

## ESCRIVA'S OPUS DEI: FROM SECULAR ASSOCIATION TO PERSONAL PRELATURE

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### INTRODUCTION

Opus Dei is an apostolic group of priests and laypeople founded in Spain in 1928 to revitalize Spanish intellectual life, to counter liberalism, and, generally, to offer the laity a means by which to sanctify ordinary work. Since 1982, it has enjoyed the prestige of being the Church's first personal prelature.<sup>1</sup> Today there are over 70,000 lay members and more than 1,000 priests who represent more than 80 countries and about 500 dioceses. Members or associates of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, its complete name, work in 500 universities and tertiary institutes, 600 newspapers and journals, 50 broadcasting stations, 40 press and publishing agencies and 10 film compa-

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<sup>1</sup>The concept "personal prelature" finds its origin within the context of *Ecclesiae Sanctae I*, August 6, 1966, Article 4, where the possibility of special pastoral or missionary needs of various regions or social groups is discussed. It establishes the ability for the Apostolic See to create prelatures in order to accomplish these special tasks, stating that these prelatures would consist of the secular clergy specially trained and under the authority of a prelate, who could erect and govern seminaries and would have the right to incardinate seminarians under the title of service to the prelature and to promote them to Orders. The document delineates the other duties of the prelate regarding the spiritual, economic, and biological well-being of those he promotes under the above-mentioned title. It also declares that

nies.<sup>2</sup> The exact nature and explicit aims of this international organization are difficult and sometimes impossible to ascertain; indeed, some argue that there is a veil of secrecy which shields Opus Dei from the public eye.<sup>3</sup> This enigmatic character makes Opus Dei even more conspicuous and may even be responsible for fostering suspicions. In an attempt to clarify these uncertainties about the nature and mission of Opus Dei, I propose to look briefly at the socio-cultural context of its founding and early development. Then perhaps it may be possible to venture a guess regarding its current status and direction.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1864, when Pius IX issued *Quanta Cura* condemning the basic principles of nineteenth-century liberalism and affirming the temporal powers of the papacy, the Spain of Isabel II had again regained its old claim to fame as the most Catholic of nations. But this would not last long. Four years later in 1868, the Bourbon dynasty was defeated and Isabel II was overthrown by revolutionary juntas. This revolt was directed against the right-wing supporters of the Isabeline monarchy and against their association with the reactionary papacy of Pius IX. Anticlericalism was beginning to give way to antireligiosity, since religion was now seen as an obstacle for liberalism.

A new government was set up in Madrid by progressivist General Juan Prim, whose aim was to return to the goals of nine-

celibate and married laypeople can dedicate their professional service, through contracts with the prelature, to its works and enterprises. Finally, the document stresses that such prelatures should not be erected without a thorough review of the views of the episcopal conferences of the territories in which they will serve in order to demonstrate that "the rights of the local ordinaries are not infringed and that close relations are kept with the episcopal conferences at all times." The 1983 Code of Canon Law specifically addresses personal prelatures in Canons 294 to 297.

<sup>2</sup>Massimo Olmi, "Opus Dei—Its Development and Structure," *The Month* 20 (July 1987) 269.

<sup>3</sup>From among the many sources see: "Opus Dei: Lifting the Veil of Mystery," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 1983, pp. 9 and 13; and "The Secret World of Opus Dei," *New York Times Magazine*, January 8, 1984, Sec. 6, pp. 83-85.

teenth century liberalism by introducing political democracy with complete economic freedom. The new constitution of 1869, however, allowed complete freedom of religion, making it possible for Catholic laypeople to organize independent Catholic associations. That was in accord with Pius IX's new Catholic policy which encouraged such recourses in order to bring about the "perfect society" which he espoused. These associations proliferated once the new regime began to liberalize Spain. Catholic Action and other socio-political Catholic associations find their roots in this period, and it is possible to speculate that some of the conceptual roots of Opus Dei may be traced back to this time also. Although Spain struggled with liberalism and the majority of the Spanish episcopacy fancied a closer reliance on the papacy, the final years of the nineteenth century were relatively peaceful.

During the long reign of Alfonso XIII (1902-32), Catholicism maintained its influence and power, and, generally speaking, Spaniards highly valued the pontificate of Pius X (1903-14) whom they considered more conservative and traditional than Leo XIII. In September of 1923, General Primo de Rivera, counting on the tacit support of Alfonso XIII, staged a *pronunciamento*. Primo's mission was to save Spain from old politicians and to reform the government. Primo managed to win the support of most Catholics, and it was out of these historical circumstances that Opus Dei emerged. However, the regime of General Primo de Rivera lasted only until 1930, when he admitted defeat just a year before Alfonso XIII left Spain without formal abdication.

The Great Depression unleashed again the forces of discontented liberalism, and a revolutionary committee became the provisional government of the Second Republic, which lasted from 1931 to 1936. With the fall of General Primo de Rivera and the demise of the monarchy, Catholicism had lost the support of the ruling classes and no longer monopolized the education of the elite. Spanish intellectual life, for the first time, had taken on a predominantly secular and liberal appearance. During the five years of the Second Republic, the impact of such intellectual figures as Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Gregorio Marañón, and Pérez de Ayala, along with the forces of political and ecclesiastical liberalism, had all but driven Spanish Catholicism into a cultural ghetto.

Many leading Spanish Catholics joined forces with Spanish Nationalists in a counter-offensive movement against the secular-minded Republicans. Both groups shared at least this common goal: to reconstruct the lost sacred order of the past. One young Spaniard, an aspiring priest from the northern Aragonian province of Huesca, had already envisioned a firm corrective to the degenerating conditions of Spanish Catholic life, especially Catholic intellectual life. The young priest was José María Escrivá de Balaguer, and his vision was the 1928 establishment of a support group of like-minded Catholic intellectuals and students soon destined to emerge as the Spanish elite. The group took the name of Opus Dei in 1930.

#### FROM SECULAR ASSOCIATION TO PERSONAL PRELATURE

On October 2, 1928, Fr. Escrivá had a revelation while on a spiritual retreat that led to the founding of Opus Dei and which seemed to synthesize all that he had ever dreamed of in the 26 years of his life. Three years after his ordination and two years after his father's death, Escrivá discovered within himself a calling that further clarified his priestly vocation, channeling it towards providing laypeople with a unique apostolic opportunity. This apostolate would enable the laity to remain within their secular professions but as informal, yet highly skilled, agents of the irrepressible Catholicism of Spain. The calling partially grew out of Escrivá's experience as a spiritual director for students at the University of Madrid, where secularism had all but eroded any sense of Catholic identity.

That same year, 1928, Escrivá petitioned the bishop of Madrid-Alcalá, Msgr. Eijo y Garay, to grant his request to form a secular association of (male) lay Catholics intent on seeking God in their everyday work and life. Two years later, on February 14, 1930, a women's branch was founded (the division exists to this day in Opus Dei centers around the world).<sup>4</sup> Two years after the Spanish Civil War ended in 1939, Escrivá returned in triumph from Burgos, the war capital of Nationalist Spain, to Franco's Spain, this time seeking the approval of Msgr. Eijo y Garay to

<sup>4</sup>"Good Housekeeping for Opus Dei . . . and Recipients of the Father's Rage," *National Catholic Reporter*, May 27, 1983, pp. 10-11 and pp. 12-13.



christen Opus Dei a "pious diocesan union."<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, on December 8, 1943, the Holy See recognized Opus Dei as an "institute of common life without vows."<sup>6</sup> That same year, a counterpart association, the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, was founded as a clerical society of common life without vows. The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross was the visible guise that kept the public eye off of Opus Dei, thus granting Opus Dei the discretion and autonomy it required.

From the very beginning, Escrivá and his co-workers had concentrated their efforts on gaining the kind of papal approval that would grant Opus Dei the sovereignty needed, even if this required the creation of a new ecclesiastical category. Opus Dei, it should be remembered, was never intended to resemble a Roman Catholic religious order. According to its self-description, Opus Dei was to "bring about—in all sectors of society—a deep awareness of the universal call to sanctity and apostolate and, more specifically, to the sanctifying value of ordinary work."<sup>7</sup> However, the Church had no canonical alternatives to offer a Catholic association of such an innovative nature, and this served to activate Escrivá's ingenuity and his network of direct and indirect influence all the more.

In the mid-1940s, at the request of Escrivá, the Spanish Papal Nuncio began an investigation of Opus Dei. The results of that deliberation proved favorable to Escrivá and his overall plan: Rome was urged to consider approving and regulating "this new form of *vita perfectionis* in the midst of the world—one that was fundamentally different from the religious state and seemed to answer the needs of the age in a special way."<sup>8</sup> At the time "there was not really any legal framework within the current Canon Law which suited the spiritual and apostolic reality of Opus Dei."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The 1917 Code of Canon Law made provisions for this form of ecclesial body in Article 708.

<sup>6</sup>Jean-Jacques Thierry, *Opus Dei: A Close-Up* (New York: Cortland Press 1975) p. 26.

<sup>7</sup>"Twenty Questions to Msgr. Alvaro Del Portillo, Prelate of Opus Dei," Scepter Pamphlet (New York 1985).

<sup>8</sup>Thierry, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>William H. Stetson, "Opus Dei: The Church's First Personal Prelature," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 83 (July 1983) 66.

So, in 1946 Escrivá, who had earned a degree in law from the University of Saragossa while studying for the priesthood, moved to Rome along with some of his closest associates with the purpose of obtaining more tangible pontifical recognition. On February 2, 1947, Pius XII promulgated *Provida Mater Ecclesia*, and twenty-two days later Opus Dei received its *decretum laudis*; that is, it was officially approved as the Church's first Secular Institute of pontifical right. This new and officially approved status was conferred upon both the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, now unified into one body called Opus Dei but with separate branches for men (clerical and nonclerical) and women.

Consequently, Opus Dei was placed under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, and immediately the following privileges were sought: 1) that, as a Secular Institute, Opus Dei could withhold from local ordinaries details about their houses, activities, and members; 2) that the Institute would be confirmed as being clerical in nature; 3) that the Institute would be exempted from any obligation to present the complete text of its Constitutions to the local ordinary whenever it opened a new center (in such cases it would only need to furnish a summary of the Constitutions and a list of the privileges that may have been granted); and 4) that members of Opus Dei could pursue their common lives and their apostolates without any intervention by the local bishop.<sup>10</sup> In 1950, Opus Dei received its definitive papal approval through the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, which underwrote all of the conditions for discretion, confidentiality, and autonomy required by the Institute.

After the death of the founder of Opus Dei in 1975, Alvaro Del Portillo became Escrivá's successor. Portillo, an engineer, canon lawyer, and historian, had worked with the founder for 40 years and also desired that Opus Dei would become more than a Secular Institute. At Portillo's request, John Paul II entrusted the Congregation of Bishops with the task of examining how Opus Dei's legal status might be changed into that of a Personal Prelature. A committee of cardinals reached an agreeable decision and approved the proposed change of status on September 26, 1981. Finally, on November 28, 1982, John Paul II erected Opus

<sup>10</sup>Olmi, p. 267.

Dei as the Church's first Personal Prelature, approving the Statutes of Opus Dei and the appointment of Msgr. Alvaro Del Portillo as Prelate.

With the change of status from Secular Institute to Personal Prelature, Opus Dei shifted from the care of the Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes to that of the Congregation of Bishops. This was a great triumph for Opus Dei because it could finally escape from misconceptions which likened it to a religious congregation. And as a kind of quasi-diocese, it could even more easily evade the direct control of local bishops. With this new and long-sought-after status, Opus Dei would have to be distinguished from such lay movements as *Comunio e Liberazione*, founded in 1954 in Milan, and the more traditional Catholic Action.

Though Opus Dei may be strictly classified as a Personal Prelature (a distinction referred to by at least one source as a "canonical monstrosity" <sup>11</sup>), it is difficult not to describe it operationally as a movement. In any event, wherever mobilized lay groups abound (and this is especially true in Europe and Latin America), one cannot avoid asking the question of how these "movements" function within the local Church and, more specifically, within the most essential unit in the life of the Church—the parish. And this leads to another more serious question: If problems between a local Church and Opus Dei should arise, to whom would the local bishop turn, now that the very congregation which is supposed to represent his interests also champions those of Opus Dei as well?

#### PERIOD OF RAPID AND CLANDESTINE EXPANSION

As already mentioned, an aura of secrecy has surrounded the whole organization from its beginning, and the linkage between the virtues of silence and obedience could already be seen in *El Camino*, a catalogue of 999 aphorisms, maxims, slogans, and thought of its author, Escrivá, which he published in 1939. *El Camino*, (*The Way*), has been called "the basic breviary of Opus

<sup>11</sup>Peter Hebblethwaite, *In the Vatican* (Bethesda: Adler & Adler, Publishers, Inc. 1986) pp. 103-104.

Dei."<sup>12</sup> The following maxims express the high value placed on discretion and circumspection: "Remain silent, and you will never regret it: speak, and you often will" (No. 639); "Be slow to reveal the intimate details of your apostolate; don't you see that the world in its selfishness will fail to understand?" (No. 643); "Never go into details of 'your' apostolate unless it be for someone else's benefit" (No. 839); "You want to be a martyr. I'll place a martyrdom within your grasp: to be an apostle and not call yourself an apostle, to be a missionary—with a mission—and not call yourself a missionary, to be a man of God and to seem a man of the world: to pass unnoticed!" (No. 848); and "Yours should be silent obedience. That tongue!" (No. 627).<sup>13</sup> *El Camino* was an elaboration of Escrivá's first work, *Consideraciones Espirituales*, published in 1934.

The Spanish Civil War had a tremendous impact upon the development of Opus Dei. By 1936, Opus Dei was already showing signs of becoming a vital religious movement and agency of social change, one capable not only of viability, but also of expansion. It was totally identified with the Nationalist side, and since Madrid remained Republican, Escrivá had to take the necessary precautions to guarantee his own personal safety and that of his vision. At the outbreak of the Civil War in the late summer of 1936, Escrivá was forced to feign a mental illness and to hide out in a mental hospital. He then sought the sanctuary of the Honduran Embassy along with an Argentinian friend who had diplomatic immunity. In 1937, Escrivá was given refuge in the Chilean Embassy and was able to escape temporarily to Valencia (another Republican stronghold). There he was joined by other members of Opus Dei, all of whom first fled to France and then to Burgos until it was possible to return to Franco's Spain. Once back to Madrid, Escrivá and his associates were able to breathe a momentary sigh of relief before resuming the realization of their plan, this time under more opportune conditions.

In the early 1950s Spain was becoming a stable state. General Franco had reached an agreement with the United States that led to the establishment of four military bases in Spain. In re-

<sup>12</sup>Yvon LeVaillant, "The Holy Mafia," *Atlas* 12 (1966) 29.

<sup>13</sup>Msgr. Joseph M. Escrivá, *The Way* (Chicago: Scepter 1954) pp. 157, 160, 205, 207.



turn, Spain received substantial financial assistance which secured its stability. By this time Franco had already harnessed the bureaucratic and political power of the Falange, which was replete with highly qualified members and cooperators of Opus Dei called "technocrats."

Originally, the *Falange Española* was a small Spanish Fascist movement founded by José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the son of the former dictator. In its early years during the 1930s, the Falange rejected the Spanish right. However, Franco found in the Falange a potential bureaucracy, a political structure, and a social theory (the Falange supplied the national Fascist ideology). In 1937, Franco forced the Falange to accommodate the traditionalist elements within the Nationalist Movement. By the mid-1950s, the Falange had steadily lost its power to the technocrats of Opus Dei, who had introduced a capitalist system.

Opus Dei managed to build up an elite leadership in Spain by first having succeeded in reconquering Spanish university life, one of Escrivá's primary and initial objectives. When José Ibañez Martín, a close friend of José María Albareda Herrera (one of the original members of Opus Dei), was named Minister of Education in 1939, Opus Dei members soon began appearing on university faculties and in intellectual circles. On November 24, 1939, Martín established the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* (CSIC), whose goal was to propagate the most fundamental doctrines of authoritarian Christianity, but also with an emphasis on science and learning. The CSIC was responsible for the allocation of grants for higher education, and as an organ of the State it provided Opus Dei with its great opportunity to enter unobtrusively into the machinery of the Franco regime.<sup>14</sup> The CSIC became the springboard from which Opus Dei could acquire university chairs. Opus Dei obtained a large number of important chairs during the 1940s, and this ascendancy in higher education partially fulfilled Escrivá's goal to reconquer intellectual life.

In the mid-1950s, Opus Dei began to play a more influential role in Spanish economic policy-making. Among the technical ex-

<sup>14</sup>Norman B. Cooper, *Catholicism and the Franco Regime* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, Inc. 1975) p. 22.

perts whom Franco appointed in 1957 was Laureano López Rodó. Rodó and his fellow technocrats introduced significant changes in Spanish economic policy in the late 1950s, liberalizing its structure, opening up the country to large-scale foreign investments, and preparing the way to capitalize on mass tourism.<sup>15</sup> The growth of Opus Dei at this time has been described in the following manner:

In 1956-57, the Opus Dei began to flower, or rather, the wave crested. Franco was forced to change his guard, the men who run the country for him. Opus Dei's hour had come. Its men seemed the only ones capable of providing a coherent, homogeneous and technologically up-to-date administration with a solid base at home and supported by contacts with German and American business circles. Also, they were supported by the Vatican, or, at any rate, by the Nuncio, who had a high regard for them. After years of silence and subterranean burrowing, they suddenly blossomed forth as government ministers, directors of banks and businesses of every kind and even university rectors.<sup>16</sup>

Opus Dei was born with two interrelated vocations: to bring Spanish Catholicism out of the cultural ghetto by reconquering Spanish intellectual life; and to present a solution to the dilemmas of Catholicism in the modern world by offering a tailor-made version of Catholic modernity which would counter liberalism, laicism, and godless secularism. According to sociologist José Casanova, the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE), Masonry, and Socialism were the three heresies against which Opus Dei stood.<sup>17</sup> Of the three movements, Opus Dei most vigorously opposed the ILE, since it was too secular-minded and attacked the distinction between clergy and laypeople.

Opus Dei, somewhat prophetically, anticipated Vatican II's universal call to holiness by almost a quarter of a century. Interestingly, Opus Dei's equally anticipatory pre-Vatican II message

<sup>15</sup>Stanley G. Payne, *Spanish Catholicism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press 1984) p. 189.

<sup>16</sup>LeVaillant, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup>José V. Casanova, "The First Secular Institute: The Opus Dei as a Religious Movement Organization." *The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, 6 (1982) 294. See also José V. Casanova, *The Opus Dei Ethic and the Modernization of Spain* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilm International 1982).

of secularity, evident from the start, was proudly restated by Portillo at the Fifteenth General Congregation of the recent Synod of Bishops on the Laity, where he asserted that "the specifically secular nature of the lay state should be underlined, for it is within the secular world that the lay person must seek his or her sanctification, collaborate with God in the sanctification of others and strive to give a Christian orientation to the structures of society."<sup>18</sup>

It is understandable, given the hostile, non-Catholic environment of its formative years, that Opus Dei began as a secretive Catholic sect that demanded autonomy and clung to the most traditional of Catholic values. But why did Opus Dei maintain its sectarian identity as a secretive, aggressive, and ascending group even after the Civil War had radically altered that environment? With regard to subsequent socio-religious development brought on by Vatican II, Casanova has this to say:

The change which came about in the larger collectivity as the result of the Vatican Council posed a new dilemma for the sectarian identity of Opus Dei. While priding itself for having anticipated the changes which were now officially legitimated by the Vatican Council, the Opus Dei, nevertheless, did not choose to assimilate into the larger conciliar movement, preferring to maintain its sectarian character, this time by emphasizing its traditionalism, thus practically retreating into a pietistic "island in society" attitude. . . . Prior to the Vatican Council it was the message of secularity which had characterized the Opus Dei as a sectarian association, whereas its traditionalism could be viewed as a concession to the orthodoxy of the Church. But now that the Church had officially adopted the Opus Dei's message of secularity, traditionalism became one of the main differentiating characteristics of the sectarian Opus Dei vis-à-vis the larger Church.<sup>19</sup>

#### MEMBERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

Shortly after John Paul II formally erected Opus Dei as a Personal Prelature, Msgr. Portillo was asked about the nature of membership in Opus Dei. Here is his reply:

Members of Opus Dei commit themselves to strive for sanctity and to spread it from their own place in the world, through their ordinary work

<sup>18</sup>*L'Osservatore Romano*, N. 43 (1011) October 26, 1987, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>Casanova, 274.

and daily activities. To fulfill this commitment they have a right to the help the prelature gives them through a continuous and demanding spiritual training. They receive this formation personally or in small groups, through classes, talks, religious retreats, etc.<sup>20</sup>

According to the official Vatican Declaration on Opus Dei:<sup>21</sup>

- 1) The laity incorporated into the Prelature do not alter their personal situation canonically or theologically. The work and apostolate of those who form part of the Prelature are normally carried out in secular society. Regarding decisions in professional, social, and/or political matters, the Prelature does not make itself responsible for the activities of any of its members. They continue to be faithful to the dioceses in which they permanently or temporarily reside and are, therefore, under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop. They must observe the territorial norms governing doctrine, liturgy, and general pastoral care. However, they are held accountable through contractual agreement to the prelate in regard to ascetical, formative, and apostolic commitments.
- 2) Priests of Opus Dei must obtain their ministerial faculties from competent diocesan authorities so that they can exercise their priestly ministry with people who do not belong to Opus Dei. They belong, therefore, to the secular clergy and maintain close relations with the secular priests of the local Church. Opus Dei priests rely on their Prelate for their formation. In sickness and in old age, priests are guaranteed care by the Prelate of Opus Dei.
- 3) The jurisdiction of the Prelate lies only within the Prelature and differs from that of the diocesan bishops in the ordinary spiritual care of the faithful. Before an Opus Dei center can be established anywhere, the acquiescence of the diocesan bishop is required, and he must be kept informed of the center's activities on a regular basis. The local ordinary may entrust to the Prelature or to incardinated priests in the Prelature parishes, rectorial churches, and also other ecclesiastical offices. In each country the Prelature must maintain regular contact with the episcopal conferences.

There are three types of lay members in Opus Dei: numer-

<sup>20</sup>"Portillo on Opus Dei," *National Catholic Register*, December 26, 1982.

<sup>21</sup>"Vatican Declaration on Opus Dei," *Origins*, 12 (1983) 510.

aries, associates, and supernumeraries. The "numeraries" choose celibacy and must undertake numerous years of extensive philosophical and theological training. They are usually well-established professionals and/or intellectuals. Generally, they live together as a family in an Opus Dei center, committed to Opus Dei not by vows but by contracts. There are two types of numeraries: inscribed members and electors. The inscribed members are at the disposal of the Prelate and must declare absolute obedience to him. The electors are those eligible to elect members to the general Council of Opus Dei. Numerary members who have had professional training and experience may be ordained as priests to serve Opus Dei. The second general type of members are "associates." Associates also choose celibacy, but they do not necessarily have secular university degrees or belong to any profession, nor are they, therefore, given any position of authority. "Supernumeraries" can be married and, therefore, are able to devote themselves only partially to Opus Dei's apostolates. Finally, there are "cooperators" of Opus Dei who are friends, sympathizers, and co-workers sharing in the work of the Prelature without being members or even necessarily Catholics. Diocesan priests can join the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross which is attached to the Prelature; however, they remain under the authority of their bishop, working for Opus Dei in addition to their diocesan duties.

In the United States, as in other countries, Opus Dei operates a collegial body headed by a counselor. The women's branch has a comparable (but separate) organization. The Opus Dei counselor in the United States, Rev. Raphael Caamano, resides in New York City. In 1980, Fr. Caamano succeeded Rev. Joseph Muzquiz, who was one of the original three Opus Dei members to arrive in Chicago in 1949. Opus Dei operates a student residence in Boston, which was established in 1954. There are Opus Dei centers in Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Washington, which were set up in 1956, and most recently, centers have appeared in New York, San Francisco, South Bend, Burlington, Newark, Providence, and Pittsburgh.

#### CONCLUSION

In summary, I would like to make some closing observations about Opus Dei. First, there is no doubt that Opus Dei is multi-

faceted. Its influence can be detected in religion, politics, economics, and education. Second, it is perdurable, and remarkably so. Most groups whose founders are charismatic figures usually collapse shortly after the leader's death. Not only has Opus Dei survived, but it has even grown more vigorous in the years following the death of Escrivá. Third, Opus Dei can easily be characterized as precedent-setting. As the Church's first Secular Institute and, more recently, as its first Personal Prelature, Opus Dei has proved more than once that ecclesial reality can be altered. And fourth, Opus Dei has been consistently loyal to the Church. It has not accidentally won the support of recent popes. The fact is that Opus Dei, through punctilious conformity to the Church's magisterium, has impressed Church authorities.

Despite all of the remarkable things that can be said about this organization, however, there remain questions that have been and will continue to be raised about Opus Dei. How, for example, should Opus Dei interact with local parishes? What influence does Opus Dei have upon relations between the local and the universal Church? Why is the aura of mystery surrounding Opus Dei so carefully nourished? To what extent does Opus Dei impede the development of grass-roots movements which are politically and theologically more liberal? What makes suspicions of elitism abound? And last, but not least, if rumors of elitism are true, why has the Church, in such an unprecedented and dramatic manner, backed this organization?