

The educational vision of St Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei

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St Josemaría Escrivá founded Opus Dei in 1928 to help all men and women discover the call to holiness in their everyday life and work. As a means to this end and moved by his zeal for souls he encouraged lay members of Opus Dei to promote a wide range of educational initiatives for people of all social conditions. These initiatives are characterised by a stress on the all-round formation of young people, parents as primary educators of their children, and freedom. For Escrivá education is to help people relate to God, the world and others.

Keywords: Escrivá; Opus Dei; education; family; freedom

Escrivá's foundational charism

On 2 October 1928 St Josemaría Escrivá 'saw' Opus Dei. He was convinced that it was not something he had thought up, not his own invention, but a divine eruption into the world. 'The Work burst into the world on that 2nd October 1928'. 'On that day the Lord founded his Work; he started Opus Dei'.¹ The essence of what Escrivá saw, his foundational charism, was the understanding that everyone is called to sanctity in the midst of his or her ordinary life. Hence, there is a double aspect: the universal call to sanctity, an ideal later recalled by the Second Vatican Council, and the understanding that sanctity can be found in everyday affairs, with a particular stress on work. In Escrivá's own words:

Opus Dei is as old and as new as the Gospel. It intends to remind Christians of the wonderful words of Genesis: God created man to work. We try to imitate the example of Christ, who spent almost all his life on earth working as a carpenter in a small town. Work is one of the highest human values and the way in which men contribute to the progress of society. But even more, it is a way to holiness. (Escrivá *Conversations*, 24, from an interview with Peter Forbarth of *Time* magazine, 15 April 1967)²

What was unique to St Josemaría and makes his message so significant was his profound understanding of the interpenetration of the divine and the human. He thereby overcame two errors which have accompanied humanity from its earliest days: the excessive union of creation and the divinity (expressed in the different forms of pantheism over the centuries), and the excessive separation of the two (the exclusion of God from the world, as in Deism, agnosticism or atheism). 'Understand this well,' he insisted, 'there is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it . . . We discover the invisible God in the most visible and material things' (Escrivá *Conversations*, 114, from a homily given at University of Navarra on 8 October 1967). St Josemaría taught that we can give glory to God by offering him our work done well and with love.

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St Josemaría as promoter of educational initiatives

The Prelature of Opus Dei is not an institution founded expressly for the purpose of education.³ It was founded, in the service of the Catholic Church, to promote the message described above. In that sense, education is just one of a number of activities which its members are involved in and are encouraged to sanctify. But at the same time St Josemaría in practice gave great importance from the very start to education and, from an institutional point of view, all 'corporate' apostolic activities promoted by the faithful of Opus Dei are in one way or another educational.⁴

The stress on education in Opus Dei is a consequence of Escrivá's great zeal for souls and his desire to spread the message he received from God and thereby bring people to Christ. He would frequently describe Opus Dei as 'a great catechesis' to help people come to know God. Schools, universities and other educational initiatives are an excellent instrument for this. They are also a great way to teach people that God can be found in all spheres of secular life and knowledge, 'in the laboratory, in the operating theatre, in the army barracks, in the university chair, in the factory, in the workshop, in the fields, in the home and in all the immense panorama of work' (Escrivá *Conversations*, 114). Escrivá frequently insisted that the initiatives themselves had to 'be Opus Dei', i.e., reflect the spirit and message of Opus Dei in their very life and activity. Hence, things in that centre should be done with high standards of professionalism, competence and cleanliness, but above all with love of God.⁵

There are now some 14 universities in 4 continents which are corporate works of Opus Dei, and almost as many business schools.⁶ There are over 50 corporate work secondary schools and a further 200+ schools which, though not corporate works, still benefit from the spiritual support and pastoral care of the Prelature. In addition there are close to 200 university residences inspired by the spirit of Opus Dei throughout the world and many clubs for young people. For a man whose primary mission was not the establishment of educational projects, St Josemaría's inspiration has been incredibly fruitful and his service to Catholic education enormous.

The three 'F's': the coordinates of St Josemaría's vision of education

Having explained briefly what the spirit of Opus Dei is, and how in practice it has led to the promotion of numerous educational initiatives, it is now time to seek to grasp more exactly what was the educational vision of St Josemaría Escrivá. Never forgetting that it was merely an extension and putting into practice of his larger vision of 'placing Christ at the summit of all human activities' (Escrivá *Conversations*, 59, from an interview with Enrico Zuppi and Antonio Fugardi of 'Osservatore della Domenica', 19 and 26 May and 2 June 1968.), I consider that it can be structured according to the following three coordinates, what we could call the three 'F's': formation, freedom, family.⁷

On the importance of formation

I have explained how St Josemaría encouraged the promotion of schools inspired by his love for Christ and his zeal to bring souls to him. He called on parents to promote good schools authentically inspired by Christian principles because he appreciated keenly the harm done by ignorance, particularly religious ignorance. This concern

would recur frequently in his preaching and teaching. ‘Ignorance’, he wrote in a letter dated 9 January 1951, ‘is the greatest enemy of our faith, and at the same time the greatest obstacle to carrying out the redemption of souls’.⁸ This concern manifested itself in the promotion of Colegio Gaztelueta, founded in Bilbao, Spain, 1951 and the first ever corporate work secondary school started by members of Opus Dei, very much inspired and encouraged by Escrivá himself (cf Pomar 2010). A letter from as early as 1939 already talks of ‘educational centres which are corporate apostolates of Opus Dei’.⁹

Education for St Josemaría, however, was integral, all-round, of the whole person, and hence he tended much more to use the word ‘formation’. He saw Opus Dei, as a great work of catechesis but also a great work of formation. Young people had to be formed, helped to grow, to become good people. It is interesting to note that although schools promoted by Opus Dei members do frequently figure among the best in their cities, they do not particularly stress ‘success’ in terms of academic results. What they emphasise much more is the growth of the person.

St Josemaría saw formation as a life-long process. Our formation never ends, he would frequently tell his spiritual sons and daughters in Opus Dei, and he took steps to ensure that members, men and women, receive a careful formation throughout their lives under five aspects: ‘human, spiritual, doctrinal-religious, apostolic and professional’ (Letter, 6-V-1945, 19).¹⁰

Escrivá gave human formation enormous importance, no doubt due to his foundational charisma. If the human and divine really do intertwine, as he understood so well, then human virtues matter a lot. So, he would often encourage parents not just to teach their children the faith but also to help them grow in human virtues like sincerity, generosity, diligence, order, fortitude, purity and temperance.¹¹ All educational projects following the spirit of St Josemaría try to help young people live human virtues. Now that character formation is back in fashion, under the guise of citizenship education, Escrivá’s teaching on the human virtues could be a good resource for this subject, although he would insist that the truth about God and virtue could and should be taught and discovered in *every* subject, ‘across the curriculum’.

St Josemaría, however, saw clearly that formation was not just something to be given, it also had to be received. A necessary consequence of this understanding was therefore his stress on study, the intellectual effort to learn and assimilate the truth oneself. Escrivá stressed greatly the value of study and its intrinsic role in the interior life. For him it was not just the particular ‘profession’ any young person is called upon to sanctify at this formative period in his or her existence. Study for Escrivá was a lifelong task. Anybody in any profession needs to keep studying, for example to keep up to date on the advances in their field, or to deepen their knowledge of the faith and their ability to defend and explain it.

But, of course, his stress on study was aimed particularly at young people. No meeting with them would be complete without some reference to study and its importance for the Christian life. His classic and most famous work, *The Way*, first published in 1939 (though this is only an extended and edited version of the 1934 *Consideraciones espirituales*), already contains a specific chapter entitled ‘Estudio’ (‘Study’).¹² It is a book about Christian perfection and how to achieve it – how to follow the Way which is Christ (cf. Jn 14: 6). Its style is personal, intimate and direct. There are chapters one would expect given the nature of the book: prayer, holy purity, mortification, examination (of conscience), presence of God, love of God,

charity, Our Lady, the Church, the Mass, humility, apostolate, and so on. But there are other chapters which – for me – are more striking and more linked to Escrivá's particular vision of 'unity of life', his keen insight that the Christian's whole existence and every activity are part of his or her relationship with God. In this remarkable chapter, he makes various points which would have been shocking then and even now are striking. Somebody may pray, practise mortification and penance, be involved in 'a thousand apostolic activities', but he is 'of no use' if he does not study. 'Study, professional formation of whatever type it be, is a serious obligation among us' (Escrivá, *The Way*, 334). A young man or woman who does not study is not 'good', he or she is only 'goodish' (337). If we are to be salt and light, we must study. 'Or do you imagine that an idle and lazy life will entitle you to receive infused knowledge?' (340). And most striking of all: 'An hour of study for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer' (335). It goes without saying that when Escrivá talked of study, he had in mind any field of human learning (engineering, medicine, arts and humanities, sciences, law, etc) and not just the sacred sciences. Opus Dei members try to teach young people how to pray – above all introducing them to mental prayer, practised for a fixed amount of time each day – and how to study. They also teach them how to turn their study into prayer by doing it as well as they can and offering it to God as their gift to him and even, if they want, adding a particular intention to that offering. Study thus becomes prayer and petition. Thus, it is not surprising – as a consequence of the above ideas – that any centre for young people promoted by the faithful of Opus Dei will have a library or study room.

Another key aspect of the work of formation as envisaged by St Josemaría – the DYA Academy (see note 4) is a good example of this – is the complementary role played by other centres outside of the school or university structure. Opus Dei members promote schools and universities but even more they promote clubs for school boys and girls and either residences or non-residential centres for university students, conscious of the profoundly significant role such centres can have. Indeed, it is precisely outside of the institutional structure that young people can most be themselves and are most open to either positive or negative influences. St Josemaría was very concerned to help young people make good use of their leisure time and to make formation fun and fun formative. Even where, and perhaps especially where, Opus Dei members have begun a school, the need is seen to set up clubs – usually promoted by the parents themselves – to which those pupils who wish can go to continue their formation. Indeed, this formation is always deeper and more effective, both because it tends to be in smaller groups and above all because it is more voluntary.

University residences are among the most prominent of the apostolic-educational initiatives promoted by the faithful of Opus Dei. These residences are places where young people can mix, exchange ideas, be challenged intellectually, and grow humanly and spiritually in an atmosphere of freedom and trust.

The final aspect of Escrivá's approach to formation is the role of personal tuition. The founder of Opus Dei understood that formation had to be made personal, helping each soul assimilate and love the Church's faith and practice and grow humanly and spiritually. He had a keen awareness that each soul is different and therefore needs different treatment, and he frequently used the image of medieval monks illuminating codices: souls need to be given the same care and patience to help them form their conscience and appreciate their freedom and consequent responsibility. Hence, a very characteristic aspect of schools promoted by Opus Dei

members, one they frequently and rightly stress in their publicity, is the fact that pupils are assigned a personal tutor to guide him or her both academically and personally. This also takes place in youth clubs and, more informally, in residences too. The team members involved in that particular initiative make a real effort to get to know the young man or woman entrusted to his or her care. The school, club or residence chaplain also makes an effort to speak regularly to the young people in that centre and spiritual direction is a key – though voluntary – aspect of the formation given there. For example, in schools it is usual – though, in full respect for religious freedom, not obligatory – for pupils to chat with the priest at least some times each term. Murphy puts it succinctly when she says: ‘Escrivá saw education as a work of friendship, a love that brings the parents closer to their children, the professor to his students and the students to one another’ (Murphy 2003, 220).¹³

In this work of influence the personal example of the teacher/club leader is of course crucial. Escrivá frequently pointed to those words of the Acts of the Apostles about Christ: he ‘began to do and to teach’ (Acts 1: 1). First he acted, *then* he taught. Hence, the teacher’s own struggle for sanctity is fundamental if he is to inspire his charges with a desire to achieve it himself:

Teacher: your keenness to know and practise the best method of helping your students to acquire earthly knowledge is undeniable. But don’t forget that you must have the same keenness to know and practise the Christian spiritual life, which is the only method of helping them and you to be better. (Escrivá, *The Way*, 344)¹⁴

Freedom

If all are called to holiness, they must be totally free. There is no sanctity without freedom. Indeed, holiness is freedom’s fullest flowering. It is striking how much St Josemaría insisted on freedom in his writing and preaching.¹⁵ Indeed, in preparing this article, whereas I found few articles relating directly to his thought on education in general, those on his ideas about education in freedom were quite numerous. Madonna Murphy goes so far as to affirm: ‘you could say that he saw education as learning how to legitimately use your freedom’ (Murphy 2003, 217). For Escrivá the crucial role of freedom in education had two principal manifestations: education in freedom (an idea which has now come up on various occasions) and freedom of education.

Regarding the latter, it must be understood that Escrivá at times found himself speaking in or about contexts where such freedom was curtailed or not fully understood, and where the State enjoyed excessive control over education.¹⁶ St Josemaría was adamant that education was primarily the right and duty of the parents and therefore the State only has a subsidiary role in this field. It is interesting, for example, how in a letter of 1939 – only 11 years after the foundation of Opus Dei – he speaks about education and insists that ‘the parents are the first and principal educators’ of their children. But even more interesting is that in saying this he references Pius XI’s *Divini illius Magistri* of 31 December 1931, a document which precisely opposes excessive State encroachment in education.¹⁷ In this encyclical Pius insists that the parent’s right and mission to educate their children come directly from God and is ‘a right anterior to any right whatever of civil society and the State’.¹⁸

Escrivá understood, however, that it was not only the State which failed to understand parental freedom in education, since it could also occur that some people within the Church might not grasp the full scope of this liberty. Indeed, one of Escrivá's biggest battles – still being fought by his spiritual children in Opus Dei – was to make the seemingly subtle but extremely important distinction that something can be Catholic without having to be 'Catholic'.¹⁹ In other words, a particular initiative by a group of Catholics can be totally Catholic in spirit, teaching and practice, without it having to be an officially 'Catholic' institution. Catholics, in use of their own freedom and responsibility, can start projects without requiring explicit hierarchical approval, and without these having explicitly to be called Catholic. Indeed, as truly lay initiatives and therefore truly secular ones (understood properly, not with its negative connotations), the project's first priority would be to find its rightful place within civil legislation more than in ecclesiastical law. The following quotation, from the above mentioned letter of 1939, gives a clear presentation of Escrivá thinking on the question. He writes:

Our apostolate – I will repeat it a thousand times – is always professional work, lay and secular; and this should manifest itself, unequivocally, as an essential characteristic, also – and even especially – in the educational centres which are corporate apostolates of Opus Dei. Thus, they will always be centres promoted by ordinary citizens – members of the Work or not – as a professional, lay activity, in full conformity with the laws of the country, and obtaining from the civil authorities the recognition which is granted to the same type of activities promoted by other citizens. Furthermore, ordinarily they will be promoted with the express condition that they should never be considered as officially or unofficially 'Catholic' activities, i.e. directly dependent on the ecclesiastical hierarchy. They will not be centres of education which the Church hierarchically promotes and creates in different ways, following the inviolable right which her divine mission confers on her; but rather, initiatives of citizens, making use of their right to carry out their work in the distinct fields of social life, and therefore, in education. And making use of their right as parents to educate their children in a Christian way ...²⁰

In this passage Escrivá explicitly affirms 'the inviolable right which her divine mission confers on' the Church to establish schools and educational centres. There is no doubt about that, be they initiatives of the diocese or of religious congregations. He is not in any way putting these in question. Rather, he is affirming – in addition – the right of the lay faithful to educate their children as they see fit. It is a principle of natural law. If parents really are the 'first and principal educators' of their children, as Pius XI wrote, then it means just that: *they* are, and not the diocese or any particular congregation.

Escrivá's vision of the role of the laity in the Church shocked people then and it continues to do so now. For him lay people enjoyed authentic freedom in the Church, a freedom which always brought with it responsibility (in first place the responsibility to seek sanctity), and this meant there were certain activities which more properly belonged to them. Education was one of these, as education was principally for children, who all in one way or another belong primarily to their parents and only secondarily to the Church. Following the principle of subsidiarity, the Church should step in to help only in so far as parents are unable to fulfil their educational mission.²¹

This then was Escrivá's vision of how schools inspired by the spirit of Opus Dei, and other schools too started by lay Catholics ('members of the Work or not'), should be: predominantly lay, with priests performing a uniquely pastoral and sacramental role, run by ordinary Catholics acting under their own freedom and responsibility,

who having chosen teaching as a career, see in it an authentic vocation, professional and divine.

It goes without saying that non-Catholics are welcome in initiatives inspired by the spirit of Opus Dei, although in practice – also to maintain the Catholic ethos in them – where possible such centres would seek to have a majority of Catholics. Sometimes this is not possible as with Tak Sun School in Hong Kong where Catholics make up only 20% of the total pupil population. The presence of non-Catholics is seen both as a blessing – they often have so much to offer – and also as an evangelising opportunity.

Families

We have already seen Escrivá's insistence on education as primarily the mission and responsibility of parents, with schools –including those promoted by members of Opus Dei – exercising only a subsidiary role. St Josemaría would insist on this in all his meetings with parents, telling them that the school should be an extension of their home and should not teach anything that goes against the faith they try to inculcate in their children.

The above mentioned Colegio Gaztelueta was a direct consequence of Escrivá's concern to move beyond the university residences and study centres which were the first apostolic initiatives of Opus Dei, and thus necessarily limited to students, to undertake a wider apostolate which also reached whole families. This was the vision Escrivá outlined to the people involved in starting the school.²² Later on, in 1969, Escrivá himself would recall:

Gaztelueta began because it was necessary to continue to promote a greater participation of parents in the human, spiritual and doctrinal formation of their children, and because – at another level – it was necessary to affirm the need for lay Christians to dedicate themselves professionally to a work of education, based on respect for the freedom of their pupils. (Pomar 2010, 118)²³

Escrivá liked to repeat one idea which when first heard sounds somewhat shocking: in any school following the spirit of Opus Dei, first come the parents, then the teachers, and only in third place the students. The point is not that the pupils do not matter, but precisely in order to help them most the formation of parents and teachers is crucial. No matter how much good doctrine is imparted at school, if children go home and find those beliefs and values contradicted by their parents, all that teaching is likely to go to waste. Likewise, if teachers do not share in the Christian and Natural Law principles inspiring that school its effectiveness is greatly reduced. To this end, a specific feature of schools promoted by the faithful of Opus Dei is that they also offer classes in good parenting. Though not obligatory, when couples do choose to participate, there is much encouragement that *both* spouses – and not just the mother – attend. Likewise, great stress is placed on parents attending school meetings. Escrivá would repeat particularly to men – so frequently absorbed in their work and likely to leave educational issues to their wives – that they should see the education of their children as their 'first business'. He also encouraged parents where possible not to abandon the existing state or Catholic education system but rather to make their voice heard and their influence felt for the good: for

example, to speak out, rallying other concerned parents around them, about immoral or inappropriate textbooks.

Initiatives for the poor

While the Prelature certainly has – and states this explicitly in its statutes – a particular mission to intellectuals, its members also seek to reach all souls, rich or poor. Indeed, many Opus Dei members are themselves poor and work with their fellow citizens to improve the conditions of their own community. Members of Opus Dei promote initiatives which respond to the specific needs of a particular society, offering human and spiritual formation to people and thereby helping them to raise their standard of living.

As said before, all such initiatives are educational. Major initiatives for the poor promoted by Opus Dei members have been the Tajamar School and the Centro Elis in working class districts of Madrid and Rome respectively, with a particular focus on sport and technical education. A more recent foundation is the Braval centre in Barcelona, established to help immigrants. In various countries of Africa and Latin America there are initiatives such as agricultural schools in rural areas or technical schools in urban ones to help poor people develop humanly, professionally and spiritually. A particularly good example is the Condoray project in the Cañete Valley of southern Peru for the promotion of rural women, many of whom indigenous, aiming to give them a greater sense of their own worth and what they can achieve.

University education

St Josemaría valued university education enormously: ‘I consider myself a university man and everything relating to the university enthuses me’, he once said.²⁴ As Bishop Echevarría explained in a lecture in 2002, Escrivá’s vision of the university could be expressed in three words: truth, freedom, service. The university should be a place which passionately seeks the truth in all fields of knowledge, which cultivates and promotes a love of freedom and which inspires in its students a spirit of service (Echevarría 2002).

The University of Navarra, in Pamplona, Spain, was founded in 1952 through Escrivá’s direct encouragement and inspiration, and his intense prayers. Other universities following his spirit – the University of Piura in Peru, the Sabana University in Colombia, and the Panamericana University in Mexico – were also founded in his lifetime and at his prompting (Murphy 2003, 225).

The following two quotations give a good introduction to his vision of the university. The reader will be struck by how different this is from the contemporary view of the university as place to train people for the economy.

The ideal I would propose is, above all, one of work well done and of adequate intellectual preparation during their college years. Given this basis, there are thousands of places in the world which need a helping hand, which await someone who is willing to work personally with effort and sacrifice. A university should not form men who will egoistically consume the benefits they have achieved through their studies. Rather it should prepare students for a life of generous help of their neighbour, of Christian charity. (Escrivá, *Conversations*, 75, from an interview with Andrés Garrigó published in *Gaceta Universitaria*, 5 October 1967)

The university-level institutions of which you speak are another aspect of this task. Their principal features can be enumerated as follows: to train people in personal freedom and in personal responsibility. With freedom and responsibility, people work enthusiastically and wholeheartedly, and there is no need for controls or supervision. Everyone feels at home and therefore all you need is a simple schedule. Another characteristic is the spirit of living together in harmony without discrimination of any kind. Here, in this living together, personality takes shape. Each individual learns that, in order to be able to demand respect for his own freedom, he must respect the freedom of others. Finally, there is the spirit of human brotherhood. Each person's individual talents have to be placed at the service of others: if not, they are of little use. (Escrivá, *Conversations*, 84)

He also believed that university education should be open to all: 'Everyone who has sufficient ability should have access to higher education, no matter what his social background, economic means, race, or religion' (Escrivá, *Conversations*, 74).

Why has Opus Dei attracted so much criticism?

As we approach the end of this article we must unavoidably say a few words about why Opus Dei continues to be seen with suspicion in some quarters, even though more and more – particularly within the Catholic Church – the Prelature is valued and appreciated. Opus Dei's on-going spread throughout the world is very often in response to requests from bishops asking it to start in their diocese. Constant approval and support from the Popes from its earliest years has been a key factor in dispelling doubts about it, though of course among more dissident circles in the Church such a support is seen as something negative. Hence, Opus Dei is often called 'conservative' simply for following the Papal line on doctrinal and moral teaching. It must also be said that Opus Dei is considered too 'liberal' by more traditionalist groups. Opus Dei has always followed the liturgical indications given by the Holy See, including the immediate adoption of the *Novus Ordo* Mass, and enthusiastically embraced the teaching of the Second Vatican Council both simply because it was Church Magisterium but also because its key message, the universal call to sanctity, was like a canonisation of the message preached by St Josemaría.

A useful resource to examine criticisms made against Opus Dei is the already quoted (see note 6) 2005 work of John L. Allen, *Opus Dei: Secrets and power inside the Catholic Church*. Allen, a respected Catholic journalist and Vatican observer, aims to be so objective and impartial that his book fails to satisfy fully either Opus Dei members or its critics. Some of the latter would probably consider him too sympathetic to the Prelature many of the former might feel that he gives too much weight to a small number of critical voices in comparison with hundreds of thousands of contented members and friends of Opus Dei. Perhaps these very complaints on both sides show the merit of the book which though quite journalistic in style displays a great deal of research.

Given the scope of this article it seems reasonable to focus on criticisms which relate to the field of education. One of these is a claim that Opus Dei is elitist and more concerned for the rich than the poor. Allen makes two significant points. First of all, Opus Dei itself is by no means as rich as people imagine. Indeed, he works out that 'Opus Dei ranks in terms of wealth as a midsized American diocese' (Allen 2005, 371). And on the question of elitism he writes:

The profile of Opus Dei as 'elitist' has some historical validity, given Escrivá's interest in evangelising the intellectual and professional classes. Yet Opus Dei is not 'elitist' in the sense in which people often invoke the term, meaning an exclusively white-collar phenomenon. Among its members are barbers, bricklayers, mechanics and fruit-sellers ... There are some well-heeled Opus Dei members, but they are not typical.

He also insists that 'many of [Opus Dei's] corporate works are aimed at helping the poor', though he correctly states that 'what Opus Dei does not do, in an institutional way, is involve itself in struggles for social justice' (Allen 2005, 371). The point is in fact that Opus Dei, *institutionally, does not do anything* apart from promote the universal call to holiness and give Catholic catechesis. Indeed, this very lack of an institutional voice is often a cause of misunderstanding: members of the Prelature understand this as a reflection of the freedom (and responsibility) they enjoy in all temporal matters but critics can see this as culpable silence. Such criticisms are, in my opinion, exaggerated and fail to take into account the numerous excellent projects for poor people carried out by Opus Dei members. The simple contrast, mentioned earlier (see note 6), between the dozen or so business schools and the 90+ 'vocational-technical' schools in poor areas – not counting many other smaller initiatives (e.g., youth clubs) – is itself very revealing.

Opus Dei is also criticised for being excessively keen to recruit members (especially young ones) and for putting pressure on people not to leave once they have joined. Allen's dedicates a chapter of his book to this question (chapter 14, 'Recruiting'). From his own research he concludes that while 'a substantial number of ex-members of Opus Dei, enough to suggest they are more than isolated cases, report feeling damaged by their experience', these seem largely caused by errors of judgement in 'the mid-1960s or mid-1980s' and now 'these episodes seem less frequent' (Allen 2005, 373). I would add that while Opus Dei directors are certainly not immune from making mistakes, it is also only fair to look at all sides of each case: at times, for example, the principal pressure applied (and damage done) may have been by 'pushy parents' unhappy that their child had dedicated him or herself to celibacy. On the question of recruitment, says Allen, 'Opus does pray for, desire, and encourage new vocations' (Allen 2005, 365) but it 'is not the voracious recruiting machine of myth' (Allen 2005, 372).

Conclusions

Given that Escrivá had such an inspiring vision of education, it is surprising that it has not been more studied. This paucity of research is shown particularly in the English-speaking world. This present article is just one small attempt to fill that gap conscious that much more can, and should, be said. In particular there is need for an English-language article giving a full and systematic explanation of St Josemaría's thinking on university education. In this study I have only been able to give the briefest of introductions.²⁵

Studies comparing Escrivá's educational vision with those of other great Catholic educationalists would also be interesting. St Josemaría studied in a Piarist school (Escuela Pía) as a young boy (1909–1915) and had great appreciation for the Congregation's founder, a fellow Aragonese, St Joseph of Calasanz. He was also aware of St John Bosco, founder of the Salesians, but almost certainly the most interesting study of all would be to compare Escrivá's educational vision with that of John

Henry Newman.²⁶ It is unlikely that Escrivá had more than a superficial acquaintance with the English Blessed and therefore it is all the more striking how much their thinking on education had in common. Newman also gave enormous importance to the all-round education of the person and to the role of personal tuition in the educational process.

The title of this study is 'The educational vision of St Josemaría Escrivá, founder of Opus Dei'. Readers may wonder why I did not choose a title like 'the Opus Dei approach to education'. Hopefully what I have explained in this work itself answers that question. The point is, St Josemaría valued freedom and the free initiative of the laity so highly that he would have been horrified at such an idea. Escrivá has left to the Church, through Opus Dei, a particular charism, a spirit. Inspired themselves by this spirit, the faithful of Opus Dei strive to grapple with the 'particular necessities of the society' (Escrivá, *Conversations*, 31, from an interview with Pedro Rodriguez published in *Palabra* magazine, October 1967) in which they live. In the various projects they promote, there will be many points in common – lay spirit and government, love of freedom, high professional standards, etc – but there will be even more differences. There is no 'Opus Dei solution' to a particular need in, say, Nigeria, the Philippines, or Colombia. There are only the solutions which local Nigerians, Filipinos or Colombians inspired by the teachings of St Josemaría and above all by their own relationship with Jesus Christ seek to implement under their own responsibility and initiative and acting with complete freedom. Things can go wrong, the civil authorities can turn nasty, human beings can make mistakes, but as Escrivá always insisted, God 'takes a risk with our freedom' (Escrivá, *Christ is passing by*, 113) because God wants our love and only freedom gives rise to this.

For Escrivá, as García Hoz (1976) explains, education is all about enabling a person to relate to God (as His beloved child), to the world (through work) and to others (through friendship).²⁷ Without being worldly, with a naturalness which dares when necessary to stand out, Christians must know well and be at home in created and human realities to transform them and raise them to God. This is the purpose of education.

Notes

1. Words of Escrivá himself quoted in Vázquez de Prada I (2001, 222). Escrivá always used the term 'saw' to describe how God made Opus Dei known to him 'that day' while he was on retreat in Madrid, Spain. Opus Dei is Latin for 'Work of God' and is often referred to with the shorthand term 'the Work'. St Josemaría (1902–1975) was aged 26 at the time. He was canonised by Pope John Paul II in 2002. Escrivá's main published works can be found online at <http://www.escrivaworks.org/> and are normally referenced by point or section number rather than page number. I will follow this system in all my quotations of his works and letters.
2. The reference to Genesis is Gen 2:15: 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it' (Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition). Escrivá would point out that this was *before* Original Sin, i.e., work is a part of humanity's original vocation and not a punishment for sin. Only the hardship which often accompanies work is a consequence of the Fall (see Gen 3: 17–19).
3. Opus Dei's juridical structure is that of a personal Prelature. It is the first of its kind in the Church and was erected as such by Pope John Paul II in 1982. For the general structure of the Prelature see the Code of Canon Law canons 294–297. Opus Dei is composed of lay people and secular priests, who are referred to as 'members' or 'faithful' of the Prelature.

4. A corporate apostolic activity is one in which Opus Dei as such, as an institution, takes responsibility for the spiritual and doctrinal formation given in that centre. Opus Dei's praxis is very much to follow the well-known saying: 'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.' While Opus Dei does not institutionally run activities like soup kitchens or provide emergency aid, its members promote numerous schools and centres for the children of poor farmers or workers or for women in under-developed rural areas, all of them educational. Escrivá's very first apostolic initiative, begun five years after the foundation of Opus Dei, was the DYA (Derecho y Arquitectura) Academy, a cultural centre and residence for university students in Madrid, teaching law and architecture. It is worth stating that even in the case of corporate apostolic activities, Opus Dei as such does not 'run' these initiatives. All technical, economic, etc, matters are run by a specific local trust, charitable body or foundation set up for the purpose which will certainly include members of the Prelature, but will also have other people, including possibly non-Catholics.
5. The generic term for an Opus Dei initiative is usually 'centre'. The word 'institution' is avoided precisely because of its institutional overtones whereas, on the contrary, Opus Dei centres seek to be family homes.
6. Some readers might be surprised that there are 'so many' business schools promoted by Opus Dei. To answer this concern, a few basic facts should suffice, but even before giving these one could query in return whether a dozen or so is in fact that many. But to return to the facts: first, these schools are few in comparison to the number of projects for the poor Opus Dei members promote. For example, according to the Catholic journalist John L. Allen, in 2005 there were some 97 Opus Dei corporate work 'vocational-technical schools', teaching 'basic professional and life skills to young men and women, and most are located in poor neighbourhoods' (Allen 2005, 34). Second, in the vast majority of cases, these business schools are simply part of the university, i.e., they have been founded together with the respective university, or following its foundation. In continental Europe and many developing countries it is quite normal for a young university to have a business school. Third, in general in developing countries business schools are seen as a necessary means to help promote the economy in that nation. I am aware of two cases where Opus Dei members have promoted a business school before or even without a university: Nigeria and Brazil. In Nigeria, for example, the need was keenly felt to help create a culture of ethical business dealings, and so the business school was founded even before a university could be. An interesting article by Antonio Argandoña explains the involvement of St Josemaría in the beginning of the first ever business school promoted by Opus Dei members, IESE in Barcelona which started in 1958 (Argandoña 2011, 131–62). As the author explains, Escrivá enthusiastically encouraged the project inspired by his own profoundly positive vision of work and business as sanctifiable realities. He quotes Escrivá as saying: 'Suspicion and apprehension towards economic ventures are not Christian, because this is one more task which should be sanctified. But this suspicion has had – and continues to have – a great influence among Catholics . . . We have to put an end to these errors . . . Your lay mentality sees nothing wrong in being involved in business or finance, because you know how to supernaturalise these tasks, like any other, and direct them with a Christian and apostolic spirit' (Letter, 9-I-1959, n. 48, quoted Argandoña 2011, 140–1). For Escrivá, sanctifying work meant doing it very well for the love of God, with the highest professional and ethical standards. A business school could form executives to work with professional excellence and seek to instil in them a more ethical vision of their work.
7. 'Three 'F's' is my term not Escrivá's. In fact, it does not work in Spanish where it would be 'formación', 'libertad' and 'familia'.
8. Quoted in Vázquez de Prada III (2005, 202).
9. It is worth noting that St Josemaría revised all his early letters some time in the period 1963–1966, and these later redactions are the versions we now have. But as J-L Illanes explains: 'even though the final redaction was later, the substance or spinal column of these writings dates from the 30s and 40s' (Illanes 2009, 253).
10. Quoted in Vázquez de Prada III (2005, 204, footnote 102).
11. The homily 'Human virtues' in his work *Friends of God* is perhaps St Josemaría's most complete and systematic exposition of the role of these virtues in the Christian life. He begins by commenting the passage of Lk 7: 36–50 where Our Lord is hurt by the lack of 'human

- courtesy and refinement' (Escrivá, *Friends of God*, 73) shown towards him by the Pharisee. He goes on to say that 'human virtues constitute the foundation for the supernatural virtues' (74) and that 'God wants us to be both very human and very divine' (76).
12. See Pedro Rodríguez's critical-historical edition for a detailed analysis of this chapter (Rodríguez 2009).
 13. She quotes from Escrivá's *Furrow*: 'The wish to *teach* and *teach from the heart* creates in pupils a gratitude which is suitable soil for the apostolate' (Escrivá, *Furrow*, 230).
 14. Escrivá stressed loyalty as a virtue particularly necessary for educators. 'Teachers need all the virtues, but above all they should manifest a great loyalty to their students', Murphy explains (Murphy 2003, 221).
 15. The homily, 'Freedom, a gift from God' in *Friends of God* would be a good introduction to his thought on this question. Escrivá's valuing of freedom is also due to the atmosphere he breathed in his own upbringing. He loved his parents greatly, considered them both his friends, and often spoke of the freedom he enjoyed as a child. His parents gave him great freedom, he would say, but without being reckless. For example, they kept him short of money. In his meetings with parents he would frequently recommend this pedagogical method (a lot of freedom but little money).
 16. Escrivá was very careful not to talk about politics but he saw this as an ethical principle – linked to a fundamental human right – and so did not fear to speak clearly on this question.
 17. Letter dated 2 October 1939 (quoted in Errázuriz 1997, 132).
 18. Pope Pius, XI, 1930. *Encyclical Letter: Divini Illius Magistri* (n° 32), Vatican City, Italy. Given in Franchi 2007. Recent Church magisterium has reiterated the primary right and mission of parents in the education their children: cfr John Paul II *Familiaris Consortio*, 22-11-1981, nn. 36–40; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, n. 2229; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, nn. 238–243.
 19. Catholic in *fact* but without the name. The article by Errázuriz which I refer to in this work aims precisely to make this point.
 20. Letter 2-XI-1939, quoted in Errázuriz (1997, 136).
 21. In fact the 'subsidiary nature of the intervention of diocesan authority' (Errázuriz 1997, 125, Footnote 9) is affirmed in the Code of Canon Law. See CIC canon 802 § 1: 'If there are no schools in which an education is provided that is imbued with a Christian spirit, the diocesan bishop has the responsibility of ensuring that such schools are established.' Errázuriz points out that this same idea was stated in the parallel canon of the 1917 Code, CIC 17 canon 1379 § 1 (*ibid.*). Incidentally, Escrivá followed the spirit of this canon very closely. He was very keen on lay people continuing to work in existing schools, even non-Catholic ones, to bring the spirit of Christ to them, to be the 'leaven in the mass', as he often repeated. Hence, starting new schools was very much 'plan B'. But one thing is for a Catholic to work in an existing school, however imperfect it might be, to act there as Christian leaven. Quite another thing is for Catholic parents to send their children to schools which might harm them. Escrivá was keenly aware that some non-Catholic schools can seriously damage children by deforming or at least failing to form them. Hence in point 866 of *The Way* he talks of 'those poor little ones who go to *wicked* schools' (my italics). The word 'wicked' is strong but so is the Spanish original, 'escuelas malvadas'. This could be the case, for example, when God is excluded from a school's curriculum or sex education becomes education in sexual immorality as is ever more the case.
 22. He also encouraged them to 'seek to give the pupils a wider formation, which went beyond the academic sphere. It was a question of forming men, not schoolboys' (Pomar 2010, 117 – recollections of one of the school promoters indirectly recorded by Pomar).
 23. 'Affirm the need' translates 'confirmar la necesidad' (literally 'confirm the need/necessity' but which sounds odd in English).
 24. Quoted in Echevarría (2002).
 25. *Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer y la Universidad* (1993; Pamplona: EUNSA) gives various texts by St Josemaría related to the university and some articles on this theme, all in Spanish. But it is by no means a systematic study of Escrivá's thinking on the university.
 26. For Newman's ideas on university education, see particularly: 'The idea of a university (1852/1858/1873).'
 27. This is the basic argument the author develops throughout his article.

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Appendix

Some major educational initiatives promoted by the faithful of the Opus Dei prelatore (as per 2011). The university list gives all the corporate apostolate universities promoted by faithful of the Prelature. The list of schools and other educational establishments gives just a few significant examples among many others:

Universities*

(*Only the principal seat of the university is given in each case. If the university's name itself indicates its location, no further city name is given.)

- Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome, Italy)
- The University of Navarra (Pamplona, Spain)

The University of Piura (Peru)
Universidad Panamericana (Mexico DF, Mexico)
Universidad de la Sabana (Bogota, Colombia)
Universidad de los Andes (Santiago, Chile)
University of Asia and the Pacific (Manila, Philippines)
Universidad Austral (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
Università Campus Bio-Medico (Rome, Italy)
Universidad de Montevideo (Uruguay)
Universidad del Istmo (Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala)
Strathmore University (Nairobi, Kenya)
Pan-African University (Lagos, Nigeria)
Universidad Monteávila (Caracas, Venezuela)

In most cases business schools are linked or attached to these universities. The most famous of all is the IESE Business School of Barcelona and Madrid, Spain.

Some major secondary and technical schools

Seido Mikawadai School for boys and Nagasaki Seido School for girls (Nagasaki, Japan)
Colegio Viaró (Barcelona, Spain): for boys
Colegio Gaztelueta (Bilbao, Spain): for boys
Colegio Planalto (Lisbon, Portugal): for boys
Escuela Feminina Montefalco (Montefalco): for the promotion of women in a rural area of Mexico
Centro Elis (Rome, Italy): technical school for sons of poor workers
Kianda School (Nairobi, Kenya): the first multi-racial educational establishment for girls in East Africa
Strathmore College (Nairobi, Kenya): for boys: the first multi-racial school in Kenya
The Heights School (Washington, USA): for boys
Colegio Tajamar, for boys, and Colegio Los Tilos, for girls (Madrid, Spain)

University residences (close to 200 in the world, ranging from some 10 to over 100 residents)

Netherhall House (London, United Kingdom): for male students
Ashwell House (London, United Kingdom): for female students
Warrane College (Sidney, Australia): for male students
RUI (Rome, Italy): for male students
Colegio Mayor Belagua (Pamplona, Spain): for male students
Collegio Universitario Celimontano (Rome, Italy): for female students

Other types of educational initiatives

Baytree Centre (London, United Kingdom): for women immigrants
Braval (Barcelona, Spain): for men immigrants
Instituto Condoray (Cañete Valley): for the promotion of women in a rural area of Peru
Kelston Club (London, United Kingdom): a club for boys aged 10- to 18-years-old