

## Work Weeks in the foundational years of Opus Dei

*The founder of Opus Dei established Work Weeks as an instrument of governance and of listening to the different regions of the Work. Among the six Weeks he organized in his life, the last one is remarkable for the broad consultation made with people of Opus Dei.*

From the time of its foundation, Josemaría Escrivá looked for people to help him in the direction of Opus Dei and in the unfolding of its charism. Throughout the 1940s he organised central, regional and local governance structures. At the same time, he established two types of assemblies: general congresses, which studied the progress of the Work and proposed new plans for expansion; and the regional Work Weeks, which examined the formational and apostolic experiences of the circumscriptions.

### *A precedent: the Study Weeks (1940)*

From 17 to 24 March 1940, the first formational meeting of the men of the Work was held at Jenner Residence in Madrid. Thirty-three students and young professionals living in Barcelona, Madrid, Valencia, Valladolid and Saragossa took part. It was called a Study Week. Its aim was to help each one to improve his relationship with God, to deepen his knowledge of the spirit of the Work, to be united with others and to become aware of the need to promote the development of Opus Dei in various Spanish cities.

The founder preached to the participants and spoke to each one alone. Some young people who had joined before the war, such as Alvaro del Portillo and Juan Jiménez Vargas, gave classes on the spirit and activities of Opus Dei. They also visited sites related to the beginnings of the work of St Raphael, such as the Porta Coeli orphanage and the buildings on Calle Ferraz where the DYA residence once stood.

In the summer of that year, Josemaría Escrivá organised two further study weeks for the men of the Work. One in mid-August, attended by 28 young men, and another in early September for 24 more. These meetings strengthened the sociability of the members of Opus Dei – family life, in the Founder's words – based on friendship and a shared Christian ideal.<sup>1</sup>

### *First Work Week (1943)*

1943 saw the beginning of another type of meeting of members of the Work that was to be held every five years: the Work Week. The first, from 29 July to 7 August 1943, was held in Madrid. Sixteen numeraries, mostly from the early years of the Work, plus the founder, took part.

During the week, study committees were organised, divided into: (a) governance, distribution of people, study centres, economic and juridical questions; (b) directors and

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<sup>1</sup> There were only study weeks in 1940 and, although the differences with the Work Weeks are clear – we will see that they focused on the discussion among a few on organisational aspects – we have included them because they were the first occasion on which the founder brought the members of the Work together collectively to transmit to them the spirit of Opus Dei. AGP, series E.2.2, 171-1; cf. Santiago Casas Rabasa, *Las Semanas de Estudio de 1940: bases de la formación en el espíritu del Opus Dei de la posguerra española*, SetD 14 (2020), pp. 143-171; Onésimo Díaz, *Posguerra. La primera expansión del Opus Dei durante los años 1939 y 1940*, Madrid, Rialp, 2018, pp. 297-313. The study weeks are maintained in the so-called annual courses and *convivencias* (which began in 1944), with formation activities in which the spirit of Opus Dei and some doctrinal themes are reviewed, while at the same time the family atmosphere of the Work is experienced.

residences; (c) family life, plan of life and virtues: study, obedience, travel, poverty; (d) proselytism and St Raphael: organisation, talks and professional classes; (e) apostolate with older people: the work of St Gabriel. These committees studied the files they had received from the various centres of the Work and drew up new ones.<sup>2</sup>

A few months later, in January 1944, Leopoldo Eijo Garay, Bishop of Madrid-Alcalá, approved the Constitutions of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross. For the first time, the Work Weeks appeared in a juridical text.<sup>3</sup> They were placed within the section dedicated to the general set of rules for the Priestly Society, specifically after the articles dedicated to the central, regional and local governing bodies.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Constitutions, the purpose of the weeks was to “*intensify the formation of the members of the Institution and a better development of the apostolic activity*”.<sup>5</sup> They would be convened by the regional counsellor, presided over by the president general of the Priestly Society or by a delegate, and attended by all registered members and local directors. Any member of the institution could send suggestions to the chairman of the Work Week, and those taking part in the week were to pass on to the secretary of the week the notes and sheets they wished to be studied.<sup>6</sup>

The outline of the week included a dialogue on the various themes in each commission plus a final plenary meeting. The conclusions were preceptive if ratified by the general president of the Priestly Society.<sup>7</sup>

### *General Work Weeks (1948)*

Opus Dei was approved as a secular institute in February 1947. The new Constitutions took up substantially the same articles that referred to the Work Weeks in 1944, with one addition: it was foreseen that, in addition to the Work Weeks, held every five years in the regions, there would be a general Work Week, every ten years for the whole institute, to be attended by all the electors and some designated enrolled members.<sup>8</sup> The Constitutions of

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<sup>2</sup> The material preserved on this Work Week is very scanty, a few documents found in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-2-1. We know that they met in a centre – probably in Diego de León – in the mornings and that, divided into commissions, they devoted these days to studying the suggestions and drawing conclusions. The files have not been preserved.

<sup>3</sup> The Statutes of the Pious Union Opus Dei of 19 March 1941 do not mention the Work Weeks.

<sup>4</sup> L.1.1, 2-4-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (25 January 1944), no. 300, in AGP, series L.1.1, 2-4-2. The translation of the Latin texts is ours.

<sup>6</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (25 January 1944), nos. 303-305, in AGP, series L.1.1, 2-4-2. The enrolled members were – and still are today in the personal prelature – people who dedicate themselves to the tasks of government and organisation of the formative activity. This figure was foreseen in the Constitutions of 1944 and became a reality in September 1947, when, just before the international expansion of the Work, the founder appointed 60 numeraries as enrolled members for the first time. Cf. José Luis González Gullón-John F. Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, Madrid, Rialp, 2022, 4th ed.

<sup>7</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (25 January 1944), nos. 306-308, in AGP, series L.1.1, 2-4-2. The Work Weeks were a consultative meeting. In contrast, the General Congresses of Opus Dei – the first one took place in 1951 – were collegial governing bodies in Opus Dei, composed of the electors, who participated with a deliberative vote. It was envisaged that there would be a General Congress every five years, with one phase for men and one for women. They reviewed the projects undertaken since the previous congress, made a judgement on the progress of corporate and institutional activities, appointed the members of the General Council and the Central Advisory, and established lines of apostolic action for the next five years. In addition to these two assemblies – General Congresses and Work Weeks – the founder convened the counsellors or regional delegates in Rome for meetings that did not draw up conclusions. Cf. Francesc Castells i Puig – José Luis González Gullón, *El I Congreso General del Opus Dei, 1951*, SetD 15 (2021), pp. 37-71.

<sup>8</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (24 February 1947), no. 300, in AGP, series L.1.1, 7-2-1. The mission of the electors was to vote for the successor to the President General when the time came, as well as to take part in the General Congresses of the Work. Cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, p. 154.

Opus Dei were approved as a secular institute in February 1947.

After the summer of 1947, the Founder asked the members of the Work who had been faithful to the Work to send in, if they so wished, suggestions for a future Work Week. They could write *on any subject: house, plan of life, apostolate, proselytism, study, poverty, discretion, sport, professional training, etc.*<sup>9</sup> The range of points of view they could take was also wide: *things observed, problems which arise or may arise theoretically and questions and points about which they have no judgement yet, to be raised and studied during the week.*<sup>10</sup> In particular, improvements for the Directory were requested.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, it asked for suggestions on some aspects of interest at the time: how to run the professional circles, spiritual direction, activity abroad, the mission of the members of the local council, the content and frequency of the Work's internal magazine, the formation of numeraries in the study centres and the summer courses, the follow-up of those who were in the work of St Raphael, the professional orientation of the young, the promotion of the apostolate, personal development and the possible deficit in the centres.<sup>12</sup> The response was remarkable, as the members of the Work sent in hundreds of suggestions.<sup>13</sup>

Having gathered this material, the Third General Work Week for men took place at Molinoviejo from 24 to 29 August 1948.<sup>14</sup> Looking at the 28 professionals who were there, many of them central or local directors, Josemaría Escrivá remarked good-humouredly that *they all had to be twenty years older; we are all too young.*<sup>15</sup> He explained to them *that the agreements reached during the week will not be binding until they are officially approved by the Father; that is to say, that these meetings do not constitute a legislative body, nor the occasion for lengthy discussions or oratorical interventions; their tone must be one of effective work, and they come to them – as always in the Work – to study matters calmly, dealing with, if necessary, the different points of view, which must be expressed, in conscience, with all freedom and clarity.*<sup>16</sup>

The formative part in the spirit of Opus Dei corresponded to the founder, both in the get-togethers and personal meetings and in the daily meditations, in which he encouraged them to respond to the call they had received: *On many occasions you have considered that you are salt, light. Christ our Lord said it, and in the recent documents of the Pontiff you repeatedly see how it is the will of the Church that you be salt that reaches far, where others cannot reach, light that pierces the darkness. Not only collectively, but personally. I insist: a very important part of our life is the personal apostolate.*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Note, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>10</sup> Note "Third Work Week", 29 October 1947, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>11</sup> In 1948, the founder printed a Directory compiling criteria and experiences on the government and management of the centres and apostolic activities. He sent it to the central and local directors of the Work. The first edition had two versions, one for men and one for women. The Directory for the women's section, for example, was divided into three parts: governance of a local centre; formation and life of those associated with the Work; and administration of the houses. During the third week of work they revised the first edition of the Directory in order to improve it. PGA, series Q.1.7, 9-50.

<sup>12</sup> Note "Third Work Week", 15 November 1947, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>13</sup> These are preserved in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-4, 172 and 256. Some suggestions are kept in envelopes referring to the Third Work Week, others indicate the centre from which they were sent, and a few are destined for the Directory.

<sup>14</sup> AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3 and 171-4. This Work Week was called the third because it probably counted the 1940 study week as the first – which had three sessions, as we have seen – and, as the second, the Work Week in the summer of 1943. On the other hand, this was the only general Work Week for the whole Work. Shortly afterwards, Josemaría Escrivá understood that it was not practical, since there was already a General Congress every five years, and he abolished it. The only thing that remained were the regional Work Weeks, which were more effective because they analysed the development of the Work in a circumscription and drew conclusions on specific cases (Interview with Fernando Valenciano Polack, Rome, 4 April 2022).

<sup>15</sup> Diary of the *Third Work Week*, 28 August 1948, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>16</sup> Diary of the *Third Work Week*, 24 August 1948, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>17</sup> Diary of the *Third Work Week*, 28 August 1948, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

Five commissions were formed: governance and special affairs, St Michael's, St Raphael's, prefecture, administration and legal advice. In addition, there were presentations on study centres, professional circles, the financial aspect of student residences and legal advice. During these sessions, each committee analysed the suggestions received and drafted a script. These notes were read out to all the members of the work week and were sometimes commented on by Josemaría Escrivá.

For example, on the occasion of the writing of the commission for young people, the founder "*made it clear that in the scripts currently used for the study circles of San Raphael there is a permanent part, which are certain ideas and the fundamental method and orientation, but another part (the anecdotes, the ancillary part of the exposition, etc.) must be something lived by the person who is to be present, and must be renewed so that the shape of the circles does not become stagnant*".<sup>18</sup> And, on the imminent departure of people from the Work to many countries, he commented that *at the beginning it will be necessary to help them in two ways: with financial means and personnel. It is necessary to think that not always older people, already trained, but some of our young people will go there to be trained and to study, and then to become nationals if necessary. I yield to no one in my love for Spain, but I will become a Turk this very afternoon, if this is to serve Jesus Christ*.<sup>19</sup>

Three months later, the first women's Work Week took place. Before the meeting, hundreds of notes were drawn up with suggestions and ideas for those days and also for the Directory of the women's section. Then, from 26-29 November 1948, fourteen participants met at the house in Los Rosales. In the light of the material received and the experience accumulated, they evaluated the activity carried out, particularly in the work of St Raphael and in the administration of the centres. Then they set goals for the future, which was promising because there was a large group of young people who were discerning their call to the Work.<sup>20</sup>

#### *A few weeks without a paper trail (1955)*

Opus Dei received definitive approval as a secular institute in June 1950. The part of the new Constitutions devoted to the direction of the institute had four chapters: the general set of rules – where reference was made to the election of the general president, the general congresses and the central governments – regional governance, local governance and the work weeks.

In the case of the Weeks, there were no major changes compared to the regulatory texts of three and six years earlier. Rather, they took up some practices that had already taken place. On the one hand, the Constitutions sanctioned that the Women's Section of the Work would have Work Weeks with a structure and functioning similar to those of the men.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, it invited all members of Opus Dei who had been definitively incorporated

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<sup>18</sup> Diary of the *Third Work Week*, 25 August 1948, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>19</sup> Diary of the *Third Work Week*, 25 August 1948, in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-1.

<sup>20</sup> *First Work Week*, in AGP, series Q.2.2, 94-1. Unlike the men, the conclusions or diary of those days are not preserved. Instead, we have a list of "*Themes for the First Work Week*", which includes the following points: 1. Financial sustenance of the houses. 2. Personal performance of each member. 3. Jewellery that they can wear. 4. Clothing of the members. 5. Ordinary and extraordinary expenses of the members. 6. Administration of the houses. 7. Selection of vocations. 8. Work in the Residences. 9. Dealing with house servants. 10. Local government. 11. Relationship with priests. 12. Way of directing the Confidence. 13. Associates of the Work without family life. 14. Wills and patrimonial goods. 15. Refinement of the Work in financial matters. 16. Formation of maidservants. 17. Piety of the maidservants.

<sup>21</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (1950), nos. 477-479, in AGP, series L.1.1, 115-1.

with the fidelity to send suggestions to the president of the Work Weeks on the topics that could be dealt with;<sup>22</sup> with this channel of expression, the legislator solicited the opinions of experienced people, so that the participants could reflect on the best ways of living and spreading the charism of Opus Dei.

In February 1953, the Secretary General of Opus Dei, Antonio Pérez, asked Josemaría Escrivá whether it would be opportune to convene a Work Week, since five years had passed since the last one. The founder replied that each region could organise its own.<sup>23</sup>

Preparations went on for months and regional Work Weeks were held throughout 1955. These Weeks were used to plan the Second General Congress of Opus Dei, which took place in 1956.<sup>24</sup>

### *On the eve of the Vatican Council (1960)*

In June 1960 – a year before the next general congress of the Work – the founder once again asked the Counsellors of all the regions to convene a Work Week in their respective circumscription. Josemaría Escrivá indicated that each Week would be presided over by a delegate or *missus* for that region. The enrolled members and the directors of local councils and auxiliary societies, as appropriate, would attend.<sup>25</sup>

The regional authorities immediately invited those numeraries in good standing who had joined the Work to send suggestions for possible topics to be discussed during the week, based on the events and experiences of the previous five years.<sup>26</sup>

Given the disparate development of the Work in each region, the topics addressed were partly similar and partly different.<sup>27</sup> For example, 54 men met under the chairmanship of Javier de Ayala, the founder's delegate, in the Spanish region. Eleven commissions studied the suggestions received and prepared corresponding papers. The main observations were reflected in the conclusions adopted at the closing session, which were submitted to the President General of Opus Dei for approval. Among other things, the participants gave importance to the formation of the members and Co-operators of the Work: to coordinate the apostolic assignments of the numeraries with the professional work of each one; to programme new cultural meetings in the centres of St Raphael and to create more small houses for the activities of the Oblates; to take care of the pastoral care of the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross; and to create a centre for documentation on current topics.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (1950), no. 428, in AGP, series L.1.1, 115-1.

<sup>23</sup> Annotation by Antonio Pérez, Madrid, 23 February 1953, with a handwritten note by the founder ("*recomenzar, con una fecha nueva, en todas las Regiones*"), in AGP, series E.2.2, 171-3-2.

<sup>24</sup> We have found no documentation on these regional Work Weeks in AGP.

<sup>25</sup> The so-called auxiliary societies were companies that owned or managed movable and immovable property, which they put at the disposal of projects with which the Christian message of Opus Dei was spread. The local councils coordinated the spiritual direction of the members of the Work, provided the bulk of the collective formation and monitored the progress of apostolic activities (cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, pp. 251-255; and 190, respectively).

<sup>26</sup> General Note 332 (26 June 1960), in AGP, series E.1.3, 242. The Work Weeks had no public mention in the media because, at that time, they were confined to numeraries who were analysing the development of the Work and its ways of spreading throughout the world.

<sup>27</sup> In AGP, series E.2.2, 342-345, the papers and conclusions of the Work Weeks in Germany, Central America, Canada, Spain, England, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru and Washington are preserved. In many cases, there are fact sheets with suggestions of various kinds that were used in the study and preparation of the papers.

<sup>28</sup> Closing session of the regional Work Week, Molinoviejo, 11 December 1960, in AGP, series E.2.2, 343-5-1. The commissions were: formation of numeraries, formation and work of Oblates, formation and work of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, delegations, local government, work of St. Gabriel, work of St. Raphael, public activities of our brothers, work of the apostolate of public opinion, apostolate in the university and economic government.

Similarly, there were regional Work Weeks for women.<sup>29</sup> The Spanish region held one in December 1960. Many of the themes suggested by the participants revolved around the vocational approach to formation. For example, in the work of St Michael, there was an appreciation of *the desirability of fostering the professional enthusiasm of the numeraries, so that they can also provide for themselves the necessary means to improve their work and the need for the Oblates to receive a more intense formation in the same centre to which they are attached, while remaining in their own place, at work and in their families.* Something similar happened with those without a commitment to celibacy: *“Given the experience gathered, it is advisable that there should be a short course for those in charge of St Gabriel and talks on annual courses on topics of concern to the supernumeraries.”*<sup>30</sup>

Mexico was the second most developed region of Opus Dei, with centres in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Culiacán. Sixteen numeraries met at the headquarters of the Regional Commission to study eleven different topics.<sup>31</sup> In their conclusions, they made several points: to dedicate time to the spiritual care and formation of the numeraries; to see to it that they remained stable in one place for a certain time, attending only one activity in order to be more effective; to take the necessary steps to make the *Studium generale* more academic; to establish the work of St Raphael in the apostolate of friendship and trust; and to consolidate the activities they were carrying out before starting new ones.<sup>32</sup>

The women of the Work in Mexico met at the headquarters of the Regional Advisory for their Work Week. The two main conclusions were related to the works of St Michael and St Raphael. On the one hand, it was desirable that the people *who form part of the local councils should have sufficient time to be able to dedicate to the work of direction and formation.*<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the growth of activities of rural development in corporate works such as Montefalco or Toshi was noted, while at the same time it encouraged fostering vocations among university women *intensifying the personal apostolate of friendship and trust,*<sup>34</sup> so that they would then collaborate in spreading the message of Opus Dei in Mexico.

Shortly before the convening of the 1960 Work Weeks, the General Council had raised with the founder the possibility of holding interregional Weeks in the case of small circumscriptions, or even the option of not holding them at all. Josemaría Escrivá rejected these suggestions because he wished to strengthen the development of the Work in all places, even the smallest or newest.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in Japan – a country where the Work had begun in 1958 – José Luis Múzquiz presided over a two-day Work Week, attended by the four numeraries living there: José Ramón Madurga, Fernando Acaso, Desmond Cosgrave and José Antonio Armisén. They drew up folders on a variety of subjects: improving the study

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<sup>29</sup> Although there had already been other similar meetings in previous years, the General Council asked the founder if it was appropriate for the women’s section to organise Work Weeks, and he answered clearly: *“It must!”* (Consultation, 28 May 1960, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-2-2).

<sup>30</sup> Conclusions of the Spanish *Work Week*, 17 December 1960, nos. 35, 20 and 22 respectively, in AGP, series Q.2.2, 25-97. There were seven working commissions: administrations, formation of numeraries and numerary servants, formation of Oblates, economic aspects, the work of St Raphael with residences and home schools, the apostolate of public opinion and the work of St Gabriel.

<sup>31</sup> The topics were: formation, work of St Gabriel, expansion, public opinion apostolate, employees/workers/farmworkers, Chapultepec Institute, Montefalco, regional spiritual direction, Pan-American University Residence, work of St Raphael and financial affairs (AGP, series E.2.2, 342-3).

<sup>32</sup> General Conclusions, 9 October 1960, in AGP, series E.2.2, 342-3.

<sup>33</sup> General Conclusions, 3 January 1961, in AGP, series Q.2.2, 20-96.

<sup>34</sup> General Conclusions, 3 January 1961, in AGP, series Q.2.2, 20-96.

<sup>35</sup> Consultation, 28 May 1960, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-2-2.

of Japanese, acquiring books on literature and Christian doctrine, practical aspects of the life of the centre such as the drafting of the *epacta* or forming the priest's library, and the study of a memorandum to start a language institute and cultural centre to be called Seido.<sup>36</sup>

### *The post-conciliar weeks (1968)*

The next regional Work Weeks were not held in 1965, as planned by law, but three years later. This delay was probably due to the fact that 1965 was the year of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and the founder wished to receive all the conciliar doctrine before establishing new lines of expansion of the Work.<sup>37</sup>

In December 1967, the central councils drew up "*Regulations for the Work Weeks*", which they sent to the circumscriptions of Opus Dei. This set out the rules for the holding of the meetings. It was divided into three parts: convocation, preparation and celebration.<sup>38</sup>

The regional Work Weeks took place successively from mid-1968 to early 1969, according to the schedules of each circumscription. Thus, the most important conclusions for the men in the British region were the start of a centre of studies a year later, the possibility of establishing a secondary school in London, an increase of activities in Netherhall House and in the clubs for secondary school pupils.<sup>39</sup> For the women, a large part of the efforts were directed towards the improvement of the professional training of those working in the training centres (vocational training centres in the hotel industry) and the care of the university halls of residence.<sup>40</sup>

The Work Week in Spain brought together a large number of people. Forty-five women, plus the regional secretary and the secretary of regional advisory, met at the Los Rosales from 3 to 5 August. The conclusions revolved around improving the formation of the people of the Work, so that they would be aware of the mission and the ways in which they could develop Opus Dei. Special reference was made to the growth of professional practice in the academic field, to the knowledge of the vocational modality of the associates and also of the assistant numeraries, so that little by little they could be entrusted with some apostolic and professional activities similar to those carried out by the numeraries.<sup>41</sup> With regard to corporate activity, it was seen as more interesting to consolidate the realities that existed before, rather than to open new ones. At the same time, emphasis was placed on the promotion of public opinion advocacy, directing people who had the aptitude for it towards this work.<sup>42</sup>

The scheduled Work Weeks for men in the five delegations under the Spanish Regional Commission, met in June and July. Afterwards, the Commission sent to the General Council all the conclusions which they indicated were useful both to the circumscriptions and to the regional government in drawing up the three-year plans for the development of Opus Dei

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<sup>36</sup> Work Week at the Delegation of Japan, 31 December 1960, in AGP, series E.2.2, 342-1-1. Seido Language Institute, started in 1962, and was the first corporate work of Opus Dei in the Land of the Rising Sun.

<sup>37</sup> In 1966 the Fourth General Congress of Opus Dei was held without there having been Work Weeks the previous year: cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, p. 274. These were, moreover, times of particular juridical difficulties for the Work, which led to the convocation of a Special General Congress in 1969 (*ibid.*, p. 354).

<sup>38</sup> "*Regulations for the Work Weeks*", 21 December 1967, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-4-1.

<sup>39</sup> '*Final Conclusions*', Study Week, 6 August 1968, in AGP, series E.2.2, 346-1.

<sup>40</sup> "*Text of Final Conclusions*", 17 January 1969, in AGP, series Q.2.2, 38-100.

<sup>41</sup> "*Work Week of the Women's Section of the region of Spain. Conclusions*", in AGP, series Q.2.2.2, 35-99. In July 1967, the Founder had changed the name of Oblate to Associate (cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, p. 349).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

in each delegation.<sup>43</sup> The various delegations of the Work agreed on some points, among which were, on the one hand, the care of the members of the local councils: to draw up regulations, to explain to each member what his local work consisted of and to take care of the professional and apostolic formation of the members of the Work; on the other hand, they encouraged the members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross to collaborate more in the works of St Raphael and St Gabriel, and to extend the relationship with seminarians interested in knowing the spirit of Opus Dei.<sup>44</sup>

A novelty with respect to previous convocations is that, at the request of the founder, the General Council and the Central Advisory studied the materials and conclusions of the Work Weeks of each region, approved them and sent notes *to specify and clarify some points*.<sup>45</sup> In this way, the conclusions acquired *preceptive force*<sup>46</sup> and the circumscriptions received indications and suggestions from the central government of Opus Dei.

### *Extraordinary Work Weeks (1969-1970)*

In the spring of 1969, several cardinals told the Founder that criticism of the Work was circulating in the Vatican and that, at the proposal of Ildebrando Antoniutti, Prefect of the Congregation for Religious, a commission of five people had been set up to study the canonical situation of Opus Dei with a view to modifying its Constitutions.<sup>47</sup> With the desire to forestall the work of that commission, Josemaría Escrivá asked the Holy See for authorisation to organise a general assembly in Opus Dei to revise its particular law in accordance with the orientations of the Council and the foundational spirit.<sup>48</sup>

The first part of the congress was held in Rome from 1 to 15 September for the men and from 4 to 16 September for the women. It was attended by 192 members of the Work from the various regions. On the 3rd, five participants suggested to Mgr Escrivá that, once these days were over, he should convene Work Weeks in all the regions (nations), organising them by zones, groups, cities, etc., as is easiest.<sup>49</sup> They asked that *all the members should have the possibility of sending personally the communications they wished*<sup>50</sup> for the second part of the congress.

The founder approved the proposal during the congress itself. On 13 September, he sent a note to the regions in which, in its first two points, he stated: *in all regions extraordinary Work Weeks are to be held before 1 February 1970. To these extraordinary Work Weeks all members – numeraries, associates, supernumeraries – can send communications, suggestions, notes of experience, etc.; and also many Co-operators, including non-Catholics, to be designated by the Counsellor with the Defender, after consultation with the Regional Commission*.<sup>51</sup> It added that in

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<sup>43</sup> H 1156/68 (15 November 1968), n. 4, in AGP, series E.2.2, 347-3-1.

<sup>44</sup> H 1156/68 (15 November 1968), n. 4, in AGP, series E.2.2, 347-3-1.

<sup>45</sup> Consultation, 15 October 1969, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-3. When the materials of the Work Week of the quasi-region of Portugal were received in Rome, the founder indicated: *“Let all the members of the General Council see it and let give their opinion and propose notes”* (24 June 1968, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-3). Similarly, in the case of Switzerland: *“Let them all see it, give their opinion and indicate what notes should be sent”* (24 June 1968, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-4-2).

<sup>46</sup> *“Regulations for the Work Weeks”*, 21 December 1967, no. 45, in AGP, series E.2.2, 345-4-1.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, p. 354.

<sup>48</sup> On the Special General Congress, cf. Amadeo de Fuenmayor – Valentín Gómez-Iglesias – José Luis Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei: The History and Defense of a Charism*, Scepter, 1994; González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, pp. 353-361.

<sup>49</sup> Communication, 3 September 1969, in AGP, series E.2.2.2, 351-1-1.

<sup>50</sup> Communication, 3 September 1969, in AGP, series E.2.2, 351-1-1.

<sup>51</sup> General Note 7128/69, 13 September 1969, nos. 1-2, in AGP, series E.2.2, 351-1-1 (italics in original). The Defender was to promote the observance of the Constitutions in his region: *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (1950), no. 383, in AGP, series L.1.1, 115-1.3.



order to achieve this extensive and intense participation of many members and cooperators sub-committees should be appointed at the headquarters of the Work to gather the materials. Meetings such as circles, retreats and *convivencias* could be used to explain this collective request for suggestions. It was also requested that the proposals be signed and that each person's address and profession be indicated, so as to reflect the extent and variety of situations in Opus Dei throughout the world. The note ends with a new insistence on the widest possible participation: *all members and designated co-operators will be encouraged to present as many papers as they wish and to sign other papers as they see fit*<sup>52</sup>.

Two days later, on 15 September, the congress participants approved conclusions from this first phase of the congress, focusing on the need for 'a conceptual and terminological revision'<sup>53</sup> of Opus Dei law. They also indicated that a second part should be held a year later, as it was necessary to allow time, given the complex legal situation in which the Work found itself. And, as far as the Work Weeks were concerned, the eighth conclusion sanctioned that an Ordinary General Congress be held every eight years and that, two years before each congress, there be regional Work Weeks, *preceding these Work Weeks by an effective and extensive consultation of all the members*.<sup>54</sup>

In accordance with the request of the Special General Congress, the respective counsellors convened Work Weeks in their regions and made it known that the members and designated co-operators had the opportunity to send communications. In addition, they consulted the founder on who could participate. In his replies, Mgr Escrivá again expressed his concern that the consultation should be very broad. He even, for example, authorised the Region of Italy to send communications from young people in the work of St Raphael.<sup>55</sup> Both the impetus of the regional directors in encouraging the drafting of proposals and the enthusiastic response of the members and Co-operators led to a consultation such as had never been experienced before in the history of Opus Dei. In the five months between September 1969 and February 1970, 50,710 people – 26,974 men and 23,736 women – from 77 countries and all kinds of professions, wrote 54,781 written submissions, 25,815 in the men's section and 28,966 in the women's section.<sup>56</sup>

After the submissions were received, each region held its own special Work Week for

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<sup>52</sup> *Constitutiones Societatis Sacerdotalis Sanctae Crucis et Operis Dei* (1950), no. 16, in AGP, series L.1.1, 115-1.3.

<sup>53</sup> Conclusions of the Special General Congress, 15 September 1969 (men) and 16 September 1969 (women), in AGP, series D.2, 459-2-1 and 459-5-1, respectively.

<sup>54</sup> Conclusions of the Special General Congress, 15 September 1969 (men) and 16 September 1969 (women), in AGP, series D.2, 459-2-1 and 459-5-1. It also added that one year later – and thus one year before the Ordinary General Congress – a "general Work Week should be held, with representatives from all regions attending" (Conclusions of the Special General Congress, 15 September 1969 (men) and 16 September 1969 (women), in AGP, series D.2, 459-2-1 and 459-5-1). This last point was not taken forward in the following years, as there have been no general Work Weeks in Opus Dei. As we have seen, the only ones with this characteristic were those of 1948.

<sup>55</sup> Consultation, 19 December 1969 and Note 611/70 (29 January 1970), in AGP, series E.2.2, 351-1-2.

<sup>56</sup> Statistical data in AGP, series D.2, 462-2-1, for men, and D.2, 462-3-2, for women. The submissions from the regions are grouped in AGP in 85 boxes. Many are written in two sections: motivation and suggestion. The richness of this mass of documents is open to future studies which could analyse the ways in which Opus Dei members and co-operators knew and wished to spread its charism at that time. We do not have definitive demographic data on the number of members of the Work in 1970. We estimate that some 20,000 members and another 30,000 co-operators collaborated in sending papers for the second phase of the Special General Congress. At the end of the congress, the Work made no distinction between them: "*da parte di 50.710 soci di 77 nazionalità sono state presentate 54.781 comunicazioni, che sono ora oggetto di attenzione e studio*" (letter from Alvaro del Portillo to Ildebrando Antoniutti, Rome, 23 March 1971, in AGP, serie D.2, 462-14). This union between the count of members plus cooperators was maintained in 1975, when the authorities of the Work said that, at the death of the founder, there were 60,000 members: cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, p. 447.

both women and men. Most took place in December 1969 and January 1970. These meetings dealt with the main topics – the spirit of Opus Dei, the juridical situation, apostolic experience, etc. – on which our Founder and President General *ad vitam* wished all the members of the Work to give their opinion<sup>57</sup>

These regional weeks presented a novelty with respect to all the previous ones, for, in addition to the numeraries who, according to law, were summoned, the Work Weeks were attended by other numeraries, associates and supernumeraries, incorporated into the Work by the fidelity, appointed by the Counsellor with the Defender, with the vote of the respective Regional Commission.<sup>58</sup> In more than one case, the members expressly thanked the trust that had been placed in them. For example, the Portuguese Commission sent the Council a note that began:

*1. With regard to the experience of this Work Week, we wish to say that the contribution of the associates and supernumeraries, and of the associate priests [of the Priestly Society], in the commissions, was of great value; and that the 'convivencias' these days was for all a strengthening of filiation, of fraternity and of unity. 2. They were all very touched and grateful for the trust that the Father placed in them, and they put all their enthusiasm into these days of work.*<sup>59</sup> At the same time, they expressed their union with the founder, at a very sensitive moment in their juridical journey, which led them to “accept all the directives of our Father aimed at possible reforms of our internal law.”<sup>60</sup>

Once they had been revised during the Work Weeks, all the communications and papers were sent to Rome. Both the General Council and the Central Advisory sorted these proposals in view of the second part of the congress work.

In April 1970, Josemaría Escrivá travelled to Spain and Portugal to pray before Our Lady of the Pillar and Our Lady of Fatima. He also visited the shrine of Torreciudad, near Barbastro. And from 15 May to 23 June he was in Mexico where he made a novena to Our Lady of Guadalupe to pray to God for the Church and for a juridical solution that would safeguard the genuine nature of Opus Dei.

The second part of the Special General Congress took place from 30 August to 14 September. The conclusions revolved around the need for a new juridical configuration for Opus Dei, which would abolish the profession of the three evangelical counsels, in accordance with the founding charism, which seeks holiness in one's own state.<sup>61</sup>

Those present also approved that, although the second part of the assembly was

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<sup>57</sup> Second session of the second part of the General Congress of Opus Dei, 31 August 1970 (AGP, series D.2, 462-2-1), which explains how the regional Work Weeks were organised.

<sup>58</sup> General Note 7128/69, 13 September 1969, no. 3, in AGP, series E.2.2, 351-1-1. As an example, the men's Work Week in Germany sent a note to Rome explaining that 76 people from 23 different professions, ranging from university professors and businessmen to farmers and shepherds, had taken part. “Number of people who took part in the extraordinary German Work Week”, Cologne, 30 January 1970, in AGP, series E.2.2, 351-1-4.

<sup>59</sup> L 19/70, 7 February 1970, in AGP, series E.2.2, 351-1-2.

<sup>60</sup> Note of the extraordinary Work Week in Austria, collected in the second session of the second part of the General Congress of Opus Dei for men, 31 August 1970 (AGP, series D.2, 462-2-1), which follows: “This disposition does not proceed from an attitude of blind submission – which would be repugnant to our conscience, since we consider ourselves to be adult Christians – but from the recognition of the foundational charism which our Father alone possesses, and of the corresponding right, which he alone has, to specify everything that concerns the spirit of the Work and to fix definitively the canonical structure of Opus Dei”. There are similar texts in the minutes of the second session of the second part of the General Congress for women, 31 August 1970, in AGP, series D.2, 462-3-4.

<sup>61</sup> Conclusions of the second part of the Special General Congress, 14 September 1970, in AGP, series D.2, 462-2-7 (men) and AGP, series D.2, 462-4-8 (women).

concluded, the special general congress would remain open until the juridical problem was solved. It was to be maintained by a technical commission, chaired by Alvaro del Portillo and divided into two sub-commissions, one juridical and the other theological, each consisting of a vice-president, five members and ten consultants.

Over the next four years, this commission examined the more than fifty-four thousand individual communications and suggestions from the plenary sessions of the special general congress. It took so long because of the volume of material under consideration. In addition, at the time, a number of people with important assignments in the Holy See had opposing views on the best solution, so it seemed prudent to slow the process down.<sup>62</sup>

In 1974, the commission prepared a proposal for a juridical statute for Opus Dei. On October 1 of that year, Josemaría Escrivá approved the draft of the *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei* (Code of particular law of Opus Dei).<sup>63</sup> The document proposed a new juridical nature for Opus Dei that identified itself with the figure of the personal prelature instituted at Vatican II, and modified expressions more proper to the state of religious or secular perfection.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusions

Josemaría Escrivá instituted the Work Weeks in Opus Dei as an instrument for reflection, participation and listening to the members of the Work. From the outset they had a consultative character and were a channel for each one to express his or her own opinion on topics related to the spirit and ways of spreading Opus Dei throughout the world. The Weeks evolved both in the progressive broadening of the subject matter of organisational questions and general aspects, and in the universalisation of the participants, who, at the beginning were numeraries with leadership responsibilities, and later were other men and women of the Work and co-operators.

The first and main beneficiaries of the Work Weeks were those who directed and coordinated the spread of Opus Dei in the regions. The study of the progress of the Work in their territory during the previous years gave them a panoramic view of the situation of the Work in that circumscription, facilitated the analysis of the reasons why there had been successes or difficulties, and led to proposals for improvement for the immediate future. In the case of the central governing bodies, the material from the regional Work Weeks helped them to understand how the founding charism was radiating in the world.

During the founding years there were six Work Weeks. The first, in 1943, served to study and reorganise the apostolates of the Work, then confined to a few Spanish cities. The general Work Weeks of 1948, for men and women, facilitated the spread of Opus Dei, which was leaving the Spanish and European borders after the Second World War. The weeks of 1955 and 1960 helped to prepare the Ordinary General Congresses of the Work, which took

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<sup>62</sup> Interview with Cardinal Julián Herranz, Rome, 25 February 2020; cf. González Gullón – Coverdale, *Historia del Opus Dei*, pp. 358-361.

<sup>63</sup> *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, 1974, in AGP, series L.1.1, 115-3. Numbers 171-179 contain the aspects related to the Work Weeks. The same numbers appear, with minor modifications, in the *Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, 1982, nos. 162-170. The statutes call the regional Work Weeks assemblies (*adunaciones*), ordinarily held every ten years. They encourage “the greatest possible participation of all the faithful of the Prelature in the Assemblies, asking them for communications, notes of experiences that have been had, and other similar contributions” (*Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, 1982, no. 167, §1). And they provide that certain designated numeraries and “other faithful of the Prelature, experts in various subjects, shall be present at the assemblies as collaborators” (*Codex iuris particularis Operis Dei*, 1982, no. 166, §2).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. De Fuenmayor – Gómez Iglesias – Illanes, *The Canonical Path of Opus Dei*. After the foundational stage, there have been Work Weeks in 1990, 2001 and 2013, which can be analysed in future studies.

place a year later, respectively. Together with those of 1968, they marked the moment of consolidation of the spirit and apostolates of the Work, under the guidance of Mgr Escrivá.

Up to that time, some numeraries who had been definitively incorporated into Opus Dei had taken part in the Work Weeks, since these meetings were intended for people with formational and leadership experience, who could review the progress of the Work and make important suggestions.

The Work Weeks at the end of 1969 and the beginning of 1970 were extraordinary both in terms of the convocation and the response. Most of the members and Co-operators took part, sending just over 54,000 communications, and the meetings were attended by people who had been definitively incorporated into the Work in all its vocational forms. The request for suggestions from all those who knew and lived the spirit of Opus Dei made it easier for each one to reflect personally on his or her charism. It also became an unexpected plebiscite of unity with the founder, as the members of the Work were aware of the complex juridical stage Opus Dei was going through.