

Some suggestions, however, are in order. First, the existing index of names is necessary, but a subject index would also have been beneficial. Second, a list of the contributors with their institutional affiliations and brief bibliographical references would have served to introduce, particularly to North American readers, authors who may not have been known. Third, although the existing preface is useful, perhaps a longer and more analytic article of concluding remarks could have synthesized the major conclusions and noted the unresolved issues. Fourth, the discussion of concrete examples of synodal expressions is valuable, but still too limited. There are detailed descriptions of the contemporary expressions of synodality in many European countries and in Canada, India, and West Africa, but nothing on the role of synods in the United States. An assessment of the history and theology of the seven provincial and three plenary councils of Baltimore in the nineteenth century and the episcopal conferences in the United States before and after Vatican II would have been a genuine contribution to this book.

Notwithstanding these suggestions, this book can be recommended to anyone with a serious interest in theology, canon law, Church history, or ecumenism. It is a rich source of information on an important contemporary issue.

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OPUS DEI. AN OBJECTIVE LOOK BEHIND THE MYTHS AND REALITY OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL FORCE IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH by John L. Allen, Jr. New York/London/Toronto/Sydney/Auckland: Doubleday, 2005.

John L. Allen, Jr., a well known journalist once based in Rome, covers the "Vatican" news for the *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*. In this capacity, he used to write a weekly column, *The Word from Rome*, now for *NCR, All Things Catholic*. In addition, Allen is an author and publishes books based on his work as a journalist in Rome. Until recently, he exclusively dealt with the papacy and related topics: his book, *Conclave* (Doubleday, 2002), reveals the procedures of a conclave and gives his view on the possible succession of John Paul II; *All the Pope's Men* (Doubleday, 2004), addresses the Roman Curia. Two slightly different

biographies of the same person, *Cardinal Ratzinger. The Vatican's Enforcer of the Faith* (Continuum, 2000) and *The Rise of Benedict XVI* (Doubleday, 2005) complete the list of Allen's books.

Allen's new book covers an entirely different topic, *Opus Dei*, founded by Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. Nevertheless, the choice for this topic is understandable. Most people see *Opus Dei* as a part of the central organization of the Church, and therefore closely linked to the papacy. The fact that *Opus Dei* is a personal prelature strengthens this impression.

The book contains four sections and fifteen chapters. A detailed index, a very helpful instrument, has been added to the text. One misses a bibliography; that is a negative point. In the first section, Allen focuses on the essentials: he gives a quick overview of *Opus Dei* and provides us with information on its founder. In the second section, he presents the organization from the inside. He covers the internal life of *Opus Dei* under four topics: sanctification of work, contemplatives in the world, Christian freedom, and divine filiation. The next eight chapters fit under the section "Question Marks about *Opus Dei*." Allen highlights some peculiar problems for *Opus Dei*: secrecy, blind obedience, mortification, women, money, recruiting, and the organization in the Church and in politics. The last section is dedicated to an evaluation and some thoughts on the future of the organization.

The book is well-documented. Allen has access to several sources and researched the materials thoroughly, at least with regard to witness testimonials. One cannot expect less than this from a good journalist. Allen traveled extensively and interviewed many people; at times, the book appears more like a travelogue.

The author points out that Escrivá tried to bring lay people, both men and women, and clergy together in one organization. He did not want clericalism, and applied Vatican II's teaching on the laity even before the conciliar documents were drafted. According to Allen, Escrivá was ahead of his time, and this is probably true. Although often considered a conservative organization, *Opus Dei* has clearly emphasized and encouraged lay ministry. This is an aspect that people often forget when commenting on the organization; it makes the distinction between conservative and progressive even more useless.

Allen has chosen a very daring subtitle for his book: "An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church". This seems to be rather dangerous. Many books

have been published on *Opus Dei*, and all of them claim to be somewhat objective. Readers will ask what Allen did with all the material he researched. When reading the book, one can very easily get the impression that the author is writing a *laudatio* and needs to give all the positive details of *Opus Dei*. He never gives the impression that he subjected the information he gathered to critical analysis. That would have made the book more valuable and more interesting. One can wonder whether *Opus Dei* really benefits from Allen's approach. In the long run, it could be counter-productive; an uncritical approach may give the impression that *Opus Dei* has asked for this book to be written. If this be the case, why would anyone refer to the book, or praise its objectivity?

There are also some more specific remarks to make. The book is a story, told and interpreted by a journalist. Scholars who read the text from canonical or ecclesiological perspectives will be disappointed: Allen is clearly neither a canonist nor an ecclesiologist. There are technical canonical concepts such as the membership/incorporation, incardination, personal prelature, and associations of the faithful employed incorrectly. Allen seems to be clueless about the meaning of and the discussion on personal prelatures in the Church and in canon law.

Allen refers to a statement of Cardinal Herranz, stating that there was a precedent for the personal prelature in the form of the *Mission de France* (p. 259). This is indeed true, but Allen does not use this opportunity to explain more in detail the history and the underlying problems associated with territorial and non-territorial prelatures. He writes that the *Mission de France* had been approved as a non-territorial prelature, which is not correct. The *Mission de France* was and is a territorial prelature.

Personal prelatures were given a place among associations in the code, not in the part on the hierarchical constitution of the Church. It is thus not correct to think of a personal prelature as a limited kind of diocese (p. 39). The book would have been a lot richer and more attractive if Allen would have offered information such as this in the text. He could have explained in depth the whole history of and discussion on personal prelatures, instead of giving technical details about how to use the cilice.

Allen's discussions on the members of *Opus Dei* are confusing. The clergy, incardinated in the personal prelature are clearly members. But is this the status of the laity? It is interesting to consult the *Annuario Pontificio* and read how the laity are addressed. They are not mentioned as members, but as laity according to canon 296 of the Code of Canon Law and the apostolic constitution *Ut sit*. According to this canon, lay persons

can dedicate themselves to the apostolic works of a personal prelature. Furthermore, this is seen as an organic cooperation. Is that the same as membership? Allen does not mention this, and he certainly does not give the answer. He is also clearly confused about the personal prelature and the priestly society of the Holy Cross. Members of the latter remain incardinated in their respective dioceses or religious institute, but share in the spirituality of *Opus Dei*. Allen sometimes gives the impression that members of the priestly society of the Holy Cross are also members of *Opus Dei*, and thus incardinated in the prelature.

The author offers an overview of the struggle of *Opus Dei* in obtaining its juridical status. He seems to assume that the personal prelature is the best juridical form. In the light of the previous remarks, he might have come to another conclusion. Perhaps the current Code of Canon Law lacks an organizational form that really fulfills the needs of *Opus Dei*.

There are other canonical errors in this book. The author states that there is no place for priests in a lay association (p. 38). Elsewhere, he addresses Juan Luis Cipriani Thorne as the Cardinal of Lima. That is clearly incorrect. Thorne is the Archbishop of Lima, and a member of the Sacred College of Cardinals.

*Opus Dei* is, at first sight, very impressive. However, it should be read carefully, bearing in mind the author's position as a Vatican observer and journalist. Allen is neither a canon lawyer nor an expert in ecclesiology.

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THE CONSECRATED LIFE: CASES, COMMENTARY, DOCUMENTS, READINGS by Rose McDermott, SSJ. Alexandria, VA: Canon Law Society of America, 2006.

Regarding consecrated life and the importance it has not only in the codes but also in the life of the entire Church, relatively little scientific study is being done to examine thoroughly the many issues that the canons on religious can raise. For that reason alone this work makes a significant contribution to the subject. From her writings and expert work experience for over twenty-five years, the author has gleaned forty-