



The Spiritual Status of Work in Opus Dei

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Opus Dei, an organization founded by Spanish priest Josemaría Escrivá in 1928, in spite of being surrounded by controversies is already perceived by many faithful as one of the biggest breakthroughs in the history of the Catholic Church. It proclaims the message that every earthly reality, all possible circumstances of life, and especially daily work, are occasions to meet Christ. This article aims to look at the relation between everyday work and prayer in the teachings of Josemaría Escrivá, with a specific focus on the biblical commandment “to pray always” (Luke 18:1) or “to pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17). The author tries to analyze the way in which work becomes prayer for the faithful of Opus Dei.

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INTRODUCTION: PRAY ALWAYS

In the Christian tradition, everyday life is inseparable from prayer. Luke's introduction to *The Parable of the Persistent Widow* says, "Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary" (Luke 18:1). Saint Paul later adds "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thes. 5:16-18). It can be safely said that these passages have had an enormous influence on the whole project called "the Christian life". The commandment to pray always, when taken literally, is however an obvious impossibility – "can we unceasingly bend our knees, bow down our bodies or uplift our hands, that he should tell us: Pray without ceasing?" asks Saint Augustine (1961, 344). These two biblical passages demand interpretation: either there has to be a second, symbolic, "higher" meaning or the definition of prayer had to be somehow widened. Both ways were tried by the early Christians (simultaneously), and the call to continual prayer later became one of the stumbling blocks of the monastic movement within the Church and the whole idea of the consecrated life.

This is also one of the points in which Christianity departs from its Jewish roots; inspired mainly by Platonic philosophy. Whereas Origen (185 – ca.254 AD) teaches that life should be "one great connected prayer" (in Dummelow 1915, 763), and later Saint Augustine (354 – 430 AD) writes about "another way of praying, interior and unbroken" (1961, 344), Jewish rabbis of the Talmudic period, at least from a Christian point of view, seem to preserve a very down-to-earth, practical approach to the place of prayer in ordinary lives of their people. For example, "with respect to prayer at every hour", Rabbi Judah HaNasi was to say that "it is forbidden ... lest a man become accustomed to calling upon the Almighty falsely" (Browne 1987, 231). To pray three times a day was considered enough; the passage from the Book of Psalms, "Seven times a day I praise you because your edicts are just" (Psalm 119:164) simply meant "very often" (Dummelow 1915, 373), a lot more than is normally needed.

The same passage from the Book of Psalms in the Christian reading of the Old Testament had a crucial meaning and was linked from the very beginning precisely to the Evangelical call to pray always. Seven, the number of times the psalmist praised God every day, could also symbolize wholeness: life and daily work in God's presence. So even though the monastic tradition understood it literally ("now that sacred number of seven will be fulfilled by us if we perform the Offices of our service at the time of the Morning Office,

of Prime, of Terce, of Sext, of None, of Vespers and of Compline” – Saint Benedict 2001, s.16), monks were well aware that the communal prayer was to serve a higher goal than a mere literal fulfilment of one passage from the Bible. Chanting psalms seven times a day was to serve as an inspiration, strengthen the continual prayer of life. Each of the seven offices was meant to sanctify the time that followed: work, lectio divina, or rest. The Liturgy of the Hours, the opus Dei (work of God), became the main occupation of Benedictine monks, provided structure and was the central point of their lives. “Some commentators have claimed that this is, in fact, the first time in history that a precise work schedule was set up, and they add that this is the real beginning of the history of the modernization of work” (Kardong, 1995).

One of the most prominent solutions to the problem of the call to continual prayer was given by Saint Augustine. Commenting on the Psalm 37(38) he provided the faithful with an explanation of how to pray without ceasing, or rather what the Scriptures meant by it. He said that there was another way of praying – the way of desire. “Whatever else you are doing, if you long for that sabbath, you are not ceasing to pray. If you do not want to cease praying, do not cease longing. Your unceasing desire is your unceasing prayer. You will lapse into silence if you lose your longing” (1961, 344). For him psalms were songs of longing. He quotes the psalmist: “My Lord, my deepest yearning is before you; my groaning is not hidden from you” (Psalm 38:9) and argues that prayer is nothing else than precisely this groaning of the soul. It is not hidden from Him, and is always there: “if the desire is always within, so too is the groaning: it does not always come to ears of men, but it is never absent from the ears of God” (1961, 345). In the recent history of the Church the way of desire has been attributed by many theologians not only to prayer – “it has become common to speak of implicit faith, baptism “by desire” and membership in the “soul” of the Church, or membership in voto (“by desire”)” (Dulles 2003). In his *The Enchiridion* Augustine adds other ways of prayer, through faith, hope and love: “In these two [the Lord’s Prayer and the Creed] you have those three graces exemplified: faith believes, hope and love pray. But without faith the two last cannot exist, and therefore we may say that faith also prays” (Augustine 1873, 178-9).

THE NEW LOGIC

Throughout the ages many different ways to God have been institutionalized within the Catholic Church, ways to sanctity. The great founders like Benedict of Nursia, Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola left more or less formalized rules of life. The call to continual prayer, and therefore the

spiritual status of everyday life has always been at the centre of attention. Opus Dei proposes a whole new answer to the problem that concerns us, an answer that positions it in some ways almost outside the history of institutional development, or at least quite radically breaks with the main logic behind it – the so-called evolution of the “states of perfection” (Rodriguez 2003, 33). This article aims to look at the relation between work and prayer in Opus Dei through the teachings of its founder, or more precisely at the status of work in Opus Dei in the light of the call to continual prayer and how this call is reflected in the institutional, organizational side of Opus Dei. The author tries to address the following question: If Opus Dei really breaks with the traditional logic behind the attitude towards life in the world (which until the Second Vatican Council was treated almost “as an obstacle to holiness” – Illanes 2003, 154), what does it propose instead?

The answer, as simple as it seems at first glance, is not just a matter of reading and analysing the existing literature. As Opus Dei is surrounded by controversies (the so-called “black legend” – Messori 1998, 15-38), the literature on it is very polarised. Few, if any, publications maintain critical distance without falling into the other extreme of simply reproducing widely circulating conspiracy theories. The answer then is to be found neither in the literature favourable to Opus Dei (largely written by current members), including theological analyses, nor on the critical side, which simply tends to be poor in its standard of scholarship. What is more, even deeper analysis of the teachings of Josemaría Escrivá combined with several years’ empirical study (conducted by the author of this article) at first seems to have led into a dead end. The outcome is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Focusing its analysis on the concepts of work and prayer, this article exhibits and seeks to overcome some of these contradictions.

OPUS DEI

In the encyclical *Laborem Excercens* (1981) John Paul II stated that the Church “sees it as her particular duty to form a spirituality of work which will help all people to come closer, through work, to God” (s.24). Almost exactly one year later he signed another document: the apostolic constitution entitled *Ut Sit* (1982) which erected Opus Dei as the first, and so far the only, personal prelature within the Catholic Church.

The main message behind Opus Dei is the universal call to holiness of all the baptized: “as an institution [it] is both an implementation of, and a permanent service to, [this] message ... The institution is something [God] desires insofar as it can spread it” (Rodriguez 2003, 30). Opus Dei is not a religious

order, but it is something more than a movement and something quite different from a secular institute. Its focus is “not restricted or sectional” (to, for example, charity, education, missions), but it addresses Christians at large and seeks to awaken “their sense of vocation [which] often lies dormant and ineffectual” (2003, 31). Even though the task of the institution is so widely defined, it still has a specific spirituality and requires a specific vocation.

The special character of this vocation is manifested in a spirituality and a mission that led him to fulfil the all-embracing demands of the baptismal vocation, in his own state or condition in the midst of the world, and to be a ferment of Christian life in all secular activities, with the help of an institutional channel of the Church – the prelature of Opus Dei. (Ocariz, 2003, 145)

Work, as “man’s original vocation” and “a blessing from God” (Escrivá 1987b, s.482), plays a key part among these “secular activities.”

What the teaching of St. Josemaría Escrivá and the spirituality of Opus Dei propose is (to sum up) a prayer which, by encouraging a person to ground his life more on faith, incorporates into the dynamic of the experience of faith the totality of life, including ... the full range of earthly experiences and realities. (Illanes 2003, 197)

The name of the organization comes from Latin and means “the Work of God”. Josemaría Escrivá could not find a suitable name for over a year after he had founded it; he used these words in a descriptive sense, “without special reference to the sanctification of work” yet (Coverdale 2002, 71), but by the end of 1930 it became officially accepted. Since then Opus Dei is commonly referred to as the Work of God, or simply the Work. As many things as this name has been attributed to in the history of the Catholic Church, one is particularly important and was already mentioned in this article – the Liturgy of the Hours, the Divine Office, prayers to be recited at fixed times during the day or night by those obliged by their vocation, meaning usually priests, clerics, monks, nuns and other religious. The analysis of those two usages, attributions of the term would be of value in itself, but there is another reason why the comparison between the Benedictine and Opus Dei’s idea of what work and the work of God is may be considered interesting as a starting point for the main argument.

Let us work. Let us work a lot and work well, without forgetting that prayer is our best weapon. That is why I will never tire of repeating that we have to be contemplative souls in the midst of the world, who try to convert their work into prayer. (Escrivá, 1987b, s. 497)

These words of Josemaría Escrivá are a good summary of his teaching on the centrality of work and its relation to prayer, but can work really be prayer? How is prayer understood here? Terrence Kardong, a Benedictine monk, wrote two short articles for his abbey's newsletter entitled *Work is Prayer: Not!* (1995, part II – 1996). The title says a lot; and even though these short articles cannot be treated as serious scholarly resources, they also come from contemporary Catholic tradition and at the same time interestingly seem to be in stark contradiction to the teachings of Opus Dei. Kardong argues that if we look at prayer in the narrowest sense (following Matthew 6:6) as something done in secret, then work undermines it, because work is done for a reward. Work cannot be prayer, but both *lectio divina* and prayer are hard work in terms of effort that they require (1995). Kardong goes on to say that the maxim *work is prayer* is “misleading and harmful” (1996) for Christian life, as most people work to support their lifestyles, and therefore in some sense they choose to do so. If we assume that “an ordinary occupation of human beings [is] to fabricate a false ego-self that we present to others and to ourselves”, then “it is quite possible to define prayer as the discovery of the true self” (1995), while working to support a certain lifestyle is an activity with directly opposite purpose and effect. He therefore insists that work and prayer are different things and calls for a return to the simplicity of life where everything is in its proper place (1996).

There are obvious reasons why these two seemingly contradictory standpoints should not be compared. First, the concepts of work and prayer have different meanings for, and are used in different contexts by, Saint Benedict and then by Josemaría Escrivá fourteen centuries later. Kardong is well aware that in Saint Benedict's time work was considered a necessary evil, a consequence of original sin (1996). Secondly, Jesus himself could not have meant the same things saying “when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret” (Matthew 6:6) and later about “the necessity for them to pray always” (Luke 18:1), and clearly Escrivá, when talking about the sanctification of work, is closer to the latter understanding, while Kardong to the former. But if Opus Dei truly breaks with the traditional logic of the evolution of the states of perfection and its consequences for ordinary, everyday life, then it does not matter that much. The value of the comparison lies somewhere else, at the very basis of each of the “logics.” The main questions are the following: What is the new logic like? How does Opus Dei break with the old one? What is the mechanism behind the change?

The problem is not as local and particular as it seems (although even if it were, it would not have been less interesting). Around the world there are about one million priests and members of religious orders within the Catholic

Church. By comparison, Opus Dei has only a little over 85,000 official members, but possibly hundreds of thousands of so-called “sympathizers” (in 2002 the canonization of Josemaría Escrivá gathered more than 300.000 people on St. Peter’s square in Rome), and it is already seen by many commentators and vaticanists (see Messori, 1998) as the new driving force of the Church.

WHEN WORDS ARE TOO POOR

In his Rule, Saint Benedict says that Sundays in the life of a monk should be filled with reading, but later he adds: “if anyone should be so careless and slothful that he will not or cannot meditate or read, let some work be given him to do, that he may not be idle” (The Rule, chapter XLVIII). Idleness was considered, as it is now, the enemy of the soul. This is then common ground for Saint Benedict and Saint Josemaría, but everything else seems to be very different, if not completely reversed. The Rule of Saint Benedict is clear here: if a monk could not cope with reading, *lectio divina*, meditation, he “should be given light work to do” (Kadrong 1995). Not only is meditation very hard work that requires maximum concentration, and therefore the weak ones should be given something easier to do, but also through *lectio* the monk exposed himself to the Word. In another words, there he found, and then had to bravely face, the truth about himself.

Opus Dei’s secular spirituality sees the problem in a different way. One part of Josemaría Escrivá’s homily entitled “Towards Holiness” (1981, s.296) is particularly interesting here. On our way to holiness “we start with vocal prayers which many of us have been saying since we were children”, he says. “Is this not, in some way, a beginning of contemplation, an evident expression of trusting self-abandonment?” Then follow the words

First one brief aspiration, then another, and another... till our fervour seems insufficient, because words are too poor...: then this gives way to intimacy with God, looking at God without needing rest or feeling tired. We begin to live as captives, as prisoners. And while we carry out as perfectly as we can (with all our mistakes and limitations) the tasks allotted to us by our situation and duties, our soul longs to escape. (...) One begins to love Jesus, in a more effective way, with the sweet and gentle surprise of his encounter. (Escrivá 1981, s.296)

Although Saint Josemaría on another occasion said “first, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place, very much 'in the third place', action” (1987c, s.82), he seems to suggest here that when in the spiritual life one reaches a

point in which fervour is insufficient and words are too poor, one should turn to action, to work in particular (carrying out duties), as a form of contemplation. Then he adds a very peculiar phrase about loving Jesus in a more effective way. The application of the adjective “effective” (with all its economical and managerial connotations) to loving Jesus could itself be easily a topic of a separate article on Opus Dei’s teachings on work in relation to the wider field of management spirituality. What is, however, of key importance to this argument is the relation between words (lectio?, vocal prayer) and action (work). The question is which one is poor when compared to the other? Or rather: which one reaches its limit first on the way of spiritual development? The founder of Opus Dei said that its “weapon is not work; it is prayer. That is why we turn work into prayer, and why we have a contemplative soul” (Escrivá, quoted in Illanes 2003, 195). If work can replace words in contemplation, then truly it must be possible to convert it into prayer. Obviously these are theological questions that have been tackled for centuries. The task of this article is much more modest – to show the difference that Opus Dei tries to make, and how it goes about putting this difference into practice.

Members of Opus Dei spend quite a lot of time on religious activities every day. They are obliged to go to mass, do some spiritual reading (Bible, Catechism of the Catholic Church, plus some other spiritual book, 5-15 minutes on each), and devote some time to prayer. All these are parts of their contract with the Prelature of Opus Dei (secular contract, as opposed to religious vows), the so-called “norms of piety.” There is a place in their lives for prayer in the narrowest sense then, but the general idea is that they “must seek holiness in and through the ordinary realities of life, among which everyday work plays a key part” (Rodriguez 2003, 22). How does mental prayer become an ordinary reality (because the fact that it should be obvious)? What does the word *ordinary* mean here? For Josemaría Escrivá, judging on the basis of his teachings and his way of life, prayer as an ordinary reality means that it needs to be habitual (planned and ritualized) and as liturgical as possible.

All the faithful of Opus Dei live according to the “plan of life.” It varies from person to person, as it is supposed to take into account their specific conditions, and it is agreed on in the course of spiritual direction that every member receives from the Prelature. This “plan of life” consists of not only “norms of piety” and apostolic activities, everything is supposed to be planned, within reason – every little detail of the day. Saint Josemaría even said “when you parcel out your time, you need also to think how you can make use of the odd moments that become free at unforeseen times” (1987b,

s.513). Obedience to the spiritual director and the plan is absolutely crucial: “you will carry out this plan, my child, if you never, for any reason whatever, give up your times of prayer ... and your work, finished off well for him” (Escrivá 1987c, s.737). Prayer, even in the narrowest sense (mental, private prayer), occupies a prominent place in the plan. Interestingly, the founder of Opus Dei encourages his followers to use liturgical formulas when praying in private: “how I would like to see you using the psalms and prayers from the missal, rather than private prayers of your own choice” (Escrivá 1987c, s.86). When, however, it happens that they pray with their own words, it should be an ordinary conversation with the Father about the ordinary, everyday things. Not only there is no pressure placed on mystical, spiritual experiences (as happens in many of the new movements within the Church); in fact these are almost discouraged. This sphere is considered extraordinary, like vocation to consecrated life, and therefore not in line with the secular spirituality of Opus Dei.

This seems to be the first “movement” through which work and prayer are being pushed closer to each other. Since prayer is work, as it also requires effort, it is placed among other everyday activities to become an integral part of the life of the faithful. Through repetitiveness and ritual it becomes continual in the same sense as in the Benedictine liturgy. It therefore almost entirely has to lose its extraordinary, mystical features. Similarly to prayer, spiritual direction in Opus Dei also has down-to-earth, ordinary character. It takes the form of a weekly confession of sins, but also fortnightly conversation with a lay, celibate spiritual director. As one of the members wrote, this conversation is “not simply the sharing of feelings. Rather it’s a means of receiving friendly, practical advice about how to love Christ better” (Pakaluk 1994). Indirect this time, but again there is a reference to effectiveness in the context of loving Jesus. “Practical” means “directly applicable to daily life,” both family and professional life. Advice is usually very detailed, particular. Absolute openness in front of your confessor and spiritual director is strongly encouraged, if not demanded (“Anyone who hides a temptation from his director shares a secret with the devil. He has become a friend of the enemy” – Escrivá 1987b, s.323).

ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

While the first “movement,” presented in the previous section, seeks to bring the religious activities down to the realm of the ordinary to somehow find a place for these activities in the everyday life of an ordinary member of society, the second works in the opposite direction – elevates the ordinary

reality to the divine level. The call to continual prayer is addressed here through offering, sacrifice:

[God] wants you to know that your human vocation, your profession, your talents, are not omitted from his divine plans. He has sanctified them and made them a most acceptable offering to his Father. (Escrivá 1974, s.20)

This comes from two important ideas: “the sense of divine filiation” (Escrivá 1987a, s.987), and the idea of the common priesthood of the faithful. Both are very much present in the post-Conciliar Catholic theology, but are especially crucial to Saint Josemaría’s teachings. The faithful are “enabled to offer their lives (...) as living, holy hosts, pleasing to God: the common priesthood of the faithful is an “existential” priesthood” (Rodriguez, 2003, 44). In Opus Dei’s lay spirituality the key component of human’s existence is work, and the aim of life is sanctity, almost in the sense of being perfect (“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect” Matthew 5:48). The sanctification of work is a logical consequence of these two, but in Opus Dei it not only happens in a sense of “unfolding the Creator’s work” (Gaudium et Spes, s.34), it is understood in a much more literal way. Saint Josemaría says: “That half-finished work of yours is a caricature of the holocaust, the total offering God is asking of you” (Escrivá 1987a, s.700). This is another, perhaps the most important example for how the founder of Opus Dei breaks with the idea of the states of perfection. He does that not by contradicting and challenging it, but by taking it literally, to its extreme consequence. It is interesting to compare this with what happened in Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple:

In Judaism “there was an early relationship between sacrifice and prayer (Gen. 13:4; 26:25), which persisted until the destruction of the Second Temple. The sacrifice suggested man’s submission to the will of God; the prayer often provided a commentary on the offering. But the two are not necessarily linked. It is noteworthy that the sacrificial regulations make no liturgical provisions (except for the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16:21); but actually the offerings were themselves a dramatic form of prayer. Contrariwise, prayer could replace sacrifice (Ps. 141:2). In the synagogue, prayer, accompanied by Scripture reading and exposition, entirely took the place of altar offerings” (Abrahams 1971, 979).

In Opus Dei, the relationship between work and prayer paradoxically resembles the early one in Judaism. Even though prayer is supposed to occupy the first place in the lives of the faithful and action very much comes third, after atonement (Escrivá 1987c, s.82), it cannot come before the “existential”

sacrifice. But since man was put on earth (in Paradise!) to work (*ut operaretur* – Escrivá, 1987b, s.482), then work is a key part this sacrifice, and prayer serves merely as a commentary on the offering. This lay Catholic spirituality proposed by Opus Dei is then, in some strange sense, very materialistic. During fieldwork, the interviewees very often called their spirituality “materialism open to the Spirit,” or simply “spiritual materialism.” True, the faithful are to be detached from material goods (or rather non-attached), but they are strongly encouraged, as one of the leading Opus Dei theologians puts it, “to produce work well done” (Illanes, 2003, 186)! Man is a producer of work well done, of pleasing offerings to God. This allows for such words like efficiency to be used in religious, spiritual context.

Consequently, the attitude towards the whole material world changed. The ordinary, average, middle-class life, with everything that comes with it, from being almost an obstacle to holiness, is now turned into “a means of personal sanctification and apostolate” (Escrivá, 1934, quoted in Illanes, 2003, 173). “Every noble human reality can therefore be a channel for the Christian spirit” (Ocariz 2003, 115), “this is why man ought not to limit himself to material production” (Escrivá 1974, s.48), but should go a step further – produce work well done and offer it to God. This leap from “an obstacle” to “a means of” sanctification and apostolate is typical in Opus Dei. For example, material goods, signs of status and professional prestige, are not discouraged. As long as a member is “non-attached” to them, they serve his apostolate; they are his “bait as a fisher of men” (Escrivá, 1987c, s.372). Even a certain degree of luxury is justifiable as a means of apostolate.

SUMMARY: GOD SPEAKING THROUGH THE WORLD

Almost thirty years ago the Patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Albino Luciani, just a month before he was elected Pope (John Paul I), wrote a short profile of Josemaría Escrivá for an Italian newspaper. Referring to Opus Dei’s spirituality he said

More than three hundred years earlier St. Francis de Sales taught something along the same lines. (...) However, Msgr. Escrivá went further than St. Francis de Sales in many respects. St. Francis proclaimed sanctity for everyone but seems to have only a “spirituality for lay people” whereas Msgr. Escrivá wants a lay spirituality.” (...) Escrivá is more radical; he goes as far as talking about “materializing” – in a good sense – the quest for holiness. For him, it is the material work itself which must be turned into prayer sanctity. (Luciani, 1978)

Paradoxically considered conservative, in many respects Opus Dei seems to take a truly radical step “forward.” It is widely accused of slowing down the postconciliar changes in the Church, but arguably it would be more plausible to accuse it of going too far. The teaching of the Church on work, however revolutionized by the Council and later in encyclicals by Paul VI and John Paul II, seems to still remain within the “Saint Francis the Sales spirituality for lay people” idea. The Council teaches that those called to the “earthly service of men ... devote themselves to that future when humanity itself will become an offering accepted by God” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, s.38). Pope Paul VI added, “Considered from a Christian point of view, work has an even loftier connotation. It is directed to the establishment of a supernatural order here on earth” (1967, s.28). Daily work, “which in most cases is of temporal character” (John XXIII 1961, s.256), is then directed at the future, and it is the whole of humanity that is to become an acceptable offering to God. This is not to say that there is a theological shift between the official papal teaching and that of Opus Dei; my aim is just to point out the important differences in vocabulary, and how the accents and priorities are placed.

Escrivá’s lay spirituality, through materializing “the quest for holiness” (Luciani 1978) by turning obstacles on the way into “means of” achieving it, relegates the consecrated life to the realm of extraordinary. There is nothing unusual in that, religious life has always been considered extraordinary, but Opus Dei defines itself almost as “not being a religious order” and, with its strong claim that holiness is achievable in all circumstances, it effectively puts the last nail in the coffin of the idea of *states of perfection*. The nature and task of prayer in this “lay spirituality,” and consequently the understanding of the call to continual prayer, change too:

In the Christian who lives in the world, the Christian whom God wants to live in the world, this action of prayer implies recognizing that through the world God is speaking to man and that it is through the world, using the world, that man should respond ... In no sense does this mean a flight from the world; rather, it means delving into the world, to grasp its meaning better and to understand better what God wants one as a concrete individual to be doing there (Illanes, 2003, 199)

Josemaría Escrivá could almost agree with the statement taken from Kardong’s article that “an ordinary occupation of human beings is to fabricate a false ego-self” (1995), except that, crucially, this “ego-self” does not have to be false. In the spirituality of Opus Dei prayer in the widest, “continual” sense is an action that happens through and using the world. Spiritual reading and formation in Church’s teachings are in some sense externally inserted in this

cycle of reading God through the world and responding to Him using the world. The obvious side effect of this is the conservative reputation of the organization (outside the socio-political context in which it was born and grew), as there is no position from which formation could be contested. By relying on the authority of the Church's official teachings and that of the founder – Josemaría Escrivá, it serves as a tool to read the world rather than being *lectio divina*. From this perspective man truly “fabricates his ego-self,” but if it is “work well done” (Illanes 2003, 186), then it can be offered to God constantly, “without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17).

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