



Saint Josemaría Escrivá

Founder of Opus Dei

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Domingo Diaz-Ambrona

This is a letter from Domingo Diaz-Ambrona, a civil engineer and lawyer, to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Prelate of Opus Dei, dated 9 January 1992. It is published in *Immersed in God*.

I met the future Saint, Josemaría Escrivá, 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 English flag. Due to the situation our country was in, we could not have our baby baptized, and we mentioned this to a dear friend of ours, Jose Maria Albareda.

A few days later, Jose Maria 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 English flag, I invited the godparents and some 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 behavior 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 a priest, he was carrying out an intense apostolic activity. He heard many confessions – sometimes risking his life in the process – and gave courses and retreats, constantly changing the venue; 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 didn't 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 traveling with my wife and our four-year-old daughter; Fr. Josemaría happened to see us, and he recognized us. He came into our compartment and said, 'I baptized this child.' We exchanged greetings and introduced ourselves, 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 Marques, 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 there 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 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 of it.

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, to find people 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 Jose Maria 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 the sanctity of life of this future saint: he was a passionate lover of freedom.

***Immersed in God*, ed. Cesare Cavalleri, Princeton NJ: Scepter Publishers, 1996.**