

8. Ibid. xxx. 186.
9. *Sermon Notes of John Henry Cardinal Newman, 1849-1879*, ed. Fathers of the Birmingham Oratory (London, 1913), p.53.
10. *L.D.* xxvi. 87.
11. Ibid., p.232.
12. Ibid., p.268.
13. Ibid. xxviii. 207.
14. Ibid., p.349.
15. Ibid. xxxi. 181.

Opus Dei and Personal Prelatures

By Robert Ombres O.P.

LAUNCHED AT Vatican II, soon translated into legal categories by Paul VI in *Ecclesiae Sanctae* (1966), given explicit place in the 1983 Code and first embodied in Opus Dei, personal prelatures are now a reality in the Church. A new pastoral instrument is available and operative. The conciliar decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* n.10 envisaged that where the nature of the apostolate demands this, not only should the proper distribution of priests be made easier but also the carrying out of special pastoral projects for the benefit of different social groups in any region or among any race in any part of the world. For this purpose there can advantageously be set up some international seminaries, special dioceses, or personal prelatures and other institutions to which, by methods to be decided for the individual undertaking and always without prejudice to the rights of local ordinaries, priests can be attached or incardinated for the common good of the whole Church.¹ The decree on missionary activity took up the mention of personal prelatures. It considered that these prelatures would facilitate special pastoral projects aimed at particular social categories in so far as it is demanded for the better exercise of the apostolate.² The decrees neither define nor describe personal prelatures.

Meanwhile, the increasingly successful organisation Opus Dei, founded in 1928, was in search of a suitable organizational form. Its *de jure* status as a Secular Institute came to be regarded as inappropriate, and in practice there were difficulties not aptly overcome by the granting of privileges. The desire for a more suitable form was expressed repeatedly, and the conciliar

texts opened up a juridical path. The Sacred Congregation for Bishops (= SCB) had been given competence over personal prelatures by *Regimini Ecclesiae universae* of 1967, and in time it was charged with examining the possibility and ways of erecting the first personal prelature. In 1982 Opus Dei was erected into a personal prelature, and the 1983 Code had provisions for this novel ecclesial institution. Although Opus Dei is only an example of a larger class, and it dates from before the Code came into force, there are obvious advantages in examining together personal prelatures as a class and Opus Dei as a specific instance; recognizing that each personal prelature is bound to have its own peculiar characteristics and priorities. All new structures need time to be assimilated into the everyday life of the Church, but judging by the 1981 Guidelines that Cardinal Hume felt were needed for the Westminster diocese, it has not been easy to adapt Opus Dei 'to the traditional spirituality and instincts of our people'.³ It should be added, however, that at present the prelature has some one thousand incardinated priests and over seventy thousand lay people, representing about 87 nationalities. The Prelate of Opus Dei believes that the previous juridical status kept the organization in a framework which was not in keeping with its way. This meant that the Founder had to make repeated clarifications to ecclesiastical and civil authorities, and to the general public, in order to defend the vocation of members and to spell out the characteristics of their specific secularity.⁴

I The 1983 Code

As draft followed draft in the process of revision culminating in a definitive text, the uncertainty and the divisions over the place to be given to personal prelatures in the Code, and more fundamentally in the life of the Church, became apparent. At first personal prelatures were closely aligned to particular Churches but the move was away from any *aequiparatio*, and the relevant canons are now a separate title in the part of Book II on Christ's faithful.⁵ The existing position of the canons was chosen at the last moment, and there is scope for a prolonged debate on the legal and theological implications of this. The essence of the problem is likely to be the exact relationship prelatures have to the hierarchical nature of the Church on the one hand and to the various forms of association on the other. Whilst these prelatures do resemble a number of other structures in certain respects, and some would even point to the *Mission de France*, in the end they are best treated on their own terms.⁶ We are dealing with something new. Cornelius Ernst drew on recent discussions in Christology to suggest there could be an ecclesiology 'from below':

An ecclesiology from above tends to impose traditional structures and church orders as metaphysical absolutes. Where the genetic moment in ecclesiology is duly appreciated, the varieties of structure and experience in the history of the Church can be creatively assimilated and allowed to suggest novel varieties of association and new interpretations of Church experience.⁷

The relevant canons governing personal prelatures are few and terse. By canon 294 such prelatures may be established by the Apostolic See after consultation with the Episcopal Conferences concerned. They are composed of deacons and priests of the secular clergy. Their purpose is to promote an appropriate distribution of priests or to carry out special pastoral or missionary enterprises in different regions or for different social groups. The law has a deep-seated suspicion of unattached, 'wandering' clerics, the *clerici acephali seu vagi* of canon 265, and so that canon requires all clerics to be incardinated; the incardination can be in a personal prelature. Such clerics remain firmly secular.

Canon 295 becomes more specific in requiring a personal prelature to be governed by statutes laid down by the Apostolic See. It is presided over

by a Prelate as its proper Ordinary, who has the right to establish a national or an international seminary, and to incardinate students and promote them to orders with the title of service of the prelature. Either by an oversight or because it is superfluous, this type of prelate does not figure among the Ordinaries listed in canon 134. The reference to the 'title' of ordination may be another oversight, as elsewhere it has been suppressed. It is an open question whether the episcopal ordination of the Prelate would be fitting, at least for certain personal prelatures. The canon goes on to require the Prelate to provide both for the spiritual formation of whomever he has promoted with the above title, and for their becoming support.⁸

Turning from clerics, the next canon enables lay people to dedicate themselves to the apostolic work of a personal prelature by way of agreements made with the prelature. The *modus*, that is the mode or manner, of this organic co-operation and the principal obligations and rights associated with it, are to be duly defined in the statutes. The kind of bond which is to exist between lay people and the prelature is clearly of extreme importance to the life of the local church, and the formula 'organic co-operation' is flexible and capable of sustaining a variety of arrangements. To want to belong to a personal prelature is a matter of choice, and the law safeguards in a general way the freedom and maturity of that choice. Canon 98 establishes that only a person who has attained majority has the full exercise of his or her rights; in the exercise of rights a minor remains subject to parents or guardians, except for those matters in which by divine or by canon law minors are exempt from such authority. Canon 124 and following contain the basic norms concerning juridical acts, whilst canon 1290 deals with contracts specifically. Canon 297 provides that the statutes are likewise to define the relationship of the prelature with the local Ordinaries in whose particular churches the prelature, with the prior consent of the diocesan bishop, exercises or wishes to exercise its pastoral or missionary activity.

II Opus Dei

The Apostolic Constitution *Ut sit* established Opus Dei as a personal prelature with an international ambit, sanctioned its statutes, placed it under the SCB, located the seat of central government in Rome and confirmed Mgr Alvaro del

Portillo as its Prelate.⁹ At the same time the Sacerdotal Society of the Holy Cross was erected and intrinsically bound to the prelature. Like the canons, the Apostolic Constitution is terse. More can be gathered from the *Declaratio* issued by the SCB in 1982.¹⁰ The incardinated clergy of the prelature are drawn from the laity incorporated into the prelature so that no candidate for the priesthood, deacon or priest is withdrawn from the local churches. The incardinated clergy continue to maintain close relations with the secular priests of the local churches and enjoy active and passive voice on priests' councils. The incorporated laity do not alter their personal status (*condicio*), canonically or theologically. One should notice that the laity are 'incorporated' in the prelature, having therefore a high degree of organic co-operation. The laity (men and women, single or married, of all professions and social situations) who dedicate themselves to the service of the apostolic purpose of the prelature, with a serious commitment, do so by a contractual bond (*vinculum contractuale*) and not by vows. The laity in Opus Dei are not 'consecrated persons'. The prelature's apostolate is normally carried out in the environment of secular society, with an emphasis on the world of work, bearing in mind the general indications which the Holy See or diocesan bishops may give concerning the apostolate of the laity. The Declaration goes on:

As regards decisions in professional, social, political etc. matters, the lay faithful of the prelature enjoy, within the limits of Catholic faith and morals and of the discipline of the Church, the same freedom as other Catholics, their fellow citizens; hence, the prelature does not in any way make its own the professional, social, political, economic etc. activities of its members (IId).

The Prelate has the ordinary power of jurisdiction or government, limited to that which refers to the specific finality of the prelature. It differs substantially, by reason of the matter involved, from the jurisdiction of bishops in the ordinary spiritual care of the faithful. As well as the government of the clergy of the prelature, the jurisdiction of the Prelate includes the general direction both of the doctrinal formation and of the specific apostolic and spiritual care which the

incorporated laity receive, to help them live a more zealous dedication in the service of the Church. The laity are under the jurisdiction of the Prelate in those matters which concern the fulfilment of the specific commitments regarding spiritual life, doctrinal formation and the exercise of their apostolate, which they have freely undertaken by the *vinculum deditionis*. The laity incorporated in Opus Dei continue to be faithful of the dioceses in which they have their domicile or quasi-domicile and are, therefore, under the jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop in what the law lays down for all the ordinary faithful. The diocesan bishop is informed regularly about the activities of centres of the prelature and has the right to visit them *ad normam juris*. In terms of relations with the Holy See, *Ut sit* provides that the prelature is under the SCB and can deal with any relevant Dicastery; 'just like other autonomous jurisdictions', adds the Declaration. Every five years the Prelate is to make a report for the Roman Pontiff on the state of the prelature and how its apostolate is progressing.

Parishes, rectoral or other churches, may be entrusted to the prelature or to priests incardinated in it. According to a Regional Vicar of the prelature, a number of parishes have been entrusted to priests of the prelature, but only a few. To his knowledge there are two parishes in Rome entrusted to Opus Dei and three other European parishes. In addition there are several rectoral churches entrusted to Opus Dei in different countries and dioceses.¹¹ Achieving a correct and satisfactory relationship between personal prelatures and the local churches is always going to be a fundamental task. When asked if, with the new juridical status, Opus Dei becomes more autonomous with respect to the diocesan bishops, the Prelate replied: 'We never sought that, because God does not want it, the Holy See would not have tolerated it, and we neither desire nor need it'.¹²

The Sacerdotal Society is for priests of the diocesan clergy who wish to strive for sanctity in their ministry in accordance with the spirituality of Opus Dei. They do not form part of the prelature's clergy and remain under the jurisdiction of their own Ordinary to all effects and purposes.

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Notes

1. A. Flannery (ed) *Vatican Council II* (Leominster 1981, 1982) I, 882. Ample material on personal prelatures in the articles — with titles too long to cite here — by J. Manzanares and J.L. Gutiérrez in *Periodica* (1980) 387-421, (1983) 71-111.
2. *Ad Gentes* in A. Flannery op. cit. 1, 837 and 845.
3. *The Tablet* (1981) 1238-1239.
4. A. del Portillo, 'Opus Dei' *Doctrine and Life* (1985) 194-200 at p.196.
5. *Communicationes* (1980) 275-282, (1982) 201-203. For different approaches, see W. Aymans, 'Ecclesiological Implications of the New Legislation' *Studia Canonica* (1983) 63-93, at pp.88-93 and P. Rodríguez & A. de Fuenmayor, 'Sobre la Naturaleza de las Prelaturas Personales y su inserción dentro de la Estructura de la Iglesia' *Ius Canonicum* (1984) 9-47.
6. J.I. Arrieta, 'L'Atto di Erezione dell'Opus Dei in Prelatura Personale' *Apollinaris* (1983) 89-114.
7. C. Ernst, *Multiple Echo* (London 1979) p.217.
8. The official Latin text of many canons, including 295:2, has been corrected by the Holy See; *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1983) 22 September, Pars 11, Appendix.
9. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1983) 423-425; D.Le Tourneau, 'L'Opus Dei en Préature Personnelle: Dans le Droit Fil de Vatican II' *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* (1983) 295-309.
10. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1983) 464-468. English translation in our Canon Law Society's *Newsletter* for March 1983, pp.35-38. The translation can be somewhat free.
11. Information kindly supplied by the Very Rev. Philip Sherrington.
12. A. del Portillo arc. cit. p.196.

Priesthood and the Communication of the Word

By John Harding O.F.M.

WHEN, IN 1982, I was ordained to the ministerial priesthood it was with a mixture of relief that the long years of preparation were ended, with joy that the day had at last dawned and with some trepidation as to what the future might hold. For the past three years I have worked in a parish on the borders of London and Essex and only now am I beginning to discover the meaning of the sacrament I received.

It is perhaps a commonplace to assert that priests are called to holiness and not only because they are numbered among the baptised. They are called to holiness precisely on account of their sharing in the ministerial priesthood of Jesus Christ. In this reflection I have attempted to outline what this has come to mean for my own experience of being a priest at the service of the People of God. Under the unifying theme of *communicating the Word*, I have gathered my reflections as follows:

1. Proclamation
2. Celebration
3. Prayer and Pastoral Charity

1. Proclamation

There are two texts which seem to me to have a guiding influence. The first is from Romans, in which St Paul reflects on the grace he has been given by God:

... to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16, cf also *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2, Abbott edition, p. 535).

The second is from the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*:

By the power of the sacrament of orders, and in the image of Christ the eternal High Priest (Heb. 5:1-10; 7:24; 9:11-28), they are consecrated to preach the gospel, shepherd the faithful, and celebrate divine worship as true priests of the New Testament. Partakers of the function of Christ the sole Mediator (I Tim. 2:5) on their level of ministry, they announce