

To explain again what Opus Dei is would seem at this stage an unnecessary attempt. There are by now many objective books written on the topic. The book Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer has been one of the best-sellers in Spain in 1969 and has also been published in other countries.

The book gathers interviews granted by the Founder and President General of Opus Dei to: Le Figaro (Paris); Palabra (Madrid); L'Osservatore della Domenica (Vatican City); Gaceta Universitaria (Madrid); Time (New York); Telva (Madrid) and The New York Times (New York).

I feel, however, that Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer answered in those interviews more questions than were expressly asked by the journalists.

The Founder of Opus Dei explained things extensively; answered questions that were in the mouths of people. These 24 questions are questions I made myself because -- like you, dear reader -- I have encountered them more than once. Naturally, I have formulated questions which I thought were more important and of general interest, and excluded on the other hand, those which are based on pure "gossip" and superficialities which a well-formed person finds useless or impertinent to ask.

I have answered my own questions by gathering quotations from Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer's book which I mentioned above. Notes at the foot of the page make reference to the passages from Conversations... which were used to answer the different questions.

Jesus Urteaga

1

What is Opus Dei exactly?

Opus Dei is an international lay organization to which a certain number of secular priests belong, although they are a small minority. Its members are people who live in the world and hold normal jobs. They do not join Opus Dei to give up their jobs. On the contrary, what they look for in the Work is the spiritual help they need to sanctify their ordinary work. Thus their work becomes a means to sanctify themselves and help others to do the same thing. They do not change their status. They continue being single, married, widowed or priests. What they try to do is serve God and their fellowmen in their own state in life. Opus Dei is not interested in vows or promises. It asks its members to make an effort to practice human and Christian virtues, as children of God, despite the limitations and errors that are inevitable in human life. 1

2

What are the aims of Opus Dei?

The sole objective of Opus Dei has always been to see that there be men and women of all races and social conditions who endeavor to love and to serve God and the rest of mankind in and through their ordinary work, in the midst of the realities and interests of the world. 2

3

By now, it is clear that a member of Opus Dei is something completely different from a monk or a nun in plain clothes; that the members of Opus Dei are not religious. What is, however, the attitude of the Work towards the religious?

We are not religious. We bear no resemblance to the religious nor is there any authority on earth which could require us to be religious. Yet in Opus Dei we

1 Conversations with Msgr. Escrivá de Balaguer, Scepter Books, Dublin 1968, page 38.
2 Ibid., page 23.

venerate and love the religious state. I pray everyday that all venerable religious will continue to offer the Church the fruits of their virtues, their apostolic works, and their holiness. The rumours you spoke of are just that -- rumours. Opus Dei has always enjoyed the admiration and the sympathetic good will of religious of many orders and congregations, especially of cloistered monks and nuns, who pray for us, write us often, and make our work known in a thousand ways because they can appreciate the meaning of our life: contemplatives in the midst of the cares of the secular city. 3

4 It is a fact that there are people who talk about mystery or secrecy in Opus Dei. Could you say what is the reason behind this?

You speak of charges of secrecy. All that is now ancient history. I could explain, point by point, the origin of those calumnious charges. A powerful organization I prefer not to name but which we esteem and have always esteemed spent its energies over many years falsifying what it did not understand. They insisted on considering us monks or friars and asked, "Why don't they all think the same way?" "Why don't they wear a religious habit or at least a badge?" And they reached the completely illogical conclusion that we are some sort of secret society. 4

It is easy to get to know Opus Dei. It works in broad daylight in all countries, with the full juridical recognition of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The names of its directors and of its apostolic undertakings are well-known. Anyone who wants information can obtain it without difficulty, contacting its directors or going to one of its centers. 5

The members of the work detest secrecy because they are ordinary faithful, the same as anyone else. They do not change status when they join Opus Dei. It would be repulsive for them to carry a sign on their backs that said, "Let it be known that I am dedicated to the service of God." That would hardly be in keeping with people who want to remain just ordinary people. But those who associate with members of

3 Ibid., page 55.

4 Ibid., page 44.

5 Ibid., page 45.

Opus Dei and are acquainted with them realize that they belong to the Work, for, even if they do not publicize their membership, neither do they hide it. 6

I must also add--although I don't like to talk about these things--that in our case there was also an organized and persistent campaign of misrepresentation. There were people who said we acted secretly (perhaps this was their own line of behaviour), that we wanted to occupy important positions, etc. To be more specific, I can say this campaign was begun, about thirty years ago, by a Spanish religious who later left his order and the Church. He married in a registry office and is now a Protestant minister. 7

5 What is the occupation of the members of Opus Dei?

Each member earns his living and serves society in the job he held before joining the Work and would hold if he did not belong to Opus Dei. 8

Opus Dei's principal mission is to give a Christian training to its members and to others who desire it. However, moved by a desire to contribute to the solution of each society's problems, which are so closely related to the Christian ideal, it also has other apostolic activities. Our criterion in this field is that Opus Dei, whose aims are exclusively spiritual, can as a body conduct only activities which already constitute an immediate Christian service, an apostolate. 9

6 Are there classes or degrees of membership among the members of Opus Dei?

In Spain and in the whole world, people of all social conditions belong to Opus Dei: men and women, old and young, workers, businessmen, clerks, farmers, members of the professions, etc. It is God who gives the vocation, and with God there is no distinction of persons. 10

All the members of Opus Dei have this same desire for holiness and apostolate. And so, in the Work,

6 Ibid., page 50

7 Ibid., page 76.

8 Ibid., page 40

10 Ibid., page 53.

there are no degrees or categories of membership. The vocation of Opus Dei is one and the same. It is a call to commit oneself personally, freely, and responsibly to try to carry out the will of God, that is what God wants each individual to do. What there is is a multitude of personal situations, the situation of each member in the world, to which the same specific vocation is adapted. 11

7 **Guilleme-Brulon, of Le Figaro asked you about point 28 of The Way, which reads:**
"Marriage is for the soldiers and not for the General Staff of Christ's army."
You explained to him the meaning of this point. Could you repeat this to us?

I advise you to read the previous point of The Way, which states that marriage is a divine vocation--it was not at all frequent to hear that sort of affirmation around 1925.

The conclusions you spoke of could only spring from a failure to understand my words. With that metaphor I wanted to recall what the Church has always taught about the excellence and supernatural value of apostolic celibacy. At the same time I wanted to remind all Christians that they must consider themselves milites Christi (soldiers of Christ), in St. Paul's words, members of the People of God who are engaged on earth in a divine warfare of understanding, holiness and peace. All over the world there are many thousands of married couples who belong to Opus Dei, or who live according to its spirit. And they are well aware that a soldier may be decorated for bravery in the same battle from which the general shamefully fled. 12

8 **Is it possible to come to Opus Dei to look for material benefits, connections, influence, professional promotion, etc.?**

Any advantage which is not exclusively spiritual is completely ruled out, because the Work demands a great deal -- detachment, sacrifice, self-denial, unceasing work in the service of souls--and gives nothing. Nothing that is, in terms of material advantages:

11 Ibid., page 73.

12 Ibid., pages 56-57.

because in the spiritual sphere it gives very much. It offers the means to fight and win in the ascetical struggle. It leads one along ways of prayer. It teaches one to treat Jesus as a brother, to see God in all the circumstances of one's life, to see oneself as a son of God and therefore to feel committed to spreading his teaching. 13

9 **What are the commitments of a person who joins Opus Dei?**

Joining the Work only implies an obligation to make an honest effort to seek holiness in and through one's job and to be more fully aware of the service to humanity that every Christian life should be. 14

If you want to achieve holiness--in spite of your personal shortcomings and miseries which will last as long as you live -- you must make an effort, with God's grace, to practice charity which is the fullness of the law and the bond of perfection. Charity is not something abstract. It entails a real, complete, self-giving to the service of God and all men: to the service of that God who speaks to us in the silence of prayer and in the hubbub of the world and of those men whose existence is interwoven with our own. By living charity -- Love--you live all the human and super-natural virtues demanded of a Christian. These virtues form a unity and cannot be reduced to a mere list. You can't have charity without justice, solidarity, family and social responsibility, poverty, joy, chastity, friendship. . .

You can see immediately that the practice of these virtues leads to apostolate. In fact it already is apostolate. For when people try to live in this way in the middle of their daily work, their Christian behaviour becomes good example, witness, something which is a real and effective help to others. They learn to follow in the footsteps of Christ who "began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1), joining example with word. That is why, for these past forty years, I have been calling this apostolate an apostolate of friendship and confidence. 15

13 Ibid., pages 79-80.

14 Ibid., page 41.

15 Ibid., page 73.

10 Several organs of the mass media have already dealt in detail with the organization of Opus Dei in several countries. We know that in January this year, *Epoca*, the Italian weekly published an interview with the physicist Calogero Crocchiolo, Secretary of Opus Dei in Italy, in which he spoke about the organization of Opus Dei in his country, presided by the Counsellor Luigi Tirelli, with offices in Via Alberto da Giussano, 6, Milano. In October also, Dr. Cesar Ortiz-Echague, member of the Regional Commission of Opus Dei in Spain, appeared in a documentary about the Association which was shown on Television in Germany. But we are here interested in a total vision. Monsignor, could you explain to us how Opus Dei is organized?

Direction in the Work is always collegial. We detest tyranny, especially in the exclusively spiritual government of Opus Dei. 17

The General Council, which is independent for each section -- the men's and the women's -- resides in Rome (*Annuario Pontificio* 1966, pp 885 & 1226). A corresponding organization exists in each country presided over by the Counsellor of Opus Dei in that nation. 18

11 How is Opus Dei governed?

In each country the direction of our apostolic activities is entrusted to a commission composed in its majority of laymen of different professions and presided over by the Counsellor of Opus Dei in the country. The Counsellor in the Philippines is Dr. Jose Cremades. 19

The principles I just mentioned are also applicable to the central government of Opus Dei. I do not govern alone. Decisions are taken by the General Council of Opus Dei, situated in Rome, made up at present of people from fourteen countries. The General Council limits itself to setting down the basic guidelines for the apostolates of the Work the world

16 *Ibid.*, page 38.
17 *Ibid.*, page 51.

18 *Ibid.*, page 51.
19 *Ibid.*, page 63.

over, leaving it up to the directors in each country to put them into effect. The Women's Section is governed in the same way. Its Central Council is made up of women from twelve countries. 20

12 What is the criterion, the philosophy with which the organization of Opus Dei is structured? Does it control the personal actions and decisions of the members in their private life?

All the activity of these organisms is directed fundamentally to one task: to provide the members with the spiritual assistance necessary for their life of piety, and an adequate spiritual, doctrinal, religious and human formation.

Having reached this point, the Association as such has done its job, the job precisely for which the members of Opus Dei have come together. The Association has nothing else to do. It neither can nor should it give any further indications. Here begins the free and responsible personal action of each member. Each one does his apostolate spontaneously, working with complete personal freedom. Autonomously forming his own conscience before the concrete decisions he has to take, he endeavours to seek sanctity and to give Christian witness in his own environment, sanctifying his own work, whether it be professional, intellectual or manual. 21

13 Doesn't the management of centers of Opus Dei for 50,000 members require a potent organization?

The majority of the members, practically all in fact, live in the same place as they would have lived had they not been members of Opus Dei: in their home, with their family, in the place where they work. Some members very few in comparison with the total number, live together to look after the spiritual care of the others, or to run some apostolic activity; they form an ordinary home, just like any Christian family, and continue at the same time to work at their profession. 22

20 *Ibid.*, page 64.
21 *Ibid.*, pages 31-32.
22 *Ibid.*, page 75.

14

From where does Opus Dei get the finances for its apostolic undertakings?

The finances of each center are autonomous. They are run on an independent basis and look for ways to find the necessary funds among people interested in their activities.

Student residences, for example, with the room and board of the residents, high schools with the pupils' tuition, agricultural schools with the sale of their products. But these funds are hardly ever sufficient to cover all the expenses of a center, especially considering that the Work's activities are all planned with an apostolic outlook and that the majority of them are designed for people with very limited economic resources, who in many cases pay only a nominal fee for the training they receive.

Another important source of funds is the members of the Work who donate part of the money they earn through their professional work. 23

15

The influence of Opus Dei in many countries is undeniable. To what do you think is this influence due?

Obviously, since Opus Dei is an Association with spiritual and apostolic aims, the nature of its influence - - in Spain as in other countries, spread over the five continents, in which we are working - - can be none other than spiritual and apostolic. Opus Dei's influence in civil society is not of a temporal nature (social, political or economic); though it is reflected in the ethical aspects of human activities. Like the influence of the Church itself, the soul of the world, it belongs to a different and higher order and is expressed precisely by the word "sanctification". 24

16

You and all the members of Opus Dei insist repeatedly that Opus Dei does not seek any temporal influence. What is then the nature of the influence the Work obviously has?

23 Ibid., page 62.

24 Ibid., pages 29-30.

The answer is easily found when we consider the sociological fact that people of all classes, professions, ages and states of life belong to our Association, men and women, clergy, and laity, old and young, celibate and married people, university men, industrial and agricultural workers, clerks, members of the professions, people who work in official institutions, and so on. Have you considered the great power of spreading Christianity represented by such a broad and varied spectrum of people especially if they are counted in tens of thousands and are animated with the same apostolic spirit to sanctify their profession or job, regardless of differences of social environment, to sanctify themselves in that work and to sanctify with that work?

All of this gives Opus Dei prominence and significance in society--not the fact that some of its members occupy positions of human influence. This does not interest us in the least, and is left therefore to the free decision and responsibility of each member. What interests us is that all the members--and the goodness of God is such that there are many--carry out tasks of which even the most humble are divinely influential. 25

17

It is said that Opus Dei has many corporations, banks, newspapers, etc. and that its members help each other in these fields. What do you have to say on this?

There are members of Opus Dei who work at an executive level in business of various kinds. Some administer family concerns they inherited. Others run businesses they themselves started or helped to start. Still others have been placed at the head of companies by the owners, who were convinced of their ability. They have reached the positions they hold by any of the honest ways in which people usually reach them. That is to say that it has nothing to do with their membership in Opus Dei.

Like all the other members of the Work, the business executives who belong to Opus Dei seek to live the spirit of the Gospel in the exercise of their profession. This means, in the first place, that they have to be

25 Ibid., pages 30-31.

scrupulously just and honest. They endeavour to be honest in their business affairs, paying a just salary to their employees, respecting the rights of the shareholders or owners, fulfilling all the laws. They avoid any type of favouritism with respect to other persons, whether they belong to Opus Dei or not. I feel that favouritism would be contrary not only to the search for holiness, which is the reason for their belonging to Opus Dei, but to the most elementary morality. 26

18 Is it true that Opus Dei devotes itself only to the rich?

The majority of the members of Opus Dei--in Spain and elsewhere are housewives, workers, shopkeepers, clerks, etc., people whose jobs carry no special political or social weight. The fact that a large number of workers are members of Opus Dei attracts no attention; but one politician, plenty. As far as I'm concerned the vocation to Opus Dei of a railway porter is as important as that of a company director. 27

19 In the case of Spain, do you believe that the Spanish political situation since 1939 has significantly helped the development of the Work? Is Opus Dei something typically Spanish?

In very few places have we had fewer facilities than in Spain. I don't like to say so, because I naturally love my country deeply, but it is in Spain that we have had the greatest difficulties in making the Work take root. No sooner had it been born, than it met with the opposition of all the enemies of personal freedom and of people who were so attached to traditional ideas that they could not understand the life of Opus Dei members, ordinary Christians who strive to live their Christian vocation fully without leaving the world.

The situation in Spain with respect to our apostolic undertakings has not been particularly favourable, either. The governments of countries where Catholics

26 Ibid., pages 62-63.

27 Ibid., page 76.

are a minority have helped the educational and welfare activities founded by Opus Dei members far more generously than the Spanish government. The aid those governments grant Opus Dei's apostolic undertakings like what they usually give other similar centers, is not a privilege, but a just recognition of their social function and of the money they save the taxpayers. 28

I don't want to go any further into this subject, but I would like to take this opportunity to state once more that Opus Dei is bound up with no country, no government, no political party, nor with any ideology. 29

In any case, no one who is reasonably well-informed on what goes on in Spain can ignore the reality of the pluralism to be found among the members of the Work there. I am sure that you could easily cite many examples. 30

Of the sixty-five countries which Opus Dei members come from, Spain is merely one among others, and we Spaniards are in the minority. Geographically, Opus Dei was born in Spain. But from the beginning its aim has been universal. And I myself have lived in Rome for twenty years. 31

20 Do the members of the Work have freedom in the political field?

From the moment in which they first approach the Work, all its members are fully aware of their individual freedom. If one of them ever tried to exert pressure on the others to make them accept his political opinions, or to use them for human interests, they would rebel and expel him without a second thought.

Respect for its members' liberty is an essential condition of Opus Dei's very existence. Without it, no one would come to the Work. Even more, The Work has never intervened in politics and, with God's help, it never will; but if it were to, I would be its number one enemy. 32

28 Ibid., page 48, 49.

29 Ibid., page 77.

30 Ibid., page 61.

31 Ibid., page 52.

32 Ibid., page 42.

21

What is the position of Opus Dei regarding Ecumenism and religious freedom?

Last year I told a French journalist, and I knew that the anecdote has been retold, even in publications of our separated brethren, what I once told the Holy Father John XXIII, moved by the affable and fatherly kindness of his manner: "Holy Father, in our Work all men, Catholics or not, have always found a welcome. I have not learned ecumenism from your Holiness." He laughed, for he knew that way back in 1950, the Holy See had authorized Opus Dei to receive in the Association as Cooperators people who are not Catholics or even Christians. 33

With respect to religious liberty, from its foundation Opus Dei has never practised discrimination of any kind. It works and lives with everyone because it sees in each person a soul which must be respected and loved. These are not mere words. Our Work is the first Catholic organization which, with the authorization of the Holy See, admits non-Catholics, whether Christian or not, as Cooperators. I have always defended the freedom of individual consciences. I do not understand violence; I do not consider it a proper way either to persuade or to win over. Error is overcome by prayer, by God's grace, and by study; never by force; always with charity. From the first moment, this is the spirit we have lived. You can understand, then, how the Council's teaching on this subject could only make me happy. 34

22

What role in Opus Dei is played by apostolic undertakings like the Center for Research and Communication (Graduate School in Economics), Tanglaw Residence, the University of Navarre, etc., and so many others that exist in the world?

In all countries in which it works, Opus Dei does conduct social, educational and welfare projects. 35

Our criterion in this field is that Opus Dei, whose aims are exclusively spiritual, can as an Association

33 Ibid., page 35.

34 Ibid., page 56.

35 Ibid., page 61.

only direct activities which clearly constitute an immediate Christian service, an apostolate. It would be ridiculous to think that Opus Dei as such could mine coal or run any type of commercial venture. Its undertakings are all directly apostolic activities: training centers for farm workers, medical dispensaries in developing countries or areas, schools for girls from under-privileged families. In other words, educational or welfare activities like those carried on throughout the world by organizations of every religious creed. 36

23

If Opus Dei is like that, why is it that there are people who do not understand it, and criticize it?

Perhaps this very simplicity of the nature and the way of working of Opus Dei presents a difficulty for people who are full of complications, and seem incapable of understanding anything genuine and upright.

Naturally, there will always be some people who do not understand the essence of Opus Dei, but this should come as no surprise because our Lord gave his disciples a forewarning of these difficulties when he told them: "No disciple is above his master." (Mt. 10: 24). No one can hope to be understood by everyone, although he does have a right to be respected as a person and as a son of God. Unfortunately, there are always some fanatics who want to impose their own ideas in a totalitarian way, and these will never grasp the love which members of Opus Dei have for the personal freedom of others, and then also for their own personal freedom which is always accompanied by personal responsibility. 37

Very many people -- Catholics and non-Catholics, Christians and non-Christians -- regard our work with affection and esteem and cooperate in it. 38

24

Finally, Monsignor, I will repeat the question put to you by Tad Szulc of The New York Times: How do you see the future of Opus Dei in the years to come?

36 Ibid., page 41.

37 Ibid., page 78.

38 Ibid., page 78.

Opus Dei is still very young. Thirty-nine years is barely a beginning for an institution. Our aim is to collaborate with all other Christians in the great mission of being witnesses of Christ's Gospel, to recall that it can vivify any human situation. The task that awaits us is immense. It is a sea without shores, for as long as there are men on earth, no matter how much the techniques of production may change, they will have some type of work that can be offered to God and sanctified. With God's grace, Opus Dei wants to teach them how to make their work an act of service to all men of every condition, race, and religion. Serving men in this way, they will serve God. 39

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39 Ibid., pages 66-67.

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