



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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On October 2, 1928, St Josemaria had seen that Opus Dei was for all kinds of people.

“We have to try to ensure that in all fields of intellectual activity there are upright people, people with a true Christian conscience, who are consistent in their lives, who can use the weapons of knowledge in the service of humanity and the Church. Because in the world there will always be, as there were when Jesus came on earth, new Herods who try to make use of knowledge — even if they have to falsify it — to persecute Christ and those who belong to him. What a great task we have ahead of us!”

This was one of his great ideals: the apostolate of the mind, to bring scientists, artists, writers, and intellectuals to Christ.

Granted, his founding vision included people of all types. And his first followers were diverse: students, workers, artists. He had always said, “Of a hundred souls, we are interested in a hundred.” The reality of Opus Dei, whose faithful are of the most different cultures, races, trades, professional specializations, and social classes, confirms this criterion of the founder. “Wherever an honest person can live, that’s where we can find air to breathe! That’s where we have to be with our joy, with our interior peace, with our desire to bring souls to Christ. Where, you may ask? Among the professions? Among the professions. Among manual workers? Among manual workers. And which of those occupations is better? I will tell you what I have always said: the best work is the one done with most love of God. And you, when you do your work and help your friend, your colleague, your neighbor, in a way that isn’t noticed, you are Christ who heals, you are Christ who dwells with mankind.”

Thousands of men and women

However, the particular influence that intellectuals exercise in steering a country's culture was not lost on him. They may or may not be famous, but they are very influential. He likened them to the masses of perpetual snow on the distant mountain peaks. Though they may be too far away to see, they send the steady stream that waters the fields and makes them fruitful. They are a key element, then, for the Christianization of temporal realities and of society as a whole.

From the time of his studies in law at Saragossa, Saint Josemaría never lost contact with the university world. He encouraged many young people to take up careers as university professors. He encouraged everyone to a serious and profound study of their own field, and an equally serious study of the faith.

Knowledge and faith

In 1952, having prepared the way with a lot of prayer, he encouraged the founding of the University of Navarre in Pamplona. He saw it as a center to infuse science and culture with the light of faith. "Every now and then, monotonously sounding like a broken record, some people try to resurrect a supposed incompatibility between faith and science, between human knowledge and divine revelation. But such incompatibility could only arise — and then only apparently — from a misunderstanding of the elements of the problem. If the world has come from God, if he has created man in his image and likeness and given him a spark of divine light, the task of our intellect should be to uncover the divine meaning imbedded in all things by their nature, even if this can be attained only by dint of hard work. And with the light of faith, we also can perceive their supernatural purpose, resulting from the elevation of the natural order to the higher order of grace. We can never be afraid of developing human knowledge, because all intellectual effort, if it is serious, is aimed at truth."

The University of Navarre began to gain prestige as it actively participated in the world of research, while diligently educating its students. In 1967, Monsignor Escrivá celebrated a Mass on campus for the entire university. His homily on that occasion, now famous as "Passionately Loving the World," traced the panorama of sanctification within temporal realities. Also on this occasion he clarified: "the activities which are promoted by Opus Dei as an institution also have these eminently secular characteristics. They are not ecclesiastical activities. They do not in any way represent the hierarchy of the Church. They are the fruit of human, cultural and social initiatives, carried out by citizens who try to make them reflect the Gospel's light and to enkindle them with Christ's love."

Also under his apostolic guidance the University of Piura in Peru was founded in

1969. It would be followed in due course by other university-level institutions all over the world, a lasting sowing of culture enlightened by the Gospel.

At the same time, Josemaría Escrivá gave decisive encouragement to the creation of elementary and secondary schools in which intellectual formation goes hand in hand with spiritual development according to a personalized system that seeks to develop virtues in the students. Parents played their role in developing these schools, by exercising their mission as primary educators. This model represented a new philosophy of education and has spread rapidly throughout the world.

In the same spirit he encouraged the start of agricultural schools, centers for vocational training and trade skills, schools to help improve the skills of women in developing countries, hospitals and medical dispensaries, etc.