

Opus Dei in Spain

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THE trials in Burgos at the end of last year of sixteen Basque separatists brought into the international limelight the political importance in Spain of a secret, secular-religious group, known as the *Sociedad Sacerdotal de la Santa Cruz y Opus Dei*, and commonly referred to simply as Opus Dei (God's Work). Vested political interests, eclipsed in power by the rise of Opus Dei adherents, attempted to utilize the internal disturbances and the overwhelmingly unfavourable international reaction at the time of the trials to discredit their rivals, who have been more influential in guiding the recent destinies of Spain. An old anecdote seemed to have its share of truth. A Jesuit priest, member of the Order popularly regarded as Opus Dei's bitterest rival, was asked by a reporter what he thought of the other organization. Tongue in cheek, he replied: 'I think very well of it. You see, in former times when things went wrong in Spain, the Jesuits were the scapegoats. Now there's Opus Dei.'

Speculations in the foreign press that the aftermath of the Burgos affair would allow the military and the Falangists to regain power at the expense of the parvenu Opus Dei appeared premature and over-influenced by Falange-inspired slogans of 'Franco, si; Opus Dei, no'. Franco does not seem to regard his *Opusdeista* Ministers as discredited. Moreover, the recent highly favourable appraisal of the Spanish economy—to which Opus Dei prestige is intimately linked—by the President of the World Bank can only strengthen Franco's confidence in his technocrats. Opus Dei remains a strong force in Spain. It is important, therefore, to examine closely the nature and influence of the organization in that country. While not forgetting that it is an international organization, we shall confine our analysis to the Spanish scene, where its membership and influence are highest.

The main difficulty in knowing what Opus Dei is all about is the reserve of its directorate and the reticence of its members—usually referred to in the ranks as 'discretion'. As usually happens in such cases, where hard facts are not available, some are invented, leading to exaggerated speculation. A recently published book on the society, subtitled *The Genesis and Development of the Holy Mafia*,¹ lists no less than ten

¹ Jesus Ynfante, *La Prodigiosa aventura del Opus Dei: Génesis y desarrollo de la Santa Mafia* (Paris, Ruedo Iberico, 1970).

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present-day Ministers as Opus Dei adherents, a number that would actually be closer to the total of *Opusdeista* Ministers Franco has had since they were first appointed in 1957. Secrecy is strongly enjoined on the members. In the typical maxims of the society's founder, the following may be found: 'Remain silent and you will never regret it: speak and you often will.' 'Be slow to reveal the intimate details of your apostolate; don't you see that the world in its selfishness will fail to understand?' 'Never go into details of your apostolate unless it is for someone else's benefit.' 'The fruitfulness of silence! . . . Be discreet.' 'I could never over-emphasize the importance of discretion.' The present writer knows of a number of cases where families did not become aware of the membership of one of their own people in Opus Dei until years later.

There have been recent attempts ostensibly to ease the practice of secrecy. Only in January this year the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted on British television to being a member of Opus Dei; this in contrast to the Minister of Housing, who, when asked in 1969 to classify himself, replied that he was a Falangist and a disciple of José Antonio Primo de Rivera, without a word of his Opus Dei connections. Nevertheless, in interviews the present writer found that the answers given by *Opusdeistas* still tended to be rather evasive, and even misleading. 'Opus Dei does not have a publishing house. If a number of our members decide to run one, that is their business.' 'Opus Dei does not own most of its centres or houses of residence'; they are rented or leased, mostly free of charge, from members or sympathizers.

Foundation of the society

Some doubt has been cast on the official date of the founding of the society—2 October 1928—especially by those who claim that it was really born of the civil war. Such scepticism seems misplaced. It is more correct to say that the nature and character of the embryonic organization were greatly influenced by the experience of the civil war and that its growth would not be understandable without taking into account the religious reaction during and after the war.

The founder, José María Escrivá de Balaguer y Albás, was born of middle-class parents (though with some claim to nobility) on 9 January 1902, in the region of Aragon. When the boy exhibited a priestly vocation, he was sent, not to the local seminary, but to the one in the provincial capital of Saragossa. While still pursuing his theological studies, Escrivá took the unusual step of also matriculating at the College of Law at the University of Saragossa. He obtained his law degree before being ordained priest in 1925, a procedure followed by the lawyer-priests and doctor-priests of the society he was to found. After performing parochial duties and serving as rector of the seminary where he had studied, Escrivá moved to Madrid; it seems that his primary aim was to obtain a

doctorate in law, and the University of Madrid was then the only institution empowered to award it.

The move to the Spanish capital was decisive. It was here that, as professor in the Jesuit school of journalism, he learnt the technique of using a small group of well-trained and able men, disposing of good means of propaganda and communication, to exert influence on the community. Escrivá seemed to refer to this when he wrote: 'Others have raised and are raising marvels of organization, of press, of propaganda.' He also came to know more of the Jesuit-led Catholic Action, a lay organization aimed at revitalizing the Church and spreading its influence among the laity. Most of all, as university chaplain, Escrivá came into closer contact with the religious problem of the university and its students.

He later described the almost wholly State-controlled universities of that time as 'disorientated', 'given to material things and even dirty'; some of the professors were 'prone to obscenity'. In effect, he was saying that in the universities Catholic influence was very low. Professorships, which had been opened to free competition since 1881, were occupied by men of republican, socialist, and even Marxist tendencies, many of whom were to figure prominently in the period of the Republic. The most active and vocal student organization was the leftist *Federación Universitaria Escolar*, which far overshadowed the Catholic group. Objectively, the universities were then vital institutions, which played no small part in the downfall of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship.

Escrivá's main aim in founding his group could have been no other than to combat the drift from religion and the anticlericalism of his time. At about the time of his first communion one of the greatest outbursts of anticlericalism erupted in Barcelona, with the burning and pillaging of churches and the desecration of monastery graves and corpses. Two years before his ordination came the shocking news of the assassination of his benefactor, the Cardinal-Archbishop of Saragossa, by an anarchist. To halt this anti-religious trend, Escrivá organized in 1928 a nucleus of university students, originally thirteen, with himself as spiritual director. Two years later, a female branch was added; and in 1934 the small society had its first house of residence.

The outbreak of the civil war in 1936 disrupted the society's development. Escrivá's experiences during this period were largely representative of those of his followers. He first hid in a lunatic asylum, then took refuge in the Honduran embassy, then slipped to Barcelona and crossed the frontier to France; without delay, however, he returned to Spain and established himself in the Nationalist capital of Burgos, where the society regrouped. A monarchist in the past, Escrivá, like many of his time, discarded his ideologies. A government that would restore order and respect the Church became the prime *desideratum*. Opus Dei had no scruples in accepting the dictatorship of Franco and co-operating with it.

The religious outburst during and after the civil war provided a fertile ground for recruitment. There was a need for an organization that would galvanize the laity into action. Apart from Opus Dei, there was only one other such organization, Catholic Action—partially discredited for its past associations. The demanding and rigorous Opus Dei seemed to be just the element to fill a psychological and religious vacuum. By 1941 the Opus Dei group was sufficiently established to be recognized by the Bishop of Madrid-Alcalá as a 'pious union' and later by the Holy See as a diocesan 'Communitarian Institute', without vows. Neither of these moves vested great importance in the society; more significant was the ordination of its three priests in 1944, followed by two years of activity to obtain full recognition from Rome, to which city Escrivá moved in 1946. (Escrivá had the good fortune to win the good graces of Pius XII's Secretary of State, Cardinal Montini, who helped the cause then just as he still does now as Pope Paul VI.)

In the post-war period the Church sought for an answer to materialism and atheistic Communism, and it decided to utilize Escrivá's plan of organizing the laity. In February 1947 a papal encyclical created the so-called Secular Institutes and shortly thereafter provisionally recognized Opus Dei as the first of such institutes. Definite approval of Opus Dei came three years later.

Administrative structure

The Vatican describes Secular Institutes as associations of priests and laymen who pursue Christian perfection by exercising their apostolate in the world; its members wear no distinctive habits, take no public vows, do not necessarily have to live in common, and, above all, do not change their social condition upon becoming members. It is perhaps too often overlooked that Opus Dei is first and foremost a religious organization whose primary aim is the sanctification of its members in the fulfilment of their ordinary secular professions. As its founder never tires of saying, the basic principle of the society is 'to sanctify work, to sanctify oneself in work, and to sanctify the rest through work'.

In Spain at present, the society goes to great pains to emphasize that the large majority of its members come from the humble, working classes, and that most of its work is directed toward these people. The present writer was taken on an 'official' tour of the famous labour institute in the poorest section of Madrid. In absolute numerical terms, it is undoubtedly true that Opus Dei counts many members among the poor and dispossessed. Yet, there is an Opus Dei school in graduate studies (not in Spain) where training is given absolutely free of charge, but only to those who have the opportunity to influence a wide circle, teachers and journalists. Moreover, an examination of the structure and organization of Opus Dei clearly reveals its clerical-elitist-authoritarian character.

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At the top of the organization is the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, strictly speaking. It is composed of two kinds of priests. There are the ordained secular priests, who become members of the society and who remain in the exercise of their parochial duties under the authority of their bishops, living in the spirit of the society and participating in a certain number of spiritual exercises, but remaining in their parishes. And there are those priests who were members of the society before ordination, who devote most of their time to attending to other members of the society. Though the administrative structure provides that the 'director-general' in each country should be a layman, authority comes from Rome, through Escrivá as President-General and then through the priests of the society.

Under the priests, who comprise only about 3 per cent of the total membership, are the laymen, organized in autonomous male and female branches and administratively united only in the person of the President-General—the post Escrivá holds for life. In each branch there are four categories of membership. Foremost are the Numeraries—unmarried members who work mostly for the society. They continue to exercise their professions, but most of their income is contributed to the organization. They receive a rigorous training in philosophy and theology; a number become ordained priests. Most Numeraries live in common in Opus Dei centres, and they take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

Admission into the society requires a period of probation and discipline. Significantly, Opus Dei decides the category to which the postulant should belong. Only those with high university degrees or equivalent social position, and without any physical handicap, are accepted among the Numeraries. Other unmarried members, lacking in these qualities, are classed as Oblates. Most live with their families. They also contribute financially to the society, but being of lower status and perhaps also needing to contribute to their family's sustenance, their contribution is necessarily meagre. Their vows and training are the same as those of the Numeraries. The worker-priests of the society come from the Oblates.

The Supernumeraries are the married members. Escrivá made this distinction because of the high value he placed on celibacy. 'Marriage is for the soldiers and not for the General Staff of Christ's army,' he wrote. The Supernumeraries have, obviously, many family preoccupations that do not allow them to devote as much of their time to the society as the Numeraries and Oblates, and their financial contributions are in the form of voluntary donations. However, a number of Supernumeraries have been very active in Opus Dei; a prime example is the well-known ex-Minister of the Treasury, Mariano Navarro Rubio.

The last category of Co-operators is really somewhat apart. It includes those who co-operate in and contribute toward the fulfilment of the Opus Dei apostolate. By permission of the Holy See these Co-operators do not

even need to be Christians. Unlike the members of the other categories, they do not have to visit the centres of the society once a month or spend five consecutive days a year in religious retreat exercises. Their only obligation is that they must do something for the society (pray or help in any way) every day.

The spirit and the guiding ideas of Opus Dei are mostly contained in the 999 maxims that comprise the little book *Camino (The Way)*, which Escrivá published in 1939. From a very modest beginning, the book has now gone into ninety-six editions, and sold two and a half million copies in twenty-one languages. *Camino* reveals the profound religiosity of its founder. Escrivá also gives great importance to obedience. 'Yours should be a silent obedience. That tongue!' 'The power of obedience.' 'You've been told to do something which seems useless and difficult. Do it.' 'Obey as an instrument obeys in the hands of an artist. . . 'Your obedience is not worthy of the name unless you are ready to abandon your most flourishing personal work whenever someone with authority so commands.'

Significantly, Escrivá reveals the group that he had foremost in mind: 'You say you are quite important: your studies, your research work, your publications, your social standing, your name, your political activities, the positions you hold, your wealth. . . 'There is a brilliant man whom you long to attract to your apostolate. There is another, a man of great influence; and a third, full of prudence and virtues. . . 'And again, 'There is no excuse for those who could be scholars and are not.' Yet, the limits are clearly defined. 'I will never praise the knowledge of those who use it as a rostrum from which to attack the Church'; 'Books: don't buy them without advice. . . '

Opus Dei was born not only of the Spanish soil but also of the Spanish temperament. There is in Escrivá's maxims the zeal and drive of the Spanish crusader, the mystic, and the *conquistador*, as evidenced in the following: 'God and daring!' 'Holy intransigence, holy coercion and holy shamelessness.' 'You say you've failed! We never fail.' 'With holy shamelessness, without stopping until you have finally scaled the heights of duty.' The word *caudillo* appears frequently. 'You . . . one of the crowd? You, who were born to be a *caudillo*?' 'A guide, a chief, a *caudillo*: to compel and to urge and to inspire others, with your word, with your example, with your knowledge, with your power.' '*Caudillos!* . . . Strengthen your will so that God can make a *caudillo* out of you.' Lastly, lest members forget that the aim is to convert all of society, 'The search for fellow apostles. It's the unmistakable sign of true zeal.'

Influence in Spain

We come to the difficult question of the actual influence of Opus Dei in Spain. In 1964, the Falangist newspaper, *Pueblo*, talked of the surprise

caused among Spaniards by the 'sudden appearance of Opus Dei in cultural bodies, business and banking groups, and high administrative posts', insinuating that there was something Machiavellian and surreptitious about it all. A closer investigation would show that the development was more consistent. For some time after the end of the civil war, Opus Dei had been 'infiltrating' the ranks of the intelligentsia and the academic community. High-ranking Opus Deimen will not deny that the first efforts of the society were assiduously directed toward that class. The man who most helped the society in this regard was José Ibáñez Martín, Minister of Education from 1939 to 1951, one of the longest ministerial tenures in the Franco regime. Ibáñez Martín did not belong to Opus Dei; he first knew of it through José María Albareda, one of Escrivá's companions. Both Ibáñez Martín and Albareda were temporarily sheltered in the Chilean embassy during the civil war.

These two men undoubtedly talked of restoring Christianity in the national research institutes after the end of the civil conflict. Accordingly, when, in November 1939, Ibáñez Martín, as Minister of Education, established the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* to succeed the republican institute of similar nature, he called upon Albareda to serve as its secretary-general. Albareda stayed in this post until his death in 1966; his assistant secretary-general was Alfredo Sánchez Bella, at present Minister of Information and Tourism, a sometime *Opusdeísta*. CSIC became the stronghold of the society, and most of its high posts were occupied by Opus Dei members. This institute has been justly criticized for favouring the natural sciences and political economics at the expense of philosophy and the humanities, a technocratic orientation that reflected that of its Opus Dei directors.

Endowed with a generous budget and free to invest its monies while being exempt from the regulation of spending all its allocation in a given year, CSIC became a potent institution. It awarded research fellowships and grants as well as scholarships to study abroad. Through these scholars and fellows, Opus Dei came to occupy university chairs. Admittedly, CSIC directors soon showed their efficiency and dedication. On the occasion of the institute's tenth anniversary, at a time when Spain was internationally treated as a pariah nation, CSIC organized a conference in Madrid attended by no less than twelve Nobel Prize winners.

In other aspects of intellectual life, Opus Dei members came to dominate the prestigious Ateneo de Madrid and to pose as serious rivals of the Jesuits in the control of higher institutions of learning. Previously, the only Catholic universities were the Jesuit institutions at Bilbao and Salamanca. In 1952 Opus Dei inaugurated a College of General Studies at Navarre, later renamed the University of Navarre. It now boasts faculties of philosophy and letters, law, medicine, nursing, physical and natural sciences, business, engineering, canon law, architecture, together

with institutes of foreign languages, journalism, and education as well as schools of social work and library science. It receives funds from the province of Navarre and the central Government (recently cut, however), but most of its money comes from the organization of the 'Friends of the University of Navarre'. The extent of these contributions may be seen from the great number of scholarships the university is able to offer and the relatively low tuition fees paid by students. Generally considered the best university in Spain, the University of Navarre has also served as a good recruiting-ground of Opus Dei members. However, Jesuit predominance in secondary institutions of learning remains firm, despite the establishment of three strategically located Opus Dei high schools in Madrid, Barcelona, and Bilbao, which are the most expensive in the country.

The arrival of *Opusdeistas* in positions of political power also came about through personal contact between a high government official and an Opus Dei member. Luis Carrero Blanco, then Under-Secretary of the Presidency of the Government, now Vice-President of the Cabinet—usually referred to as the regime's grey eminence—came to know a brilliant young Opus Dei lawyer, Laureano López Rodó, in connection with a personal legal matter. Carrero Blanco was so impressed by the latter, who, moreover, was advocating administrative reform in his writings, that he appointed him Technical Secretary-General of his office. The time was ripe, for a high-level overhaul of the Government was imminent.

In 1956 the Franco regime faced one of its most serious threats, a double—political and economic—crisis. The Falange openly bid for power in a rather demagogic way, while the economy was on the brink of collapse. Consequently, in the following year, Franco made a major re-organization of his Cabinet. While its new composition still reflected the principle of representing the major forces in the country, two groups were outstanding: the army, in order to checkmate the Falange, and the Opus Dei technocrats, in order to solve the critical economic situation. Two economic Ministries were given to *Opusdeistas*—Alberto Ullastres in Commerce and Navarro Rubio at the Treasury—thus marking the first ministerial posts to be held by members of the society. The influence of Carrero Blanco and his assistant was apparent in these appointments. López Rodó himself remained as Technical Secretary-General, perfecting his economic programme, until 1962, when Franco appointed him Commissioner for Economic Development in charge of his brainchild, the Programme of Economic Development.

The Opus Dei appointments were regarded as technical, for they involved men with no previous political positions or civil-war records; and the nation generally applauded the idea of placing economic matters in the hands of the economists. *Opusdeista* Ministers held in com-

mon certain basic economic principles. They advocated a neo-liberal, Keynesian orientation, decreasing governmental control and regulation (though believing in careful public budgeting), opening the Spanish market to European competition, and devaluing the peseta so that it would find its real level in the world market. Most of this programme was carried out, together with the accelerated development of tourism, despite the alarm of conservatives at the negative effects which the influx of foreigners would bring. The July 1965 Government reshuffle signified no change of economic policy. López Rodó was given Cabinet rank as Minister without Portfolio, Alberto Ullastres, the main champion of Spain's integration with Europe, was appointed Ambassador to the European Communities, and Navarro Rubio was given the key position of Governor of the Bank of Spain.

Opusdeistas have also been active in the field of private finance and communication. They control the Banco Popular Español, one of the major banks, and other commercial enterprises, particularly real estate. They own a publishing house, Ediciones Rialp; periodicals, *Nuestro Tiempo*, *Arbor*, *Atlántida*, *Gaceta Universitaria* (directed at the elite); and picture magazines, *La Actualidad* and *Telva*. (The society, of course, insists that these enterprises belong to some members of the society and not to Opus Dei itself.)

Politically, Opus Dei supports Franco—a generalization as valid as any. Interestingly, at a time when the Jesuits and other Orders and even some members of the hierarchy have desisted from being closely identified with the regime, Opus Dei moved in the opposite direction; a fact that prompted the Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain, Vicente Enrique y Tarascón, to declare that it was not the Church that was compromised with the regime but only a certain group in it. Opus Dei commitment toward strong authoritarianism in religion makes the step toward authoritarianism in politics easy and even logical.

The question of the succession to Franco has concerned everyone in Spain, especially those in positions of power. Finally in 1969 Franco was persuaded to name Prince Juan Carlos as his successor. This solution, which, by excluding the prince's father, Don Juan, the direct successor of Alfonso XIII, tampered with the law of monarchical succession and was therefore resisted by strict monarchists, was advocated and pressed on Franco by a motley group. Its members held one thing in common: the desire to avoid conflict and to preserve what had been achieved during the Franco regime. At its head were Opus Dei Ministers, acting with Carrero Blanco; for Opus Dei the main motivation was to eliminate any possibility of the Church suffering harm in a post-Franco struggle among various groups. It is speculated that advocates of this type of succession preferred Juan Carlos to his father because he is likely to be more easily manipulated. At any rate, Opus Dei influence is not likely to wane with

Juan Carlos as king. The prince had been tutored by *Opusdeistas*, notably by Father Federico Suárez Verdaguer, now professor of history at the University of Navarre, and Angel López Amo, whose *Letters to the Prince* frankly revealed his distaste for universal suffrage. The foremost Opus Dei political theoretician, the monarchist and elitist Rafael Calvo Serer, served as secretary to Juan Carlos for a brief period.

One must add that there is no strict political homogeneity in Opus Dei; ex-Minister Ullastres, for one, was a well-known non-monarchist. One must also add, in reference to the activities of Opus Dei, that the society undertakes many noteworthy acts of its apostolate. It has established student residences, technical schools for men, vocational schools for women, and agricultural institutes. The society justly takes special pride in projects such as the labour institute of Tajamar, situated in the working-class section of Madrid, where 1,500 students receive training and instruction at minimal cost. Most Spaniards who have had personal contact with Opus Dei members have found them earnest and amiable; such also was the present writer's experience. One is especially struck by their good humour, a fulfilment of their founder's instruction: 'I want you to be happy always, for cheerfulness is an essential part of your way.'

Opposition to the society

Opus Dei has its enemies. Rivalry and friction had characterized its relationship with the Society of Jesus, but, apparently due to a directive from Rome, this has now been converted to an attitude of tolerance. The army—in whose ranks Opus Dei has not been without success—generally looked askance at the policy of relative liberalization and *rapprochement* with the rest of Western Europe advocated by *Opusdeista* Ministers. But it is the Falange that has been most hit by the rise of Opus Dei members in government. The latter's programme of administrative and economic reform went against Falangist bureaucracy and syndical organization. The clash between the two groups erupted in the open in the form of a controversy between a Falangist and an Opus Dei Minister. When Franco decided to relieve the Falangist Minister of his post, there remained no doubt as to whose star was in the ascendant. As mentioned earlier, the attempt on the part of the army and the Falange, at the time of the Burgos trials last year, to discredit Opus Dei has not had much success. Franco's promised concessions to the army have not been translated into action.

Opus Dei is also confronted with a third kind of obstacle, albeit one of a different character but just as real. It is what the knowledgeable Professor Stanley G. Payne of the University of Wisconsin characterized, in a conversation with the present writer, as the paranoiac attitude toward Opus Dei in Spain. Significantly, Spaniards have referred to the society as 'White Freemasonry', a word which in Spanish history is full

of exaggerated attributions. In an atmosphere where power is in the hands of a few, Opus Dei is not infrequently regarded as a kind of fifth column—already well entrenched in the power structure—that is aiming at the domination of the country. Interestingly, it is an attitude shared by varying social groups, including the intelligentsia; and one that is likely to persist for some time.

The final question. Is Opus Dei a kind of Holy Mafia, as its detractors claim, or is it purely a religious organization some of whose members, on account of their continuance in the exercise of secular professions, happen to hold positions of power and influence, as its members assert? As is often the case, the truth lies midway between the two. Opus Dei does not have a precise politico-economic ideology, but its well-selected and restricted group of Numeraries exhibit, to a great extent, a homogeneity of thinking. They are men of similar upper-middle-class background and like temperament. Furthermore, they hold seminars and discussion groups on secular subjects that serve to refine basic ideas and channel them to a general consensus. There is definitely a sense of corporate identity among its members; it would be an exaggeration to say that *Opusdeistas* arrived at positions of influence without the help of fellow members.

Opus Dei has aimed to capture the men of talent and promise; it has worked toward placing its members in positions of influence in order the better to rechristianize Spain. It may be that its phenomenal success had not been foreseen. It was rumoured that Escrivá himself had misgivings about his followers' entry into politics. López Rodó's case is illuminating in this regard: a man who did not openly seek to be in the forefront of politics and who ended up as one of the regime's most important politicians. There is no doubt that Opus Dei is—aside from the religious—a cultural, economic, and political pressure group in Spain. Parenthetically, the present writer might add the personal experience of not finding in Spanish libraries any books critical of the society.

The names and numbers of Opus Dei adherents are a closely guarded secret, though individuals may reveal themselves at their discretion. A high estimate of Opus Dei membership would be 18,000; 50,000 including Co-operators. As such, there is no correlation between its numbers and its influence. Opus Dei's founder admitted the strength of the society in Spain when he stated in an interview that 'I think it would not be humility, but blindness and ingratitude toward the Lord . . . not to recognize that Opus Dei exercises a real influence on Spanish society.' Explanations that it is a purely religious organization that seeks to fulfil its apostolate in all levels of society would not suffice to explain this phenomenon.