



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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On February 19, 1981, Cardinal Poletti, the Pope's Vicar for the Diocese of Rome, published the Decree introducing the cause of canonization of the founder of Opus Dei. The Decree set the opening session of the cause for May 12 of that same year. The following is a translation of the entire text.

The Second Vatican Council “repeatedly called all the faithful, of every condition and degree, to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. This forceful call to sanctity can be considered the most characteristic feature of the entire teaching of the Council and, in a sense, its ultimate aim” (Motu proprio *Sanctitas clarior*, March 19, 1969).

Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer proclaimed the universal calling to sanctity ever since he founded Opus Dei in 1928. For this reason he has been recognized by all as a precursor of the Council in the very thing that constitutes the core of the conciliar teaching – a teaching that has been so fruitful for the life of the Church.

The Servant of God was born on January 9, 1902, in Barbastro, Spain, into a deeply Christian family. From his youth he stood out on account of his lively intelligence and his strong and likeable personality. At about the age of 15 he became aware of the first intimations of a call from Our Lord to a mission which nevertheless remained hidden from him. In order to make himself completely available to God's will he decided to become a priest and to cultivate an intense life of piety and penance. After having completed his studies, first at the Seminary of Logroño and later at the Seminary of St. Francis of Paola and at the Pontifical University of Saragossa, he was ordained in Saragossa on March 28, 1925.

In 1927 he moved to Madrid where he carried out an extensive apostolate among

the sick, the poor and the young. He was the chaplain of the *Patronato de Enfermos* from 1927 until 1931; in 1931 he became the chaplain of the *Patronato de Santa Isabel*, where he was named Rector in 1934.

On the 2nd of October, 1928, while making a retreat, Our Lord let him see clearly what, until then, the Servant of God had only had hints of; as a result he founded Opus Dei. Again moved by Our Lord, he founded the Women's Branch of Opus Dei on February 14, 1930. Thus there was opened up in the Church a new path aimed at encouraging persons of all levels of society to pursue holiness and practice apostolate by sanctifying their ordinary work in the midst of the world, and without changing their state in life.

From the very beginning, with the blessing and encouragement of the Ordinary of Madrid, the Servant of God dedicated himself fully to this mission, and Our Lord blessed it abundantly.

During the Spanish Civil War, heedless of the dangers which threatened his life, he did not abandon his intense priestly activity. Toward the end of the war he returned to Madrid; from there he was able to give greater impetus to the apostolates of the Work in Spain. In spite of a complete absence of means, he opened new centers in a number of cities and made preparations for the Work's expansion beyond the Iberian peninsula.

A great many priests and laymen relied on the Servant of God for spiritual direction. At the request of bishops and the provincials of various religious orders and congregations, he preached numerous retreats to priests and religious besides those he was giving to lay people. With his apostolate he fostered many vocations of all types.

On February 14, 1943, Msgr. Escrivá founded, within Opus Dei, the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, thus making it possible for some lay members of Opus Dei to be ordained and to be completely available for the spiritual attention of the other members and the apostolic activities fostered by the Work. Nearly a thousand members of the Work, professional men (doctors, lawyers, engineers, journalists, etc.), received Holy Orders during the life of the Servant of God. They have put aside flourishing professional prospects to dedicate themselves entirely to the priestly ministry.

In 1946 the Servant of God moved to Rome where he established his permanent residence. In 1947 he obtained from the Holy See the *decretum laudis* for Opus Dei, and on June 16, 1950, it received its definitive approval as an institution of

pontifical right. At the same time, approval was given to the Association of Cooperators of Opus Dei, to which non-Catholics could also be admitted.

From Rome, Msgr. Escrivá stimulated and guided the spread of Opus Dei throughout the world, expending all of his energy in giving to his sons and daughters a solid doctrinal, ascetical and apostolic formation. The dedication of the Founder to his mission was exemplary: he was tireless in work, and in his great zeal he undertook wearying trips throughout Europe and America, even at times when he was seriously ill. In spite of constant financial difficulties, he did not let himself become discouraged, but launched opportune apostolic instruments both in Rome and in other countries.

His zeal was expressed in a broad range of apostolic initiatives. Like “a shoreless sea”, they have been multiplied throughout the world and in all those environments that have most keenly felt the need to have Christ's truth illuminate men's efforts. They have included centers of professional training, elementary and secondary schools and universities (Monsignor Escrivá founded and was Chancellor of the University of Navarre, in Spain, and of the University of Piura, in Peru), out-patient clinics, youth clubs, and residences for domestic employees, for farm workers, and for university students, cultural centers, specialized academic institutes, agrarian schools, and more.

With his teachings the Servant of God has opened a new chapter in the history of spirituality. His writings have received widespread attention: Of *The Way* alone, three million copies have been printed, with translations into 34 languages. The statistics on the other works of Monsignor Escrivá – *Holy Rosary*, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, *Christ Is Passing By*, *Friends of God* – are comparable.

The Servant of God held doctorates in Jurisprudence and in Sacred Theology. He had been named Domestic Prelate of His Holiness, Consultor to the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law and Honorary Academician of the Roman Theological Academy.

In Rome, on the 26th of June, 1975, at noontime, a sudden heart attack cut short his earthly life. He died after having received sacramental absolution and the Anointing of the Sick in an unconscious state. These he had ardently desired to receive his whole life long, having repeatedly given his children precise instructions to this effect. On that day too, as he confided to four members of the Work, he had renewed the offering of his own life on behalf of the Church and of the Pope during the celebration of Holy Mass, four hours before his death.

At the time of the Servant of God's death, Opus Dei had spread to every continent and numbered more than 60,000 members of 80 different nationalities.

The root of such fruitfulness consists in the timeliness of the spiritual message of Opus Dei's Founder and, along with it, in the living example which he first of all gave to it. He proclaimed the call to sanctity through one's daily occupations, teaching that a man's every action can be made holy and sanctifying, and contributes to the building up of the People of God.

Msgr. Escrivá taught that sanctity was to be sought within the framework of ordinary life: he emphasized work as the instrument and arena of sanctification. For this reason, while he underlined the importance of achieving the greatest possible perfection in the fulfillment of one's temporal duties, he insisted on the necessity of carrying them out in union with God, that is, with grace and with a living and sincere piety. This was the source of his concern to highlight the primary role of the sacraments in building an authentically Christian life, and it was the reason for his efforts to introduce souls to the practice of prayer.

At the base of the spirituality of the Servant of God there is a profound perception of the mystery of Jesus, true God and true man, which is expressed in the interweaving of the human and the divine into a "unity of life". His own life was a demonstration of this intimate fusion of contemplation and action, of interior life and daily activity. The supernatural virtues were united with the human virtues, making him an example of a sanctity that was woven out of simplicity and naturalness and built out of faithfulness in little things. He lived a deep sense of his divine sonship, and this led him to a trusting abandonment in his Father God, and to putting prayer ahead of all human effort, which thus became work done with God and for God. It also led to an ardent love for the Sacred Humanity of Christ, to a strong and tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph and the guardian angels, and to a spirit of supernatural optimism and contagious joy.

In accordance with this unity of life, the Servant of God did not think of apostolate as one activity among many others, nor as a mission reserved to a handful of people doing something ecclesiastical. He saw it rather as a constant duty for all the faithful as a consequence of the graces received in Baptism and Confirmation and successively developed by the other sacraments; he saw it as a duty that must be performed in all the situations that arise each day.

One may especially recall his consideration of Holy Mass as "the center and root of the interior life," and the love that he consequently lavished on the Sacrament

of the Eucharist and all of the liturgy. These and other teachings have brought undoubted benefits to priests as well. For them, the doctrine preached by the Servant of God is sure to produce fruits of unsuspected significance.

Msgr. Escrivá lived his own ministry as a disinterested service to the Church, and he taught his children throughout the world to act in steadfast union with the ordinary hierarchy and in absolute fidelity to the Church's Magisterium, so that in all the dioceses where Opus Dei works, fidelity to the Pope and loyalty to the hierarchy are its unmistakable characteristics.

In the message of Msgr. Escrivá, love for true freedom, a value so keenly felt by today's world, plays an decisive part. He insisted particularly on freedom in temporal questions which is indispensable for the activity of Christians in the world. He felt that freedom should always be exercised with attendant responsibility and with respect for the principles of faith and morals contained in the pronouncements of the Church's Magisterium. He scrupulously respected the legitimate choices of all Christians in opinionable matters. In this way he simultaneously defended an irrevocable characteristic of the Christian's secular vocation and safeguarded the exclusively spiritual purposes of Opus Dei.

Of particular note is the attraction which the spirituality of the Servant of God has for educated people: students, university professors and professional men of all sorts appreciate the great vitality of a message in which the interior life and the effort to achieve a serious professional competence constitute two equally necessary aspects of the path to God. Likewise, employees, farm-workers and factory-workers, parents and children, men and women – in short, all sectors of civil society (“the people in the street,” as Msgr. Escrivá used to say) find in this spirit an aid for discovering the divine plan for salvation hidden in the tiniest realities of life. Indeed, the significance of the life and teaching of this priest is of perennial interest; it is a reference point from which the light of the Christian apostolate shines out upon society at all times.

This is confirmed by the widespread reputation for sanctity that surrounded the Servant of God even in his lifetime: a reputation supported by abundant authoritative evidence. Since Our Lord called him to Himself, this reputation for sanctity has continued to spread, and it has done so with remarkable spontaneity. Thousands of letters from eminent persons as well as common people have reached the Holy Father from the ends of the earth, petitioning him to open the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God. Among these letters, we are pleased to recall particularly the one written by the Episcopal Conference of Lazio, with its expressions of gratitude for the fruits which the

priestly zeal of Msgr. Escrivá has sown in Rome. People of all social conditions and of many different nationalities testify to the mounting number of favors, great and small, spiritual and material, that have been received from heaven through recourse to the intercession of the Servant of God. The crypt of the oratory of Our Lady of Peace, located at the headquarters of Opus Dei in Rome, is where the mortal remains of the Founder lie at rest. It has become a place of pilgrimage for many of the faithful who continually come to entrust all their needs to his mediation before God, or to give thanks for favors received.

In view of these facts, the President General of Opus Dei, the Very Rev. Alvaro del Portillo, named the Rev. Flavio Capucci Postulator of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. His mandate was canonically recognized on February 4, 1978. At the request of the Postulator, and convinced of the benefit which the acceptance of our petition would bring to Holy Church, we petitioned the Apostolic See on March 15, 1980 to grant the *Nihil obstat* for introducing this Cause, attaching the documents required for this purpose by the Motu proprio *Sanctitas clarior*.

After a careful study of the documents, the Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints, in the Ordinary Session of January 30, 1981, granted the *Nihil obstat* for the Cause to be introduced. The Holy Father John Paul II ratified and confirmed the decision of the Sacred Congregation on February 5, 1981.

In virtue of the aforesaid, and of the faculties which belong to us under the Code of Canon Law and the Motu proprio *Sanctitas clarior*, WE DECREE the canonical introduction of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of the Servant of God, Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Priest, Founder of Opus Dei, and the commencement of the corresponding canonical proceedings for the date of May 12, 1981.

Ugo Card. Poletti

Vic. Gen.

Rome, February 19, 1981