

Ernest Caparrós, *The Juridical Mind of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá: A Brief History of the Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Midwest Theological Forum, Chicago (2001), 45pp.

This little opus is in reality a position paper presented at the Conference "Opus Dei: 70th Anniversary of Charism and Institution", organized by the Midwest Theological Forum (Chicago, USA) on 2 October 1998, which was later on revised for publication in Ottawa in July 2000.

As the subtitle states, it presents a brief history of the canonical path of Opus Dei. Any student of ecclesiastical circumscriptions cannot avoid paying close attention to the new figure of personal prelatures, envisioned by Vatican Council II and given a legal framework in the Codex of 1983. But in order to fully understand the nature of this ecclesiastical jurisdictional phenomenon, an understanding of its historical antecedents is indispensable. And since Opus Dei is the first – and at the moment the only – Personal Prelature erected in the Catholic Church, an understanding of the charism, pastoral phenomenon and subsequent canonical path of this institution also becomes mandatory. Herein lies the unique value of this little monograph under review.

In fact, a very thorough 655-page *magnum opus* on this same subject had been published in the past (cf. A. de Fuenmayor, V. Gómez Iglesias and J.L. Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*, Scepter Publishers and Midwest Theological Forum, Chicago, 1994). In that work, the authors – all eminent canon lawyers of both the Pontifical Universities of the Holy Cross (Rome) and of Navarre (Spain) – made a well-documented study of the canonical path of Opus Dei.

The merit of the present work, however, is that it summarizes – *sans* the documentation and deeper theologico-canonical analysis of course – in 45 pages what the aforementioned authors discussed in 15 times that number of much denser pages.

And what is the gist of that history and canonical itinerary? A lengthy quotation from the Introduction of the book best expresses it:

"We have to realize that the theological and canonical elements of the mission of Blessed Josemaría, according to the divine inspiration he received, were far from being recognized in the early 1930s. As a

matter of fact, both the message and the subsequent institution appeared to many people as impossible. The message he was imparting, holiness in the midst of the world, although specifying only one dimension of the teaching of the Church, seemed for many a utopia, insanity, or even heresy.

“At this time, there was no canonical setting which allowed for an institution, or ecclesial community, consisting of a unity of both priests and lay people, men and women, married and single, all of whom were spreading this specific message by their lives and their word. The theological gap was immense, and the canonical one was as broad, if not broader.

“This was the foundational challenge of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá. He had the certitude of the divine mission entrusted to him, and at the same time he knew the human obstacles that lay ahead.”

“Hence, faced with the wide canonical gap – Caparrós would affirm in the next chapter – the founder needed to look for transitional solutions that could facilitate the development of the mission, even though the pastoral phenomenon had to force itself into an ill-fitting and uncomfortable suit. The canonical path of Opus Dei is an example of the interplay between charism and law.”

That interplay is what the book summarizes. In the process, it also shows the great juridical mind of the Founder of Opus Dei, recently canonized (October 6, 2002) Josemaría Escrivá.

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