctification of work. By work is meant a stable way of life, where one earns one's living; it is an extension of personality and an expression of whatever talents God has given us.

Two purposes of work have always been rightly considered to be the support of oneself and the exercise of charity. Apart from these though, work has often been seen negatively as an ascetical means of fighting idleness, the mother of all vices, rather than as something good in itself. Secular occupations have been regarded as an obstacle in the search for sanctity, and emphasis has been placed on leaving the world to be free from its snares. Lay people were told to sanctify themselves in spite of the world, in spite of their work. The environment in which one lives, the work which fills one's day, the problems of family life, our time with our friends, were often seen in the past as situations in which one is committed to stay but which are confining and inhibiting.

Msgr. Escriva helped lay-people to permeate secular society in the manner of the early Christians, by sanctifying themselves and others through their work and by sanctifying their work. The sanctification of work demands that work have a supernatural motive, that one renews the morning offering frequently during the day and before each new task. The sanctification of work also demands a high human standard in the work itself. How can one offer to God something that is not done to the best of one's ability? (cf. *The Way*, 178, 782, 787, 967).

Msgr. Escriva pointed out that in our work we can fulfil our Divine Master's command to pray always, since an hour of work can be an hour of prayer (*The Way*, 335). It must be work founded on love, since it does not depend on what we do, but why we do it and the way we do it. "It is well to remember that the dignity of work is based on love. Man's great privilege is to be able to love and to transcend what is fleeting and ephemeral . . . This is why man ought not to limit himself to material production. Work is born of love and is directed towards love. We can see the hand of God, not only in the wonders of nature, but also in our experience of work and effort. Work thus becomes prayer and thanksgiving, because we know we are placed on earth by God, that we are loved by him and made heirs to his promises. We have been rightly told, 'In eating, in drinking in all that you do, do everything for God's glory'." (J. Escriva, *Christ Is Passing By*, 48)

A practical effect of all this can be seen in the seriousness of purpose, genuine happiness and deep sense of commitment to the Christian ideal of members of Opus Dei, all lived with the greatest naturalness in the practice of their daily occupations.

Furthermore, by not relying too much on man we are never too dismayed by the prophets of doom: ". . . in your heart foster the glorious hope of heaven" (*The Way*, 668).

This implies no neglect of or conflict with our civic duties. "I often said to the university students and workers who were with me in the thirties that they had to know how to **materialize** their spiritual life. I wanted to keep them from the temptation, so common then and now, of living a double life. On one side an interior life, a life of relation with God; and on the other, a separate and distinct professional, social and family life, full of small earthly realities." . . . "The Lord wants His own people at every cross-roads on earth." (*Palabra*, 39, 1968, p. 10.)

Our Lady

Msgr. Escriva carried out God's apostolate in imitation of Mary, the Mother of God, who gave us the most perfect example of the fulfilment of the Will of God. Her vocation lay in the quiet devotion to her family duties as a wife and mother in Nazareth. Mary, our mother, was a lay person, **par excellence**. Since apostolic times Marian love has been a feature of all those who have strived heroically to love her Son. Love of Our Lady was one of the foundation stones of Msgr. Escriva's interior life, a love expressed by the frequent recitation and real contemplation of the mysteries of the Rosary. "But in the Rosary . . . we always say the same things. Always the same? And don't people in love always say the same things to each other . . . ? Might it not be that you find the Rosary monotonous because, instead of pronouncing words like a man, you mumble noises while your mind is very far from God? Moreover, listen: before each decade we are told the mystery to be **contemplated**. Have you ever **contemplated** these mysteries?" (J. Escriva, *Holy Rosary*, pp. 12, 13).

Another example of Msgr. Escriva's devotion to the Blessed Virgin can be seen in his initiation of the restoration of the ancient shrine to Our Lady of Torreciudad in northern Spain. Significantly, but sadly, the first act of worship in the new shrine was a solemn funeral Mass on 7 July, 1975, for Msgr. Escriva himself who had passed away in Rome eleven days before.

He had said of the shrine: "I want spiritual fruits; graces which Our Lord will give to those who come to honour his Blessed Mother in her shrine. These are the miracles I want: conversion and peace for many souls". The shrine has 40 confessionals "so that people will be purified in the holy sacrament of Penance and,

when their souls are renewed, they will confirm or renew their Christian lives, learn to sanctify and love work, bringing to their homes the peace and joy of Christ . . .

"Other miracles," he used to say, "however many and great they may be, if the Lord wants to honour his most holy Mother, will not seem greater than those I have just indicated. And they will be many and frequent and will pass unnoticed so that no statistics can be made."

Msgr. Escriva had wanted to see the ancient shrine restored since childhood, as his parents took him to the shrine when he was two years old after he had been cured of a serious illness. The focus of the shrine is an 11th century statue of gilded wood which is carved in a simple, unsentimental style. For hundreds of years this small statue was revered in a crumbling stone shrine in the barren countryside of Aragon.

Now the statue reposes in a modern church, which is surrounded by several buildings for spiritual and cultural activities. The shrine is set beside the deep blue waters of one of Spain's largest dams, within sight of the snow-capped Pyrenees. The buildings blend in with the rugged ochres of the soils and rocks of the region which provided most of the construction material. The harmony of art and nature also helps it to be a place for prayer.

Concluding Comments

Since that day on 26 June 1975, at midday, when like a lemon squeezed to the last drop, Msgr. Escriva died at work in his office in Rome, literally hundreds of thousands of people have sent written testimonies to Rome stating belief in his sanctity or recounting favours received from God after requesting the intercession of Msgr. Escriva.

Msgr. Escriva reminded lay people that they are children of God the Father, that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity became man, worked, suffered and died for love of each of us, not just all of us, and that the Holy Spirit will help each of us attain genuine holiness in whatever place in society we occupy.

Msgr. Escriva's life reminds us that the holiness to which we are called is human holiness, happy holiness. Aspects of this can be seen in two concluding anecdotes.

The first was recounted by the late Pope John Paul I, while he was Patriarch of Venice, not long before his election to the Papacy: "Escriva smoked as a student. On entering the seminary, he gave his pipe and tobacco to the porter and never smoked again. But on the day on which the first three priests of Opus Dei were ordained he said: 'I don't smoke, nor does any of you three either. Alvaro, you will have to take up smoking, otherwise the others might think there's something wrong with smoking and I don't want them to feel they are not free to smoke if they want to.'"

(Albino Card. Luciani, "Cercando Dio nel lavaro quotidiano", *Il Gazzettino*, Venezia, 25 luglio 1975).

Msgr. Escriva's 'human-ness' can also be seen in the next little story. "In a corner of the main hall of 'ESDAI' Home Economics School which is run by the Women's Section of Opus Dei in Mexico, stood Victoria, a member of the Work, and her aged mother who was hoping to catch a glimpse of the Father as he passed by. When they told Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer that she was the mother of two daughters who were domestic assistants and two sons who were labourers and that all four were members of the Work, he went towards her to tell her that he had just seen them in Montefalco. Before anyone had time to react, the lady knelt down to express her gratitude . . . and immediately Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer knelt down as well. 'We are just the same, my daughter, we are children of God. The only difference is that I am nothing but a poor sinner, for whom you have to pray a lot.' It all happened so quickly that no one knew what to do . . . One could only hear the friendly voice of the Founder of the Opus Dei quietly saying things to the elderly mother, who, with her head covered, was crying. As she left, this peasant woman was heard to say between sobs: 'Today has been the happiest day of my life'"

(S. Bernal, *A Profile of the Founder of Opus Dei*, pp. 164, 165).

"Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer was above all a priest of Jesus Christ. He knew how to understand. He loved everyone and encouraged us to love our fellow men with their defects. He spoke with affection, manifesting it in so many occasions of good humour. He paid great attention to every person he met. His speech was marked by a striking clarity and his thought by extreme clear-sightedness. It is impossible to get a complete idea of the richness of the human personality and of the far-reaching significance of the spiritual teaching of Msgr. Escriva de Balaguer in just a few lines. With his death, Opus Dei lost its founder and the Church lost one of the pioneers of lay spirituality. However, his untiring work will continue bearing fruits"
(Professor Ernest Caparros, Laval University, Quebec).

The body of Msgr. Escriva lies in the crypt of the Oratory of Our Lady of Peace, Viale Bruno Buozzi 75, Rome, continually accompanied by the prayer and gratitude of his sons and daughters, and of the countless people who have come closer to God, drawn by the example and teaching of the Founder of Opus Dei. Amongst the many pilgrims who have come to pray at the tomb of Msgr. Escriva have been many of the Cardinals who were in Rome for the conclaves which elected the Popes, among them those who later on would be elected Popes with the names of John Paul I and John Paul II.

The books by and about Opus Dei and its founder referred to in this booklet can be obtained through leading booksellers. Enquires can be directed to the Australian and New Zealand distributors: Ernest Books, PO Box 176, Gordon, N.S.W. 2072.

There is also a Newsletter which can be obtained free of charge from the Office of Vice Postulation of Opus Dei in Australia, PO Box 145, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033.

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**The Published Works of
Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer.**

1. *The Way*. First Published 1934.
2. *Holy Rosary*. First Published 1934. (A book of Meditations).
3. *Conversations with Monsignor Escriva de Balaguer*. Published 1968.
4. *Christ is passing by*. Published 1973. (Homilies).
5. *La Abadesa de las Huelgas*. Published 1944.
6. *Amigos de Dios*. [Friends of God] Published 1977. (Homilies). (Currently being translated into English).

PRAYER

for private devotion

O God, you granted countless graces to your servant and priest Josemaria, choosing him as a most faithful instrument to found Opus Dei, a way of sanctification in daily work and in the fulfilment of the ordinary duties of a Christian. Grant that I may also learn to turn all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you, and to serve the Church, the Pope, and all souls, with joy and simplicity, lighting up the paths of the earth with faith and love. Deign to glorify your servant Josemaria and, through his intercession, grant me the favour I request . . . (*here make your petition*).

Amen

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to the Father.

In conformity with the decree of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that there is no intention of anticipating in any way the judgement of the Church. and that this prayer is not intended for public use.

[As earlier stated since this pamphlet was first published Msgr. Escriva has been beatified and canonized and is now known as Saint Josemaria, so that Pope Urban's restrictions have all now been fulfilled and no longer apply.]

Other A.C.T.S. Pamphlets by the same authors:

No. 1693 *Prayerful Reflections on the Rosary*.

No. 1704 *Prayerful Reflections on the Way of the Cross*.

No. 1707 *Saint Thomas More Today*.

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