

## WARRANE COLLEGE. THE DIFFICULT BEGINNINGS OF AN OPUS DEI UNIVERSITY RESIDENCE IN SYDNEY

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**Abstract:** *This article refers to events that occurred in Sydney, Australia, from 1966 to 1974, to provide some general background to the foundation of Warrane College, a university hall of residence entrusted to the spiritual care of Opus Dei and affiliated with the University of New South Wales. Primarily based on journalistic accounts, this study is divided into three main sections: first, it provides a narrative of the foundation of the college, then an analysis of the particular aims and ethos of the residence, and finally, it describes the growing opposition to the project and the subsequent protests of 1971 and 1974.*

**Keywords:** *Opus Dei – Josemaría Escrivá – Warrane College – Australia – 1966 –1974.*

The history of Warrane College, an Opus Dei university residence for students at the University of New South Wales, can be traced back to the 1950s. Then the Catholic archbishop of Sydney, Norman Cardinal Gilroy, first came into contact with members of Opus Dei and a sample of their educational initiatives in Europe. The most senior figure of the Catholic Church in Australia, Cardinal Gilroy attended the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), when he is likely to have met Saint Josemaría Escrivá. The Reverend Thomas Muldoon, auxiliary bishop of Sydney, recalls that after an audience with the founder of Opus Dei, Pope Pius XII famously said to Cardinal Gilroy that Monsignor Escrivá “is a true saint, a man sent by God for our times”<sup>1</sup>.

As it turned out, Gilroy’s visit to Rome was to prove a crucial moment in the early history of Opus Dei in Australia. The cardinal was then entertaining the idea of setting up a residential college at a university

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1 *Postulación de la Causa de Beatificación y Canonización del Siervo de Dios Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Sacerdote, Fundador del Opus Dei: Artículos del Postulador* (Roma, 1979), p. 395, and n. 1424.

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campus in Sydney and the University of New South Wales – then the New South Wales University of Technology – was very short of places for student accommodation. Opus Dei, then a secular institute of the Church, must have loomed large in the mind of the Australian cardinal, not only because of the words of Pius XII about its saintly president and founder, but also because Gilroy had taken note of the experience of its members in the administration of university halls in Spain, Italy, Ireland and the United States<sup>2</sup>.

In 1963, Father Salvador Ferigle, a member of Opus Dei and lecturer at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, had been to Sydney on his way from Tokyo to Rome, and had met Cardinal Gilroy and visited the university campus. Four months later, and under the impulse of Saint Josemaría, two priests and two laymen of Opus Dei went to Australia to settle for the first time. They lived on Silver Street, in the suburb of Randwick, near the university. Several other laymen from Spain and the United States came to support the apostolic work of Opus Dei in Australia, and in 1965, they set up ‘Nairana Cultural Centre’ on High Street in Randwick, also very close to the campus.

In the 1950s, there was a move to set up a Catholic university in Sydney but it was finally decided to build instead a residential hall and add to the long-standing presence and important function of St. John’s College at the University of Sydney.<sup>3</sup> A letter from Gilroy to another Italian cardinal in June 1963 reveals his enthusiasm about the prospects of an Opus Dei university residence in Australia:

‘Opus Dei’ is quite unknown here, but I have heard so much that is good about it that I share Your Eminence’s confidence that it will do a great deal of good...The apostolate of ‘Opus Dei’ should be appropriate antidote to the spirit emanating from these places that have

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2 Cf. Ian WALKER, *Church, College and Campus: The Sacred and the Secular in the Foundation of Denominational Colleges in Australian Universities, with particular reference to certain colleges in universities established in the period 1945 to 1975* (unpublished doctoral thesis), The University of New South Wales (Sydney, 2001), p. 427. The foundation of university residences run by Opus Dei around the world is summarised in Andrés VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *op.cit.*, pp. 341, 504; and Owen F. HUGHES, Owen F. HUGHES, “Disorganised Organisation? Opus Dei Replies”, *Arena*, 30 September 1968, p. 4; *Tharunka*, 29 October, 1968.

3 Cf. Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 427; *Tharunka*, 7 June, 1966.

a high intellectual standard but inculcate indifference to religion.<sup>4</sup>

The “Kensington Tech” (or New South Wales University of Technology) was founded in 1949 and in the face of increasing student demand for accommodation in the 1950s, it became the most suitable campus for new halls of residence<sup>5</sup>. At the Australian Universities Commission in 1959 the Vice-Chancellor of the university and representatives of the Church met to discuss the prospects of setting up a Catholic college on campus, and it was agreed that “depending upon a suitable site being obtained, and Commonwealth grants for the triennium 1961-63, the Church would match the available finance to provide a college for up to two hundred residents”<sup>6</sup>. The details of the negotiations between the Church and the university concerning the building were managed by Father John Burnheim of St. John’s College. It is worth citing a letter he sent to the Vice-Chancellor in June 1963 in which he reveals a great deal of enthusiasm for the project and the Church’s confidence in the suitability of Opus Dei for its management:

I am very happy to be able to tell you that a Catholic organisation called Opus Dei is very anxious to push ahead with the project for a College at the University of N.S.W., and that the Church authorities are giving them every encouragement and support. Two of their members, Father James W. Albrecht and Christopher Schmitt are in Sydney and are empowered to take immediate steps towards making a foundation...In the near future I shall no doubt be handing over any negotiations concerning a college at the University of N.S.W. I know that they will pursue the project with great vigour, and I hope that they will enjoy the same very cordial and understanding relationship with you and the University that I have enjoyed over the past few years<sup>7</sup>.

Members of Opus Dei had spent only three years in Australia and they were now entrusted with a major task for which they received unreserved support from university and church authorities. Cardinal Gilroy’s letter to Father

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4 Sydney Archdiocesan Archives, Series 40/35. See also John LUTTRELL, *Norman Thomas Gilroy. An obedient life*, St Pauls Publications, Sydney, 2017, p. 231.

5 See Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, pp. 436-437 and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter *SMH*), 10 June, 1971, p. 14.

6 Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 432.

7 These excerpts are taken from UNSW Archives (FN. 29367 CN.461/1), and included in Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 433.

Albrecht in March 1964 stamped the initiative with an official blessing:

As you know, for some years now, the Archdiocese has had the desire to establish a Residential College at the University of New South Wales under Catholic auspices. I am pleased that *Opus Dei* has come to Sydney and is providing an opportunity for this desire to become a reality...While I was in Rome, I had the opportunity to visit one of your international student residences there. I was very pleased with the spirit of the people in the residence and the work *Opus Dei* is accomplishing there. I am happy that you plan to establish a residential college in order to carry on this work here, and I wish you every success and assure you of my blessing<sup>8</sup>.

Michael Steuart, then the secretary of a committee set up to carry the project through, received a letter in 1968 from the Chancellor of the university praising the efforts of such a group and stating that he was

also pleased that the direction of Warrane is to be entrusted to Opus Dei, an Association which has had wide experience in this field<sup>9</sup>.

The college was named Warrane, and this was perhaps the very first manifestation of its affiliation with the principles promoted by the projects under the direction of Opus Dei members. Warrane is an anglicised version of *Warrang* which in one of the aboriginal languages of Australia means 'Sydney Cove', where the first European settlers established themselves in 1788. Some may have expected the new college at the University of New South Wales to have a 'Catholic' name – after all, the Church had initiated and was significantly involved in the project.

Furthermore, an initiative of this nature could have followed the precedent of St. John's College, set up in the nineteenth century as the Catholic college of what was then the only university in Sydney. Josemaría Escrivá always practised and encouraged others to have a very intense veneration of the saints of the Church, but he had indicated as early as 1943 that the corporate initiatives of Opus Dei would not have the name of saints, so none of these

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8 Cited in Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, pp. 434-435 (from the UNSW Archives, see above). Cfr. Patrick O'FARRELL, *UNSW: A Portrait*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 1999, p. 165.

9 Cited in Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 437. Refer also to *Committee of Enquiry into Warrane College*, The University of New South Wales Council, November, 1974, p. 2).

projects would be identified as officially Catholic<sup>10</sup>. Opus Dei had gone to Australia to serve the Church and the ethos of Warrane College was to be closely associated with the principles and values of Catholic doctrine. However, it was made clear from the beginning that the college was not run by the diocese, nor was it in any way dependent on directives suggested by the hierarchy more than any private initiative run by ordinary Australian Catholics.

Cardinal Gilroy, who seems to have understood this aspect of the spirit of Opus Dei, celebrated the work of the Warrane College Development Committee in a letter sent to its secretary, Michael Stuart, in October 1968: “it is especially pleasing to know that you have the co-operation of men of different faiths who have the common desire to establish Warrane College in the knowledge that its benefits will be extended to students of all faiths”<sup>11</sup>. Residence in the college was open to non-Catholics just as much as membership of its management and administration. As Owen F. Hughes remarked in *Tharunka*, the newspaper of the Students’ Union, as with all residences of Opus Dei throughout the world, “Warrane will be open to students of all religions, races and nationalities. The College will, in fact, make every effort to have the greatest possible diversity among the residents and tutors”, and quoting the words of Saint Josemaría, he continues: “In Opus Dei pluralism is not simply tolerated. It is desired and loved, and in no way hindered”<sup>12</sup>. This was not mere university diplomacy. When the college was officially opened in 1971, *The Sydney Morning Herald* informed that “its resident population will include undergraduate and postgraduate students from every faculty at the university, and will represent more than 20 countries, mostly in the Pacific area. Open to students of all faiths, the college has residents of many denominations”<sup>13</sup>. In 1972, for example, 72 per cent of residents at Warrane were Australian; 24 per cent from Asia; and 4 per cent from other continents, and since its foundation, the college

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10 Cf. Josemaría ESCRIVÁ, *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá de Balaguer*, Sydney, Little Hills Press, 1993, n. 81; see also n. 47. This aspect of the spirit of Opus Dei is succinctly explained in Scott HAHN, *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Grace: My Spiritual Journey in Opus Dei*, New York, Doubleday, 2006, p. 89.

11 Cited in Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 436.

12 *Tharunka*, 29 October, 1968. In 1974, for example, 37 per cent of the residents at Warrane College were not Catholic (*Committee of Enquiry, op.cit.*, p. 9).

13 *SMH*, 10 June, 1971, p. 14.

has hosted students from over 40 different countries. This multicultural interaction was so prominent a feature in college life, that it was noted and celebrated in 1972 by the Minister for Immigration<sup>14</sup>.

The lease of land which allowed the construction of Warrane was signed on 27th March 1967. Construction of the college began in January, 1969, and the building was ready to accommodate students for the third term of the academic year of 1970. It stood as an imposing structure of dark brown bricks which dominated the skyline of Kensington with its tower of eight floors elevated over the south-east corner of the university campus on Anzac Parade with Barker Street. The building was equipped with single bedrooms and facilities to accommodate 204 students, resident tutors and other senior and domestic staff. The first two stories included the chapel, a number of offices, a common room and snack bar, a library and music room, as well as a large dining room adjacent to the entrance hall and reception room. Next to the dining room were the premises reserved for the household administration, managed and directed by women of Opus Dei in collaboration with many others.

For the standards of the 1960s, Warrane College was indeed a large-scale structure which impressed the neighbouring community and was the subject of an extraordinarily detailed description in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.<sup>15</sup> Opus Dei was barely starting its activities in Australia and its members would have surely preferred a much smaller building in order to offer a more personalised attention to residents in accordance with the principles that inspired this type of project in other parts of the world. In this case, a particular model of residential education, so successfully tested in several countries, was naturally adapted to local circumstances, not without difficulties as we shall see. More in the traditional style of Opus Dei residences was Creston College, a university hall for women with capacity for 30 students, who settled in the building previously used for the 'Nairana

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14 The Minister for Immigration was Albert J. Grassby. Another manifestation of the international character of Warrane was 'The Asian Cultural Festival,' organised by college residents, attended by more than 300 people, and opened by Sir Robert Webster, Chancellor of the University of New South Wales. There were about 1,000 overseas students enrolled at the university in 1970 (Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, p. 120).

15 Cf. "Governor to open university college," *SMH*, 10 June, 1971, p. 14. See also Jon POWIS, "Opus Dei on the campus," *The National Times*, August, 1970; and *Tharunka*, 2 October, 1968; 25 February, 1969; and 4 November, 1969.

Cultural Centre', just outside the northern bounds of the university campus, on High Street<sup>16</sup>.

Dr Joseph F. Martins was appointed master, the highest authority in the residence. A member of Opus Dei, Joe Martins had migrated from the United States after obtaining a doctorate in physical chemistry from Harvard University and having directed a small residential hall in Boston. The dean of students was Dr Owen F. Hughes, also from the United States, and then a lecturer in the School of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering at the University of New South Wales. In the administrative and academic management of Warrane, they were assisted by a number of staff, among them 12 residential tutors, divided between the six residential floors, several lay members of Opus Dei, and two Catholic chaplains, also in residence.<sup>17</sup>

Warrane was officially opened on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1971, by Sir Roden Cutler, Governor of New South Wales. The ceremony was also attended by David Hughes, Minister for Public Works; Sir Kevin Ellis, Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly and Deputy Chancellor of the University of New South Wales; Professor Rupert Myers, Vice-Chancellor of the university; the members of the Warrane Development Committee; and more than 200 guests, among them the college residents. Warrane then became one of the 70 university residences in Australia and one of the six colleges affiliated with the University of New South Wales<sup>18</sup>. Like Warrane, all these institutions were affiliated university colleges which aimed to provide a communal environment nurtured with active participation in a variety of collegial activities ranging from social events to cultural initiatives, from sporting competitions to academic endeavours. Like all affiliated colleges in Australia, these were not simply halls of residence providing temporary accommodation during the university term in the manner of student hostels. Like the first colleges established in Australia in the nineteenth century, the post-war residences aimed to maintain and cultivate at least the most fundamental traditions first espoused by Oxbridge colleges in the Middle Ages, "while expressing, in their architecture and style of life, new ideas and approaches to university student life"<sup>19</sup>.

In varying degrees, an intense collegial life was common to all the

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16 Cf. *Tharunka*, 1 September, 1971.

17 Cf. "Governor to open university college," *SMH, op.cit.*, p. 14.

18 *Tharunka*, 25 February, 1969. Cf. "Governor to open university college," *SMH, op.cit.*, p. 14.

19 "Governor to open university college," *SMH, op.cit.*, p. 14.

student halls affiliated with the University of New South Wales from the late 1960s, and came to complement and enrich the university experience for thousands of students in Sydney. However, the principles upon which Warrane was established and the aims driving the efforts of its management towered above the objectives of all other residential colleges at the University of New South Wales, and indeed in Australia.

In concordance with the aims of the Education Development Association, the college's first and most fundamental purpose was "to promote education and the development of character in accordance with the principles and ideals of Christianity"<sup>20</sup>. Such an objective was common to all university residences established by members of Opus Dei throughout the world, but in 1970, it implied a most ambitious and daring novelty for a college in the increasingly secularised environment of campuses in Australia<sup>21</sup>. When asked whether Opus Dei was relevant to the Australian conditions, the college master, Joe Martins, vigorously answered that "there are two main points that Opus Dei emphasises: living one's Christian commitment fully and sanctifying oneself through one's work. It is obvious that both Christianity and work have a place in Australia. Opus Dei's message is relevant here as in the some 40 countries where the Association carries on its work..."<sup>22</sup>.

Tony Shannon, formerly a lecturer in the Department of Applied Mathematics and now Emeritus Professor at the University of Technology Sydney, had been in touch with members of Opus Dei and residents at Warrane long enough to grasp the essential mission of the college. In an article published in 1974 in the *Canberra Times*, he explains:

Warrane's aims are: (1) to ensure good study conditions and further the intellectual development offered by the university; (2) to promote a spirit of friendship and understanding in an atmosphere of warmth and service to others; (3) to provide, for those students who wish it, the opportunity to know and practise the Christian faith more fully; (4) to encourage participation in all aspects of university life; (5) to foster

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20 *Committee of Enquiry, op.cit.*, p. 11. This was cited from the Memorandum of E.D.A. in relation to the objectives of Warrane College, its affiliated institution.

21 Cf. Donald HORNE, *The Lucky Country: Australia in the Sixties*, Ringwood, Penguin Books, 1964, pp. 52-58; Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, pp. 162, 167.

22 "Warrane College-Opus Dei", *op.cit.*



an awareness of one's social responsibility and of the opportunities to contribute to the needs of the society in which we live<sup>23</sup>.

In order to ensure good study conditions and further the intellectual development offered by the university, the college appointed several tutors every year. These tutors would be residents chosen on the basis of seniority and academic experience, and in 1971 they were expected to conduct tutorials, be available to students for consultation concerning their university courses, and be aware of their academic standing. Beside these academic obligations, these tutors were also asked to fulfill a number of mentoring and leadership tasks. In 1973, these roles were separated and two groups of tutors were established: those designated 'academic tutors' were exclusively concerned with the academic welfare of the students in the college, while a second group known as 'resident tutors,' were appointed for each floor to look after their personal wellbeing and were entrusted with some authority over the residents.

The sanctification of work is at the very centre of the message of Opus Dei, and since studying was the principal occupation of university students, it was naturally afforded a central place in the college experience. "An hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer", once wrote St. Josemaría.<sup>24</sup> A large number of tutors, a comprehensive tutorial program, an encouraging environment of academic achievement, and ideal study conditions were the ingredients of the Warrane recipe. An appropriate ratio between tutors and residents ensured personalised attention and regular academic counselling. In addition to the assistance offered by the permanent staff, the academic environment at the college was substantially aided by 22 visiting and resident academic tutors, who offered assistance on a wide range of subjects.

Academic achievement was encouraged and rewarded at Warrane from its earliest history. A college scholar award was given each year to students who on average obtained a distinction level or higher in all subjects. Further contribution to this environment of academic excellence was made by weekly guest speakers to broaden the professional and cultural horizons of the residents, and study weekends designed for those who wanted or

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23 Tony SHANNON, 'In defence of Warrane and Opus Dei', *Canberra Times*, June, 1974.

24 ESCRIVÁ, *Furrow*, Sydney, Little Hills Press, 1987, n. 428; and Scott HAHN, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

needed to intensify their study towards preparing exams or completing assignments.

The Warrane model, however, was not entirely geared towards the academic performance of its residents, nor was this successful system what characterised the college most. The staff was also greatly concerned with promoting a spirit of friendship and understanding in an atmosphere of warmth and service to others. Residential tutors were appointed for this purpose. According to an outline of proposals for 1971, the staff indicated that two tutors were to be allocated to each floor and they would be expected to help establish get-togethers or social gatherings on the floors in a way which creates a home-like environment among the residents; be vigilant about study conditions, apply the rules and deal with the students on these matters; visit the residents with frequency for counselling and mentoring; and finally, help the House Committee member on each floor in promoting floor-based activities and contributing to the social interaction and cohesion of the group<sup>25</sup>.

And just as the college promoted and rewarded academic achievement, the sportsman of the week was presented with the ‘Willie Wong Best and Fairest Award’, a cup named after a resident from Malaysia who represented Warrane with distinction in a number of sporting contests. The presentation of this award became a tradition in college and has continued to honour the efforts and skills of many residents. Sporting success was a fundamental element of cohesion and has fed college spirit for decades in a country where sport awakens unparalleled fervour.

A number of public lectures were organised at Warrane every year and added to the talks given every week by guest speakers from the professional and academic world. These weekly lectures served to widen perspectives among the residents while facilitating privileged contact with a range of professional undertakings. These sessions also fostered an ever present awareness of the student’s social responsibility and of the opportunities to contribute to the needs of society, another of the aims procured by the staff and tutors at Warrane, and unmistakably inspired by the mission preached by the founder of Opus Dei of “contributing to resolve in a Christian way the

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25 Cf. “Outline proposals for the college in 1971,” Minutes of the College Council, ref. 1/71, p. 2.

problems which affect the community of each country”<sup>26</sup>.

Residents at Warrane were encouraged to participate in community service and devote some of their time to visiting nursing homes and families in poorer areas of Sydney, feed and accompany the homeless, and assist the elderly with some gardening. These activities have greatly enriched the college experience for generations of university students, and have been an integral part of the education for life which is offered at Warrane.

These particular features were characteristic of a college committed to the education of its residents in Catholic morals and ethics. The final and most important of all objectives established with the foundation of Warrane College in 1970 was to provide, for those students who wish it, the opportunity to know and practise the Christian faith more fully. This purpose inspired all the other aims we have cited and, in various ways, it informed every single project designed for the college. On offer to Catholic residents and the faithful at large, as well as those interested in Catholicism, was a rich variety of spiritual and doctrinal activities: ongoing courses on Christian principles, ethics and history, a weekly chaplain’s talk, and personalised spiritual guidance and training were made available to all who wish to start or improve a relationship with God. The chaplains were also available for confessions, and Holy Mass was celebrated in the college chapel every morning. But in explaining the role of the chaplains in Warrane, the college vice-master insisted that “functions of a religious character will of course be organised, but the residents will be under no obligation to attend them. In fact, respect for the freedom of the individual to participate or not in any activity is basic to the spirit of *Opus Dei*”<sup>27</sup>. In consequence, “no obligation whatsoever of a religious nature will be imposed on the residents”, who could gain acceptance into the college regardless of their religious beliefs or personal convictions<sup>28</sup>.

Catholic or not, the residents have always been encouraged to lead a life of virtue and principle. They have acquired or developed social skills later necessary for forging lasting friendships and for the crafting of successful professional careers. There can be no doubt as to the radical change that years in Warrane have prompted in the life of many young men. Staying at the college was therefore a challenging experience for those willing to assume the demands of an education for life. The resident was no mere

26 *Conversations, op.cit.*, n. 19. Cf. *Conversations, op.cit.*, ns. 56, 57, 119.

27 *Tharunka*, 29 October, 1968.

28 Cf. Owen F. HUGHES, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

lodger because the college was much more than a student hostel.

However, the same Warrane ethos responsible for its success and attractiveness to so many also encountered hostility from a noisy minority, particularly among student activists on campus. The validity of such ambitious and transcendental goals was not understood or tolerated by everyone, for they embodied a staunch resistance to many of the trends and ideologies emerging at university campuses from the mid-1960s.

All over the world, the traditional university experience was challenged by radical minorities who opposed all forms of authority and morality. In the words of Patrick O'Farrell, these trends responded to "emergent student mores, marked by anti-authoritarianism, anti-religion, and aggressive personal laxity"<sup>29</sup>. In the English-speaking world, much of this activism and protest in the 1960s was fuelled by a combination of Marxist ideas and the new commandments of the sexual revolution, and found an inspiration in the 1964 Berkeley Free Speech Movement, among other student uprisings<sup>30</sup>. In Australia, the university environment quickly became politicised and rebellious from 1965, after the commitment of Australian troops in support of the United States' military involvement in the Vietnam conflict, which was seen as cooperating with authoritarian and capitalist forces<sup>31</sup>.

A minority of radicalised students wanted to assert control over university

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29 Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, p. 162.

30 Refer to Kenneth KENISTON and Michael LERNER, "Campus Characteristics and Campus Unrest," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 395 (May, 1971), pp. 39-53, and particularly pp. 50-52; Helen LEFKOWITZ HOROWITZ, "The 1960s and the Transformation of Campus Cultures," *History of Education Quarterly*, 26 (Spring, 1986), pp. 1-38; James W. CLARKE and Joseph EGAN, "Social and Political Dimensions of Campus Protest Activity," *The Journal of Politics*, 34 (May, 1972), pp. 500-523. Cf. Mick ARMSTRONG, "The radicalisation of the campuses, 1967-1974," *One, Two, Three, What are we fighting for?*, Melbourne, Socialist Alternative, 2001: [www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions](http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions)). See also James FRANKLIN, *Corrupting the Youth: A History of Philosophy in Australia*, Sydney, Macleay Press, 2003, pp. 289-295.

31 Cf. W.J. WEST, *Opus Dei: Exploding a Myth*, Sydney, Little Hills Press, 1987, p. 156; Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, pp. 451-453; O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, p. 162. See also references in footnote 61.

administration and thus transform the nature of tertiary education by changing the focus from teaching and learning to urging political, moral and social change. Although a rejection of traditional morality and any form or shape of authoritarianism were the major causes that united student movements across the world, activists at different universities were constantly in search of a local *cause célèbre* to initiate and justify action, mostly by a typical sequence of propaganda, march and occupation<sup>32</sup>. In Australia, for example, any measure taken by university authorities which contradicted the emerging ideology was turned into a cause for protest. In consequence, from 1967 to 1974 there were violent student uprisings at the universities of Monash, Queensland, Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, La Trobe, Flinders, and Macquarie<sup>33</sup>.

The student population at the University of New South Wales in Sydney was moderate compared to the others, perhaps because it had originally been a technological institute and was therefore attended by a larger proportion of science and engineering students<sup>34</sup>. The Students' Union, however, was controlled by people who had been influenced by the Freethought Society, the Libertarians, and the Sydney Push in addition to influence exercised by international trends, all of which advocated the defiant ideas typically associated with the movements of the 1960s<sup>35</sup>. In 1971, then, student activism at this university found a most convenient cause for protest, a real gold mine to keep radicals occupied on campus. The presence of Opus Dei in Warrane College was suitably turned into a 'local Vietnam' and the Catholic organisation became the target of violent opposition in the early 1970s. The historian Patrick O'Farrell explains that "some were genuine radicals frustrated in their larger ambitions and seeing in Warrane a specifically local issue which they might champion with some hope of drawing on immediate and individual discontent"<sup>36</sup>.

Opus Dei was seen by the radicals as a formidable opponent because its

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32 Cf. Mick ARMSTRONG, *op.cit.*; Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 442.

33 Cf. Mick ARMSTRONG, *op.cit.*; James FRANKLIN, *op.cit.*, pp. 281-294, 309; Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, pp. 162-163.

34 Cf. Mick ARMSTRONG, *op.cit.*

35 See James FRANKLIN, *op.cit.*, pp. 158-161; and Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, pp. 439-442.

36 Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, p. 163; *Tharunka*, 4 June, 1968.



*Tharunka front page, 12 June 1974*

mission was in direct collision with the moral relaxation they intended for university students. Also in reference to the Anglican foundation of New College, Ian Walker observes that the situation “was as if the colleges had arrived at the wrong party!”<sup>37</sup>.

Most of the opposition to Opus Dei from 1966 to 1975 was primarily

<sup>37</sup> Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, p. 452.

channelled through *Tharunka*, the publication of the Students' Union at the University of New South Wales.<sup>38</sup> Many of the written accusations here were typically misinformed and slanderous, well summarised by William West:

Stripped of their rhetoric, the objections in *Tharunka* to Warrane College policy boil down to (a) they are Catholic; (b) they don't let students visit maids or girls in rooms; (c) they expel students for breaking rules or promoting pornographic movies; (d) they hang crucifixes on walls.<sup>39</sup>

The attacks on Opus Dei had in the 1960s been confined to pen and paper, but the theft of a sex manual published by *Tharunka* as a 'family issue' in 1971 gave the protesters a local excuse to test their strength against the university authorities and further their cause against Opus Dei.<sup>40</sup> All of the literary ammunition directed at Opus Dei since 1966 was collected and used again to replenish the pages of *Tharunka* in 1971 and 1972. On campus, the small but loud opposition to the administration of Warrane had commenced a fierce campaign with the cry 'Joe must go', directed at the college master, Dr Joe Martins.

Only two months after the official opening of the college, the staff and residents at Warrane were confronted with dramatic scenes on that famous Monday 9th August. What followed the meeting of students held at the university roundhouse was broadcasted by most radio stations and attracted the attention of newspapers all over Australia, one of which reported the following:

The incidents occurred after a meeting of about 2,000 students in the university roundhouse passed a resolution demanding that the university end the lease of Warrane College...shortly after 2 pm, after a number of students had left, the meeting narrowly voted that students should 'adjourn to Warrane College'. Several hundred walked to the front of the college in Anzac Parade, and about 10 ran inside. A group of college employees and residents blocked the doorway, and pushed

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38 Cf. James FRANKLIN, *op.cit.*, p. 175; Joe MARTINS, 'Information of the events of the last few days related to Warrane College', Kensington, 13 August, 1971, p. 2.

39 W.J. WEST, *op.cit.*, p. 157.

40 Cf. "Student sex manual theft alleged," *The Australian*, 5 August, 1971; *The Australian*, Letters, 6 August, 1971; Brian McKINLAY, "Uproar over sex book follows pattern," *Sunday Review*, 20 August, 1971.



*Demonstrators at the Roundhouse, UNSW; from Tharunka, 12 June 1974*

back others who were trying to force their way in...the crowd then moved to the side of the college, and a number of students climbed in through a window. Police kept arriving throughout the afternoon until by 3.15, 21 police cars were parked beside the median strip in Anzac Parade. About 40 police were moving through the crowd. Soon after 3 pm, police entered the college to remove the students who had run inside...The arrested students will appear in Waverley Court this morning.<sup>41</sup>

Radical students had resorted to occupation. Violence had finally come to the Kensington campus and 7 students were arrested as a result. The diary of the college records that “an estimated 600-strong crowd mostly curious onlookers was watching the ‘siege’”<sup>42</sup>. The residents at Warrane had not only opposed the meeting and its resolutions, but they defended the college

41 ‘Students besiege uni college’, *SMH*, 10 August, 1971.

42 *Warrane College Diary* (1971), General Archive of the Prelature (AGP, Rome), 8 August, 1971.



during the attempted invasion by throwing all sorts of missiles, rubbish and water bombs from the windows.<sup>43</sup> The college diary keeps the recollection of an extraordinary day for everyone at Warrane:

Most of the radio stations broadcasted the incident at the college. Reporters from various media came to interview the master and many did it by phone. In the evening after tea, the main common room became the TV room as everybody went to watch the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission) telecast of the “siege”. Other channels also reported on the same events. From this day on Warrane or Opus Dei shall have been heard by the whole of Australia.<sup>44</sup>

It had been a difficult day for those running the college, but it was almost as if the rebels had done Opus Dei a great favour: shortly after its opening, Warrane had made the news all over Australia. In any case, Joe Martins publicly declared that Opus Dei had nothing to do with the disappearance of the manuals and the director of students’ publications quickly wrote a disclaimer to one of the newspapers stating that the controversial ‘family issue’ was not an official publication of the Students’ Union and that there was no official support for the occupation of the college<sup>45</sup>. In addition, an avalanche of letters came in support of Opus Dei and its project for the college.<sup>46</sup>

A minority of students persisted on their attacks over the next year. In June 1972, about half of the college residents broke the rules concerning visitors, but three were singled out as particularly defiant, and were expelled. Although they were reinstated two days later and the visitors rule

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43 “Police at Uni. Clash”, *Courier Mail*, 10 August, 1971. A member of the staff registered the events of that day in the college diary.

44 *Warrane College Diary* (1971), *op.cit.*, 9 August, 1971. See also “College stormed in students’ riot,” *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 10 August, 1971; “Student riot under review,” *Daily Telegraph*, 11 August, 1971; *Sunday Review* (Melbourne), 20 August, 1971; “Police rush to stop Uni. Brawl,” *Sun* (Melbourne), 10 August, 1971; *The Australian*, Letters, 6 August, 1971; “The ‘Spanish Mafia’ comes under attack,” *The Australian*, 10 August, 1971; *Sunday Australian*, 12 August, 1971; “Police at Uni. Clash,” *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), 10 August, 1971; “Students besiege Uni college,” *SMH* (Sydney), 10 August, 1971; and 16 October, 1971.

45 Cf. *SMH*, Letters, 16 August, 1971; Letter from Joe Martins to *The Australian* (5 August, 1971).

46 “Nothing left to read,” *The Sunday Australian*, 15 August 1971.

was revised after peaceful dialogue and mutual compromise, the incident was reported in several newspapers and television news, and the editors of *Tharunka* took this opportunity to reactivate their discourse on Opus Dei.<sup>47</sup>

Animosities cooled down in 1973 as *Tharunka* was slowly cleared of some radical trends, but the magazine continued to lead the opposition to the presence of Opus Dei on campus, and the violent scenes of 1971 were repeated in 1974. The Students' Union and a handful of activists had incited a large crowd to join them in testing strengths with university authorities, and this time they took advantage of the absence of the Vice-Chancellor, who was then overseas, to bully the acting authority and exploit the fragile situation. There was less violence in this protest than in 1971, but the activists achieved a lot more. While they failed to have Opus Dei ousted from the campus, they managed nevertheless to push the university into a compromise: a committee would be established "to inquire into the recent public criticism and protests over the management of Warrane College and to investigate whether...is contrary to the interests of the University generally".<sup>48</sup>

The investigation began on July 22nd and concluded on November 11th. The six members of the committee, which included the president of the Students' Union and no one from Warrane, assembled on 11 occasions, received 149 written submissions and interviewed 18 of those who sent written testimonies.<sup>49</sup> After much consideration of documents, interviews, and a thorough inspection of the college, the committee resolved in a 22-page report, the following:

There is no evidence before us capable of supporting the suggestion that Opus Dei has employed its position on the campus as a means of bringing its corporate influence to bear upon any institution of the University...(or) is an organization which designs by secrecy and stealth to overthrow existing institutions, or to infiltrate, for its

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47 Cf. *Tharunka*, 4 May, 1972; Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, p. 163; "Row at Uni. Over rules", *Daily Telegraph*, 5 June, 1972; "Uni. Students reinstated," *Daily Telegraph*, 6 June, 1972; "Uni rule relaxed," *Daily Telegraph*, 8 August, 1972; "Students criticise expulsions," *SMH*, 5 June, 1972; Letter from the Australian Broadcasting Commission to Joe Martins (7 July, 1972) and Statement given by the college master to Channel Ten by telephone (21 April, 1972).

48 *Committee of Enquiry, op.cit.*, p. 1.

49 *Committee of Enquiry, op.cit.*, pp. 1-2; Ian WALKER, *op.cit.*, pp. 445-450.

own purposes, positions of power and responsibility. The material before us does no more than establish that, in this country at least, it is the lay apostolate which it purports to be...We have no reason to question the good faith of those members of Opus Dei associated with the management of Warrane...the College possesses special aims and special character (and) the University, which invited Opus Dei to establish this College, cannot now contend that its aims, as set out in E.D.A's memorandum and articles, are other than proper and deserving of support...We are of the opinion that a University has a duty to tolerate intellectual pluralism, and the expression of disparate views<sup>50</sup>.

The exoneration was publicised in several newspapers in November 1974 and the attacks against the administration of Warrane College practically came to an end thereafter,<sup>51</sup> "yet the matter was not trivial or irrelevant", observes Patrick O'Farrell in his historical account of the university. "It raised again the question of how a tiny minority of students in *Tharunka* could sustain an agenda well past its use-by date: the era of student power had long ended and it was rationally and politically obvious that the anti-Warrane agitation could go nowhere, whatever the motions gone through"<sup>52</sup>.

Although the magnitude and relevance of the protests of 1971 and 1974 should not be exaggerated, there are a number of reasons for considering these incidents as an important section in the early history of Warrane College. In the first place, these were public events and as such, they are undoubtedly the best documented episodes in the history of the college. Secondly, these attacks had been, as it were, Warrane's baptism of fire. This violent assault on the aims of the college and the public nature of the campaign against its management did as much to advertise the spirituality and apostolic mission of Opus Dei in Australia as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* has recently done throughout the world. Finally, just as the circumstances forced the residents and many students on campus to take sides, the members of Opus Dei were strengthened in their convictions.

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50 *Committee of Enquiry, op.cit.*, pp. 7, 20-21.

51 "Opus Dei college is not subversive, says council," *The Australian*, 12 November, 1974; "Sex adjudged reason for college ban on women," *SMH*, 12 November, 1974.

52 Patrick O'FARRELL, *op.cit.*, p. 163.

Over the years, the experience of many at Warrane has been one of real conversion: many Catholics have learnt to live their faith more fully and love the Church more intensely, a few have discovered their call to join Opus Dei. For many non-Catholics, on the other hand, the years at Warrane have served to become acquainted with Catholic doctrine, and several of them have been received into the Church.