

documentation

INFORMATION OFFICE OF THE OPUS DEI PRELATURE IN BRITAIN
6 Orme Court, London W2 4RL - Tel: 020-7221 9176 - Fax: 020-7243 9400 - E-mail: info@opusdei.org.uk

DOSSIER

October 2001

OPUS DEI AND FRANCO

Arguments and facts about a chapter in the history of Opus Dei about which a confused image has sometimes been presented

Press cutting:

Profile of Sr Antonio Fontán (from *IPI Report*, Columbia, MO, Second Quarter 2000)

History texts:

Brian Crozier (from *Franco. A biographical history*, London, 1967)

Paul Preston (from *Franco. A Biography*, London, 1993)

Background:

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo on relations with the Franco regime
(from *Immersed in God*, Princeton, NJ, 1994)

Giuseppe Romano, *Opus Dei and Franco*
(translation of Chapter 17 of: Vittorio Messori, *Opus Dei: Un'indagine*, Milan, 1994)

Press cutting:

Obituary of Sr Rafael Calvo Serer (from *The Times*, London, 21st April 1988)

This Dossier has been prepared by the Information Office of Opus Dei in Britain.
For more information visit the internet site <http://www.opusdei.org.uk>



FOREWORD

This special issue of Documentation aims to tackle the misconception that Opus Dei supported the regime of General Franco, who ruled Spain from 1939 to 1975. It is arguable that this prejudice is becoming less topical by the year, for various reasons; among others, Franco died over a quarter of a century ago. Furthermore, Opus Dei is a world-wide institution. However, the theme occasionally comes to the fore. One can still find articles in works of reference affirming that Opus Dei had political influence in Franco's government, through the important posts occupied by its members.

This image is not in agreement with the Statutes of Opus Dei, which state that the faithful of Opus Dei “enjoy the same freedom as all their Catholic fellow-citizens in the exercise of their job, their social life, and in politics”, etc., and that “the authorities of the Prelature are obliged to abstain completely from giving indications or advice about these matters”. (Art. 88, § 3)

This issue of Documentation is a compilation of articles taken from books and the press, which demonstrate that Opus Dei, as an institution with exclusively spiritual aims, has always acted according to its Statutes. It has not become involved in politics; much less did it support Franco. Nor did Opus Dei in the time of Franco become involved with the political actions of its faithful; those who were in politics always acted on their own responsibility.

The ‘dossier’ does not aim to be complete. The emphasis is on facts that are less easily accessible. It is well known that there were members of Opus Dei who were ministers of Franco (eight in total, from out of 116 ministers over a period spanning almost forty years). However, it is heard less often that other members were in opposition to Franco and had to go into exile abroad. It is mentioned only infrequently that the ministers who were in Opus Dei were often in disagreement among themselves with regard to political issues, as historians Brian Crozier and Paul Preston clearly show in their biographies of Franco, extracts of which are published in this issue.

This issue of Documentation contains the following material:

- A profile from *IPi Report*, published when the International Press Institute nominated Antonio Fontán, a member of Opus Dei who opposed Franco, as one of its 50 “Press Freedom Heroes” for its 50th anniversary in May 2000. He is the only Spaniard on the list.
- Texts written by historians (those cited are not members of Opus Dei) about the so-called ‘technocrats’ within Franco’s government.
- An interview of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, conducted by Cesare Cavalleri. For forty years Bishop del Portillo was the person closest to the founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá, and afterwards became his first successor.
- A chapter translated from a book by Vittorio Messori, *Opus Dei: Un’indagine (Opus Dei: An investigation)*. The chapter on Opus Dei and Franco was written by Giuseppe Romano.
- An obituary from *The Times*, published on the death in 1988 of Rafael Calvo Serer, a member of Opus Dei who opposed the Franco regime from within Spain and later from exile in Paris.

Andrew Soane

Director, Information Office of the Opus Dei Prelature in Britain

Antonio Fontán was the editor of the independent national daily *Madrid* from 1967 to 1971. The government suspended the liberal newspaper, which was in favor of democracy and against the authoritarian rule of General Francisco Franco, for four months in 1968 while Fontán was prosecuted on 19 occasions and fined some 10 times. In October 1971 the authorities demanded Fontán's resignation, closing down the paper for good a few weeks later. Fontán's staunch defense of the principles of free expression during those five years as editor of *Madrid* earned the paper and the men and women on its staff a unique place in the annals of Spanish journalism.

Antonio Fontán Pérez was born in Seville, Spain, on Oct. 15, 1923. Educated at the Universities of Seville and Madrid, he received his doctorate in classical philology in 1948 and was active in clandestine royalist and liberal circles. He was the director of a weekly magazine, *La Actualidad Española*, and the monthly *Nuestro Tiempo* before joining the evening paper *Madrid* in September 1966, shortly after the introduction of a new press law had led to the lifting of prior censorship.

However, when Fontán was appointed editor in chief of *Madrid* on April 15, 1967, he soon learned that the end of prior censorship did not necessarily mean true freedom of the press. *Madrid* quickly became unpopular with the authorities for its coverage of such taboo subjects as student and labor unrest, the growth of regionalism, illegal trade unionism and opposition party activities. Fontán and his paper were bombarded with sanctions for publishing articles defending democracy and civil liberties and criticizing the Franco regime. Between January 1967 and May 1968 alone, proceedings were initiated against the paper on 12 separate occasions. *Madrid* was shut down for four months on May 30, 1968, inflicting heavy financial losses on the paper, which continued to pay the salaries of its staff.

After *Madrid's* reappearance on Sept. 30, 1968, judicial proceedings against the paper continued on a regular basis and under the smallest pretext. Finally, in October 1971 the Minister of Information, Sanchez Belle, demanded the replacement within 24 hours of Fontán with a journalist close to the Falange fascist party and the appointment of a director to represent the Ministry. In case of refusal, Belle warned, the newspaper would be temporarily suspended and an investigation started to consider its permanent closure. However, *Madrid's* publisher and principal owner, Rafael Calvo Serer, refused to agree to these conditions. The paper's editorial staff formed a journalists' association, the first of its kind in Spain, to defend the independence and dignity of the profession and to fight for the retention in office of the present editor.

On Nov. 25, 1971, after the paper

Snapshot Antonio Fontán refused to surrender his paper, *Madrid*, to official trade unions. Instead, he paid his employees when the paper was shut down. As a senator, he helped to write a new constitution recognizing freedom of the press.

published an article critical of General Franco's right-hand man, Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, the Ministry of Information removed *Madrid* from the register of press publishers, allegedly because of irregularities in the paper's ownership. He also told the paper to cease publishing. The banning of *Madrid* affected public opinion and was widely criticized by the Spanish press. "To close an economically sound and well-read paper is murder," commented the Catholic paper *Eclesia*.

Madrid's journalists and workers agreed to support the management and not surrender the newspaper to the official trade unions, which had offered to take charge of the newspaper under a new editor and with its own editorial line. "We are ready to sell the presses to pay the staff rather than agree that the paper should lose its independence," the journalists said. *Madrid* stayed closed. Calvo Serer, who went into exile in France a few days before the government closed the paper, was tried in absentia and charged with actions "prejudicial to the reputation and authority of the State."

When democracy was restored in Spain after Franco's death and the monarchy was re-established in 1975, the Supreme Court revoked the order to close down *Madrid*. The state was ordered to pay damages to the paper, but this was not enough to restart the daily, which had sold everything in order to compensate its employees.

Fontán was elected to the Senate as a member of the Unión de Centro Democrático coalition party in the first democratic general elections in June 1977. He was one of the authors of the country's Constitution of 1978, which recognized freedom of expression and freedom of information as fundamental rights. He also served as a minister of the government from 1979 to 1982.

In addition to journalism and politics, Fontán has had an active career in academia. He set up the first university-level school of journalism in Spain at the University of Navarra in 1958.

He was made an honorary life member of IPI in 1984. Fontán is currently the president and publisher of *Nueva Revista de Política, Cultura y Arte*, a bimonthly magazine on current affairs, which he founded in 1990.



Antonio FONTÁN

FRANCO AND OPUS DEI

Extracts from the writings of well-known historians on the subject.

➤ Brian Crozier, *Franco. A biographical history*, London, 1967:

“The charge that Opus Dei had been aiming at political power, and had achieved it at last, was heard in February 1957, when Ullastres and Navarro Rubio joined Franco’s cabinet. In this bare form, the charge seems to be unfounded because based on a misconception of what Opus Dei is.

It is not, as its enemies either think or want others to think, a political party; nor is it a political pressure group. Nor, for that matter, is it a kind of super labour-exchange for politicians. In February 1957, Franco did not turn, as one would almost conclude from reading hostile comment, to Opus Dei’s leadership, saying, in effect: ‘I have vacancies for a couple of technocrats. Send me some candidates and I shall make my choice.’ This would not have been Franco’s way, even if it had been Opus Dei’s ambition. What happened was more pragmatic and less sinister. Franco had heard of the intellectual and technical merits of Ullastres and Navarro Rubio and sent for them; they happened to be members of Opus Dei. On the same occasion, he had heard of the intellectual and technical merits of Castiella and Gual Villalbi and sent for them; but Castiella and Gual Villalbi happened *not* to be members of Opus Dei.

In other words, Opus Dei was not a group to be conciliated by being given a share in power, as the Monarchists were, or the Falange, or the Army.” (p. 460)

“In the meantime, Opus Dei offers a remarkable diversity of opinions: for instance, Rafael Calvo Serer, one of [its] leading thinkers, is an enthusiastic Monarchist, while Ullastres is cool towards a restoration. Other shades of opinion range from the authoritarian right to the Christian social left.” (p. 461)

➤ Paul Preston, *Franco. A Biography*, London, 1993:

“The fact that López Rodó was a member too led to speculation that the three constituted a sinister block at the orders of a secret society... Falangist resentment, combined with a readiness to believe in sinister masonic conspiracies, led to the emergence of the idea of the Opus as a Catholic freemasonry or mafia.” (p. 669)

“The arrival of the technocrats has been interpreted variously as a planned takeover by Opus Dei and a clever move by Franco to ‘fill vacant seats in the latest round of musical chairs. In fact the arrival of the technocrats was neither sinister nor cunning but a rather piecemeal and pragmatic response to a specific set of problems... López Rodó was the nominee of Carrero Blanco. The dynamic Navarro Rubio was the Caudillo’s choice. Franco had known him since 1949. He was a *Procurador en Cortes* for the *Sindicatos* and had been highly recommended by the outgoing Minister of Agriculture, Rafael Cavestany.” (p. 669)

“Bright, hard-working functionaries were emerging who were more concerned to get top jobs in the state apparatus than to implement the ideology of Falangism. That was entirely true of men like López Rodó and Navarro Rubio who were labelled as being primarily of Opus Dei but were more accurately seen as being part of what came to be called the ‘bureacracy of number ones’, those who had won competitive civil service examinations or university chairs while still very young. Other prominent administrators of Francoism in the 1960s, like Manuel Fraga and Torcuato Fernández Miranda, were usually described as Falangists... Ironically, in the early 1960s, there was more tension between López Rodó and Navarro Rubio than between López Rodó and Fraga.” (p. 695)

Mgr Alvaro del Portillo (1914-1994) lived and worked at the side of Mgr Josemaría Escrivá for forty years, and was elected as his first successor at the helm of Opus Dei after the latter's death in 1975. He was made a bishop in 1991.

Cesare Cavalleri (b. 1936) is a columnist for the Italian newspaper *Avvenire*, an author, and professor on communications arts at the University of Genoa. His book, *Intervista sul fondatore dell'Opus Dei* (Milan, 1992) was published shortly after Pope John Paul II beatified Mgr Escrivá on 17 May 1992. In the extract below (from the English edition, *Immersed in God*, Princeton 1994) Cavalleri questions Mgr del Portillo about the relations between Escrivá (and Opus Dei), and Franco.

How about his relationship with Francoism?

Before answering this question, I think it is imperative to underline a truth that is already well known: that the activity and purpose of Opus Dei are exclusively spiritual, and so were the mission and priestly ministry of its founder. The government of a nation—of whatever nation—and Opus Dei are realities which operate on totally different planes. The Prelature encourages its members to exercise their rights and diligently carry out their own duties as authentic Christians, but leaves them in complete freedom with regard to their concrete decisions in temporal matters. In fact, the Prelature urges them to exercise such freedom; the only stipulation it makes is that they should follow the Church hierarchy in such matters may give.

In the case of Francoism, it is necessary to recall that the end of the Spanish Civil War signalled the rebirth of the life of the Church, of religious associations, of Catholic schools... the hierarchy, understandably, did come out in favour of General Franco, whose rise to power was considered by many to be providential. It is enough to remember how at the end of the civil war, the façades of cathedrals and parish churches all over Spain were plastered with the symbol of the Falange and the following inscription: "All those who died for God and Spain—forget them not!" ["Caídos por Dios y por España. ¡Presentes!"] The founder of Opus Dei protested against this abuse many times.

In those circumstances, although the Father acknowledged Franco's achievements in bringing peace to the country, he had to counteract two dangers: on the one hand, a manipulation of the Catholic faith, an attempt on the part of certain groups to monopolize the representation of Catholics in public life; and, on the other hand, a tendency in some Catholic circles to use public power as a kind of secular arm; in short, two versions of clericalism.

The Father always recognised that it was for the hierarchy alone to provide guidance to Catholics on political matters; he refrained from doing this himself. Now, the hierarchy did openly encourage Catholics to support Franco—so much so that members of Catholic Action and other religious organisation had representatives serving in Franco's cabinets. Clericalism was so pervasive that some people even asked for (and, of course, obtained) the permission of their bishop before accepting a ministerial post.

When, in the fifties, some members of the Work became ministers in Franco's government, the Father neither approved nor disapproved; they were exercising their freedom as Catholic citizens, and showing respect to the hierarchy. However, there were people who tried to attribute the use of political pressure or interference to

the Work as such. We experienced no end of difficulties and misunderstandings on this account.

Already in the forties, for example, some members of Opus Dei presented themselves for the qualifying examinations for university professorial positions. Thanks to their thorough preparation, and without seeking any recommendations, they succeeded brilliantly. There then came a violent reaction from some enemies of the Church, members of a group which ever since the end of the previous century, by means of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* [Free Institution of Education], had been in control of the university. A rumour was circulated—it was absolutely slanderous—that the members of Opus Dei had passed their examinations in an irregular way. Actually they never enjoyed any advantages whatsoever; if anything, they were discriminated against in favour of other Catholic institutions which had the backing of the ministers of education then in office.

But it was not only the enemies of the Church who opposed or did not understand Opus Dei. In 1947, when the founder returned briefly to Spain to prepare for the transfer of the government of the Work to Rome, he had a meeting with Martin Artajo, the minister of foreign affairs, who, before he took this position, had been president of Catholic Action in Spain. To the Father's astonishment, as he later told us, Artajo said that he could not understand "how it was possible for someone at the same time to be consecrated to the Church, with a bond of obedience, and still serve the state." The Father explained that he himself would have no problem with this, because the *matter* of the obedience owed to the Church was the same for him as for all other Catholics, whether or not they were consecrated to God; the obligation was on an equal *level*, although it might take a different form. But Artajo apparently could not understand this clear and obvious truth; he gave orders that members of Opus Dei, or those thought to be such, were not to be admitted to the diplomatic corps, even if they had passed the qualifying examination. This completely unjust ruling was applied in several specific cases.

Since other Catholic organizations were openly and directly supporting the Franco regime, some people could not imagine the attitude of Opus Dei as being any different. Yet our Father always vigorously defended the freedom of opinion of his children, and it was only natural that among the members of the Work there would have been some who supported Franco, and others who took part in the opposition.

I recall a film in one of the catechetical get-togethers of the founder, in which he told the

story of how he did not hesitate to go in person to a "very powerful" personage to defend the freedom of opinion of one of his sons. I would like to hear a bit more about that.

It happened that a member of the Work had written an article against the Franco regime. The reaction of the authorities was very harsh, and he had to go into exile. On this point the Father had nothing to say, since it had to do with questions into which he did not enter; issues in which his children were involved as free and responsible citizens. However, among other insults thrown at that member of the Work, it was said that he was "a person without a family". At that point our founder reacted, literally, like a father defending his own son. He returned immediately to Spain, where he requested (and immediately received) an audience with Franco. Without going into any kind of political discussion, he just stated quite clearly that he could not tolerate a son of his being spoken of as "without family": this young man had a supernatural family, the Work, and our founder considered himself his father. Franco then asked, "And what if they put him in prison?" The Father answered that he would respect the decisions of the judicial authorities, but that if they did take him to prison, nobody could keep him from bringing to that son all the spiritual and material assistance he would need. He said the same things to Admiral Carrero Blanco, Franco's right hand man. And I have to add that both of them, showing themselves to be gentlemen with Christian sensibilities, recognised that our founder was right.

Many attacks on the Work and on the freedom of its members proceeded directly from institutions of the regime, such as the Falange...

In this connection, the letter which our founder wrote on October 28, 1966, to the minister José Solís, the head of the Falange, is very revealing:

"Most esteemed friend:

"Word has reached me about the campaign which the press of the Falange, which is in Your Excellency's control, has been so unjustly waging against Opus Dei.

"I repeat to you once again that the members of Opus Dei—each and every one of them—are personally utterly free, as free as if they did not belong to Opus Dei, in all temporal matters and in those theological matters which are not of faith, which the Church leaves people to disagree about. It therefore makes no sense to publicize the fact that a particular person belongs to the Work, when it comes to political, professional, or social matters—just as it would make no sense, when speaking of the political activities of Your Excellency, to bring in your wife, your children, your family.

"This misguided policy governs the publications which are connected with your ministry. As a result, they accomplish nothing other than to offend God by creating confusion between the spiritual and the temporal orders. It is obvious that the directors of Opus Dei can do nothing to hinder the legitimate and complete personal freedom of its members, who, for their part, never hide the fact that each one of them assumes full responsibility

for their own actions. Consequently, the plurality of opinions among the members of the Work is, and always will be, just one more manifestation of their freedom, and one more proof of their good spirit, which leads them to respect the opinions of others.

"In attacking or defending the thought or public action of any of your fellow citizens, let your publications have the decency—which justice demands—not to make any kind of reference to Opus Dei. This *spiritual family* does not intervene, nor can it ever intervene, in any political or earthly affair in any field whatsoever, precisely because its ends are *exclusively* spiritual.

"I hope that you have understood my surprise, both at the announcement of this campaign of denigration and at seeing it carried out. I'm sure that by now you must be aware of the blunder which is being made, as well as of the responsibility in conscience which those involved in this campaign are assuming before the tribunal of God. This blunder involves the denigration of an institution which does not—and cannot—influence the use which its members scattered over five continents make, as citizens, of their personal freedom, while not evading their personal responsibility for their actions.

"I beg you to put an end to this campaign against Opus Dei, since Opus Dei has done nothing to deserve it. Otherwise, I will have to conclude that you have not understood me, and it will then be clear that Your Excellency is not able either to understand or to respect freedom, *qua libertate Christus nos liberavit* [the freedom with which Christ has freed us], the freedom of Christian citizens.

"Fight when you must (though I am no friend of fights), but do not commit the injustice of bringing into such conflicts something which is above human passions.

"Let me take this opportunity to convey to you my best wishes and to bless you and your family.
In Domino..."

If I may be allowed to express a completely personal opinion, it seems to me that those members of the Work who freely collaborated with the government of Franco, on their own responsibility, worked for the good of their country; they achieved successes, unanimously recognized today, in improving the economy and in ending the isolation of Spain by turning her towards Europe. While he refrained from intervening in political matters, and even from expressing publicly any opinion on them, was there any aspect of them that particularly concerned the Father?

He was concerned about the problem of the succession to Franco. He did not hesitate to make this problem known to Franco himself, and he did seek to bring this sensitive issue to the attention of the Spanish bishops who came to see him. But our founder was wise enough to resist any and all hints, some of which came to him from the Vatican, suggesting that he take the initiative in this regard. He refused to act as an intermediary for certain individuals, because it was not his mission to get involved in politics. He made his position on this matter quite clear, in a manner that left no room for misunderstanding, in a letter of conscience he addressed to Pope Paul VI on June 14, 1964.

Chapter 17

Opus Dei and Franco

by Giuseppe ROMANO

The question of the "implication" of Opus Dei in the regime of General Francisco Franco is only in appearance easy to elucidate. For a start, the historical and journalistic context in Spain is different to that outside Spain.

For non-Spaniards the problem is only of interest in broad outline. Hence it is usually dealt with in a few short lines, so making it possible to mark Opus Dei as being "pro-Franco", an allegation which it has proved difficult to shake off.

Articles, dictionaries and encyclopaedias come out with generalisations such as, "It has members in 73 countries but is particularly strong in Spain; in spite of the nominal autonomy that the association recognises in its members regarding political and civic life, it is considered as a pressure group within the Franco regime and as a mouthpiece for the liberal, technocrat lobby".¹ The source of this information? Another dictionary entry which had said more or less the same thing previously. One is dying to ask: Who defines as "nominal" the autonomy enjoyed by the members of Opus Dei? Who "considers" Opus Dei to be a pressure group?

I have had occasion to study the figure and the work of the founder of Opus Dei, Josemaría Escrivá in order to explain it to others. Now, as far as I am able, in the available space, and with ample though not exhaustive documentation, I would like to embark on the saga of unravelling this controversy.

I have no intention of spinning a web of theories or generalisations, nor will I be claiming to say the last or even the next to last word on the subject. I would like simply to let some of the protagonists speak for themselves and, where appropriate, complete the narrative with some clarifications.

Anyone who wants to go into this question seriously will find at once that there are two fundamentally opposed views: that of Opus Dei, which has steadfastly maintained that Opus Dei has never had any connection with Franco's political system; and the "reputation" (so-called) of Opus Dei, which is that it had a "collaborationist" role. This accusation seems to proceed from several sources with many facets and nuances, some of them mutually contradictory.

At the root of the matter lies an indisputable fact: some members of Opus Dei took part in the Spanish government under Franco. As Peter Berglar, a German historian, summarises: "In 1957, Franco restructured his cabinet with a view to restoring the economy of Spain and guiding the nation toward a modern fiscal system. With such purposes in mind, he appointed a number of talented young bankers and economists. Four of them were members of Opus Dei. Alberto Ullastres Calvo, a professor of economic history at the University of Madrid, became Minister of Trade;

Laureano López Rodó, a thirty-seven-year-old scientist, became Technological Secretary of the State Department (later he became Minister without Portfolio and Commissioner for the Economic Development Plan); Mariano Navarro Rubio, the managing director of the Banco Popular, took over the Treasury Department; and, in 1962, Gregorio López Bravo Castro became Minister of Industry."² In specialist publications there is talk of the "age of technocracy" in the Franco regime, with the implication that the emphasis, for a time, had passed from the plane of ideology to the pragmatic. Among the "technocrats" there were people quite unconnected with Opus Dei, and also members of the Asociación Católica de Propagandistas.

The fact that certain ministers were members of Opus Dei is not sufficient to prove the existence of a political design

Here end the facts; and the arguments begin.

Before entering into the merits of the case, there are two essential premises to bear in mind; the first, which might seem obvious but is not entirely so, is that when accusations are made, it is guilt which has to be proven, not innocence. So—and here is the difference between calumny and honest accusation—it is up to the accuser to seek and provide proof. And to provide proof that Opus Dei has had and pursued an involvement in politics is, as we shall see, a very difficult task. The fact that certain ministers were members of Opus Dei is not sufficient to prove the existence of a political design.

Second: the problem of Francoism is still far from being settled, especially in Spain. Franco has left a profound impression on his land, covering a large part of the twentieth century, and in many cases, its effects are still being felt today. Spaniards seem to have done everything they could, first to follow Franco, then to forget him. It is difficult to find a Spaniard who is calm about the subject. This means that it is hard to find an unemotional Spanish source to appeal to; hence the non-Spanish researcher has to proceed with great caution in tackling this matter.

Franco was a dictator. But he was not a Mussolini, nor a Hitler. Taking all things into consideration, and allowing for numerous qualifications, Franco put an end to one of the cruellest civil wars in European history and later kept his country out of the carnage of the Second World War. Faced with difficult situations in diplomacy and foreign affairs he gained indisputable achievements. When his regime ended it gave way almost spontaneously to a

¹ AAVV, *Pro e contro Franco*, Milan 1972.

² Berglar, Peter, *Opus Dei (Leben und Werk des Gründers Josemaría Escrivá)*, Salzburg 1983.

democratic evolution leading to the monarchy of King Juan Carlos, in line with Franco's wishes. As "*Vida Nueva*", a magazine openly hostile to his regime, put it the day after his funeral: "Franco's death—we would say no one can dispute it—has shaken the nation's conscience. We have seen hundreds, thousands, of eyes crying, we have touched the moving silence in the streets of Madrid all these days, a wave of sincere affection and deep respect, the enthusiasm of many for a figure who for them was a hero, a saviour, almost a saint. And they were certainly not those whom fortune or politics had favoured: they were rich and poor, educated and simple folk, old and young."³

In short, whatever judgement one wants to make of the man, his ideas and the historical context, one must take into account an essential fact: for forty years Franco and Spain were tied together by a unique historical bond, unlike any other. If Spaniards themselves still have not been able to completely disentangle it, are we likely to succeed in just a few pages?

Let us however get straight to the point and examine the various positions regarding the involvement of Opus Dei in the Franco administrations.

Opus Dei, speaking both as an institution and in the words of its individual members, has always maintained that the fact that some of its members took an active part in Franco's administration does not signify that the Institution has political aims. The members come together solely for spiritual motives and a desire to receive a Christian formation. Whatever each one does at work or in politics, finance, culture, is his own personal affair. Evidently he will also seek to "sanctify" these areas, but "how" this is done (and all the decisions he makes) is left to the each member. Therefore there are no representatives of Opus Dei in politics, but merely (Christian) men and women who are in politics and who, also, are members of Opus Dei.

As far as the members of Opus Dei are concerned, living in dozens of countries all over the whole world, and belonging to all social classes, the matter is straightforward. Opus Dei has nothing to do with politics. Their daily lives prove it, they say: none of them has ever dreamt of thinking or acting otherwise. It happens, not infrequently, when reading a newspaper, that one comes across a statement from some national Information Office of Opus Dei (relating to a previously published news item) saying, more or less: "So-and-so is not 'Opus Dei'; and he is free to say or do whatever he wants and he does not involve the Prelature."

Whatever each one does at work or in politics, finance, culture, is his own personal affair

Repeating these ideas is useful as the years and events have shown. Today, especially after the beatification of the founder, many people have a better knowledge of Opus Dei and are aware that its members are just like other people, and not manipulated puppets. But in the fifties, sixties and seventies things were not so clear.

Moreover, this is not just a "technical" question. The founder was convinced, and said so many times, that understanding this point is of capital importance if the laity are to mature along the lines taught by the Second Vatican Council. Unless one has understood that any Christian, working alongside his fellow citizens, can and should act in the world without wearing a badge or label proclaiming his Christian allegiance or stating that he is acting for the hierarchy, one has not really grasped what is meant by the Christianisation of temporal realities.

However, many publications, even those in good faith and seeking to be objective, were often not convinced by such statements regarding Spanish politics; after all, it was a fact that there were "Opus Dei ministers".

Italian publications are fairly typical on this point. For example, the article in *AAVV* quoted earlier completes its information on Opus Dei by quoting a book violently opposed to Franco and the Church. This book by Jesus Ynfante,⁴ published in Paris in Spanish, with evident political motives, says: "The penetration of the Spanish State apparatus by Opus Dei was achieved in successive stages: before 1951, in the field of education and scientific research they had monopolised almost all the university chairs; after that, the members appeared among the senior civil servants in government ministries (...). Then, from 1957 onwards, they have had ministers (above all in the area of finance), until 1969 when the formation of a 'homogeneous' government revealed in all its impressive reality the political monopoly of Opus Dei in Spain."⁵

Was that really the case? Let us blow away the smoke of hearsay and have a look at how things really were.

On the point of the "political monopoly" of Opus Dei in Franco's governments, the simple figures are eloquent enough. Out of 116 ministers appointed by Franco in 11 governments between 1939 and 1975, only 8 were members of Opus Dei and their views reflected different shades of the political spectrum. The first Spanish government to include members of Opus Dei started on 25 February 1957. Thus, eight ministers out of 116, in nearly forty years. Moreover, one of the eight died three months after being appointed and four others only held office during one government.

Let us proceed. We need also to take into account the discordant note provided by the life and activities of Rafael Calvo Serer, university lecturer, intellectual, editor and publisher of newspapers and one of the outstanding men in Spanish cultural life after the war. Calvo Serer, a member of Opus Dei, was a liberal monarchist, strongly opposed to the Franco regime. In 1953 he was expelled from the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Superior Council for Scientific Research) for having published in Paris an essay criticising the politics of the Spanish Government. From 1966 he was the publisher of the newspaper *Madrid*, until it was closed down by government censorship five years later. Calvo Serer, who had faced many accusations and judicial

³ Cf. Gómez Pérez, Rafael, *El franquismo y la Iglesia*, Madrid 1986.

⁴ Ynfante, Jesus, *La prodigiosa aventura del Opus Dei*, Paris 1970.

⁵ *AAVV, Pro e contro...*, op. cit.

processes, was forced to go into temporary exile in Paris. On his return to Spain he had to suffer serious difficulties and was prevented from re-starting his newspaper. He became one of the founders of *Junta Democrática* (together with, among others, Santiago Carrillo, the secretary of the Spanish Communist Party), which was preparing clandestinely for the coming of democracy in Spain.

Another member of Opus Dei in the newspaper *Madrid* was its editor, Antonio Fontán. He describes the atmosphere reigning in the newspaper. "Those of us connected with Madrid saw ourselves as advocates for public freedom, especially freedom of association in politics, in trade unions and freedom of expression in general (...). It was a question of introducing parliamentary democracy, free elections and a spectrum of political opinions. We were pressing for this freedom to be introduced at once, globally, rather than being conceded in a piecemeal fashion."⁶ It is worth noting that Fontán, a professor of Latin and Greek philology and one of the best known opponents of Franco, was in 1977 elected to the Spanish Senate in the new climate of the post-Franco era. As president of the Senate he played a decisive role in the formation of the democratic Constitution of Spain.

Another member of Opus Dei, Antonio Fontán, was one of the best known opponents of Franco

A similar case is that of the *Europa Press News Agency* and the daily *El Alcázar* (circulation, 100,000 copies) where the journalists included many who were and still are famous in Spain. Some of these journalists were members of Opus Dei (about ten out of two hundred). *Europa Press* was subjected to repeated harassment and in 1967 *El Alcázar* was by government order taken out of the hands of the editor and the journalistic staff.

Madrid, Europa Press and *El Alcázar* were considered by many to belong "to Opus Dei". And even today there are people who think that way. Well, the persecution of these means of communication was taking place while other members of Opus Dei were present and, we are told, "running" Franco's government. How can this be squared with the image of an Opus Dei aiming at a "political monopoly" in Spain?

Shortly before he died from cancer in 1988, Calvo Serer wrote a brief autobiographical note which says, among other things: "I have never been nor ever could be the ideologist of Opus Dei. If I am the ideologist of anything it is of my own intellectual convictions, of my cultural, political and professional ideas, which have nothing to do with the doctrine of Opus Dei, which limits itself to the spiritual field (...). It does not make sense to talk of an internal split in the hierarchy of Opus Dei, basing it on the fact that there is dissent between me and other members of the Work in political and professional affairs. Each of the members of the Work acts according to the dictates of his own

conscience, never according to the conscience of someone else: they act with complete personal freedom and responsibility. I have never received, neither from the directors nor from the priests of Opus Dei, anything other than spiritual advice, and I have always been free to follow it or not."⁷

An "internal split"? Evidently in Spain someone thought so and said that, in view of the stark opposition between the positions held by this member of the Work and that one, there must be at least two pressure groups. However this does not fit in with the standard image of a unified strategy, in which the different members are carrying out a hidden plan to seize and maintain power in Spain.

So where are we? Is Opus Dei a monolithic group or a divided giant? Or perhaps its various members quoted are right when they claim, from different individual positions, that they are acting according to their own ideas?

For the sake of completeness I ought to cite another source of ideas, which denies that Opus Dei has political ends, but for reasons that are just the opposite. Looking at the matter from the point of view of so-called "National Catholicism", an Italian author writes: "The fact is that Opus Dei does not have a political programme (...) nor does it possess the ideological tools to provide a theological basis for autonomy in the political sphere and with it the consequent pluralism in that terrain. In Opus Dei there is in fact an implicit separation between religion and politics. With this de-ideologised conception of politics as technocracy, comes a bourgeois-inspired privatisation of the faith. Paradoxical though it may seem, it is the political poverty of Opus which explains its situation and role in Francoism."⁸

In other words, this view reproaches Opus Dei for its lack of a grand design for power, because if it had had the capacity to define it in theory, it would have imposed it in practice. But it is very difficult to give credit to the author of this analysis when he describes *The Way* as "a handbook of banal maxims, devotion and traditional piety" and "devoid of even the most elementary theological awareness".⁹

Let us listen to another voice on this matter. Rodolfo Martín Villa was director general of the Spanish Ministry of Industry during the time that Gregorio López Bravo, a member of Opus Dei, was the Minister. On the occasion of López Bravo's death in an air crash in 1985, Martín Villa wrote: "I do not belong to Opus Dei. This was one of the myths circulating at the time, because it was supposed that any Director General or high ranking colleague who worked with a Minister who was in Opus Dei must belong to that organisation. I, myself, when I first entered the Ministry of Industry thought the same. I assumed everyone was in the Work and everyone else, save one, thought likewise; that is, they were not in the Work."¹⁰

A bit earlier in his recollection, he writes: "In 1968, during the discussions on the Finance Bill an

⁷ *Diario de Navarra*, Pamplona 20 April 1988.

⁸ Botti, Alfonso, *Nazionalcattolicesimo e Spagna nuova*, 1881-1975, Milan 1992.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ AAVV, *Gregorio López Bravo visto por sus amigos*, Madrid 1988.

⁶ Fontán, Antonio, *Gegen den Raub der Freiheit, Opus Dei-Leute im Franco-Regime*, in *Deutsche Tagespost*, 18 May 1991.

amendment was proposed, opposing a grant to the University of Navarre. I voted in favour of the amendment, which was adopted, and the grant was stopped (...). As things were seen at the time it would have been thought that a Minister belonging to Opus Dei would have been very angry if his Director General had voted in Parliament against the interests of the University of Navarre. I am not saying that I expected to be sacked from office, but I thought a severe reprimand likely, given the rules of the game. However, the first time I went to his office afterwards, I broached the subject in a straightforward way, explaining my reasons. He understood perfectly and the episode did not have the slightest negative effect on our subsequent relations."¹¹

In Republican Spain at the beginning of the civil war, over six thousand priests were assassinated, including thirteen bishops

So there we have it, a "widely held view" (that Opus Dei was involved in Spanish politics) but not a single fact to confirm the view. Where then does the truth lie? To understand things better, we need to take a broader perspective, because the real problem here is not the relations between Opus Dei and Francoism, but those between Francoism and the hierarchy of the Church in Spain. We need to recall that with the end of the civil war there was a resurgence of Catholic life in Spain, associations, Catholic schools, and the hierarchy took up a clear stance in favour of General Franco, who was considered in many quarters as "a man sent by Providence". Suffice it to say that at the end of the conflict the shield of the Falange was put on the facade of cathedrals with the accompanying inscription: "To those who died for God and Spain!"

Antonio Fontán comments: "The authoritarian regime of Franco had no reason to fear at the start any serious opposition from the Catholic side. Above all, because memories of the way the Popular Front reacted to defeat were very fresh. They had unleashed a cruel persecution against the Church. In Republican Spain at the beginning of the civil war, over six thousand priests were assassinated, including thirteen bishops (...). When Franco took power, the policy of discrimination against the Church ended. A start was made to the rebuilding of churches and monasteries, many of which had been reduced to heaps of rubble. The Jesuits recovered their goods, which had been confiscated by the government of the Republic. Many private schools were put on an equal footing with State schools. In the classrooms it was possible to put up crucifixes again. The civil laws governing marriage once again came into line with Church law. So Catholics, after the hard trial, were able once again to breathe freely as regards their religious interests. But that is as far as it went, if one bears in mind that Franco's regime eliminated or utterly controlled, with an iron fist, individual freedoms: among them, the freedom of association, of opinion, and the press. The fact that there was no general rising against Franco, is due certainly to the peace he brought to religious

matters, and also to the general state of exhaustion after the civil war."¹²

"For us the perfect State is the Catholic State. It is not enough for us for the people to be Christian to ensure that the precepts of a morality of that order are fulfilled; laws are also needed to maintain principles and correct abuse. The chasm, the great difference between our system and the Nazi-Fascist system is the Catholic character of the regime which today governs the destiny of Spain. Neither racism, nor religious persecutions, nor violence to consciences, nor imperialisms over our neighbours, nor the slightest shadow of cruelty, have a place under the spiritual and Catholic sentiment which presides over our life." These are words of Francisco Franco, in his speech of 14 May 1946.¹³ In fact, "the attitude of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, both Roman and Spanish, in the Franco regime during the period 1939-1962, can be summed up in three words: acknowledgement, gratitude, support."¹⁴

At this point, it is necessary to introduce a further consideration. In Franco's Spain it is difficult to find people acting in public life who are not Catholics.

It was not just a question of convenience, although it is true that it would not have been possible to act in politics and say that one was not a Catholic in a totalitarian confessional State. But it is a fact that the faith was professed and practised. On 31 May 1964 in Madrid a somewhat special public gathering was organised. Its purpose: to say the Rosary. Over a million people took part, and the vice-president of the government led the first mystery. Prominent among the authorities present were the heir to the throne and his consort. When asked about the initiative by a journalist, Prince Juan Carlos replied: "This was a personal, intimate, act, even though there may have been a million people there."¹⁵

It must be understood that the Catholic faith in Spain at the time of Franco was popular and widespread

It is impossible to understand Spain or Spain at the time of Franco if one cannot understand that the Catholic faith in Spain was a widespread, popular and spontaneous reality. Indeed, it could be said that the relations between Church and State, which changed so radically between 1936 and 1975, were in good part changes of the Church and in the Church (and first, in the clergy, before the general population): the Church which receives the new lights of the Second Vatican Council, and the Church which is experiencing, as is the whole world, secularisation.

Catholics are everywhere, in government and out of it: the simple fact is that faith is not a factor that differentiates people. This explains, among other things, why Spain did not feel the need to have a "Catholic party".

On 1 July 1937, the Spanish Bishops had collectively signed (only two prelates refused to sign)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Fontán, Antonio, op. cit.

¹³ Gómez Pérez, Rafael, op. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

an open letter which said: "Despite its spirit of peace and its desire to avoid war and to have no part in it, the Church in Spain could not look upon the struggle with indifference. On one side God was being suppressed (...) and immense harm was being done to the same Church, to its members, its goods and its rights, more harm perhaps than at any other time in its history. On the other side there rose a conscious effort of those who were fighting for the conservation of the old Spanish and Christian spirit. We maintain that the civil-military uprising has a double cause: patriotic sentiment, which sees the uprising as the only way for Spain to rise again and avoid utter ruin, and the religious sentiment, which considers it as the force that will render the enemies of God powerless."¹⁶

Between the 13 and 17 of September 1971 there took place in Madrid the first "Joint Assembly of Bishops and Priests". Resolution 34, not approved because of a technical formality but voted for by the majority, reads: "We humbly recognise and beg pardon for not having known, at the time, how to be true ministers of reconciliation in the midst of our people divided by a war between brothers."¹⁷

These two declarations form a kind of parenthesis, between which lies the complex relationship between Catholic Spain and Franco's dictatorship, the confrontation between the "two Spains" of yesterday and today, and a civil war whose effects have for decades divided Spaniards.

The novelty of Opus Dei: Christians seeking God through their own work, without forming a group, nor showing off their faith by some title

Undoubtedly, one of the main aims of the Republican side had been the elimination of the Church, and their "nationalist" opponents offered much better guarantees of survival and freedom for Catholics and their Bishops. At the same time, the uprising led by Franco sought and obtained a legitimisation from the ecclesiastical sphere, and maintained with it after the war a favoured relationship. In the 1953 Concordat, for example, it was established that the Bishops should swear before General Franco: "I swear before God and the holy Gospels to respect and make my clergy respect the Head of State and the Government, in accordance with the laws of Spain."¹⁸

And so it was natural that the opponents of the regime should see in the Church the most important supporter of their political adversary.

The Spanish hierarchy, for its part, genuinely grateful for the help received from Franco, was not sparing in its support, but at times went even further than prudence dictated (despite some warnings coming from the Vatican). The fact was that neither were all on the one side Catholics, nor were there lacking Catholics on the other side. The Church in those circumstances was not impartial. This drew upon it, and does so still, criticism both from many democrats and from "revanchists" of the left.

This context helps to show up the novelty of Opus Dei, an institution which offers ordinary Christians the formation they need to seek God in their own work, without forming a "group", nor showing off their Faith by some title, but rather with the example of their lives. When some members of Opus Dei have decided to enter active politics (a tiny number out of the total), instead of practising any other profession, their decision has brought them, as far as one can see, frequent misunderstandings. I will list a few to offer the reader as wide a variety of material as I can, but obviously in practical reality motives get mixed and at times overlap.

First, the most obvious misunderstanding comes from opponents both of Franco and of the Church. Such sources need no excuse to attack Opus Dei. From their point of view, there was no merit in the fact that "some" members of Opus Dei, publicly known to be Catholics, should support the regime "in their own personal name", when very few Catholics acted in this area "in their own personal name". To cite one example among many, the president of Spanish Catholic Action, Alberto Martín Artajo, was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs by Franco on 25 July 1945. Before accepting, he asked for and obtained permission from the ecclesiastical authority.

Next, the new course of political events was not to the liking of the Falange, which in 1945 lost its supremacy in politics with the advent of the *Fuero de los Españoles* (or "Bill of Rights"). Nor were they happy with the ever closer alliance between the regime and the Catholic hierarchy and the formation of the new government, which was made up to a large extent of Catholics.¹⁹

This resentment continued and grew in the following years. Laureano López Rodó, a member of Opus Dei who was one of the so-called technocrat ministers who joined the government after Franco's change of policy in 1957, recalls the jealousy expressed in Falangist quarters at the time: "There were also misunderstandings [regarding Opus Dei] in the Falangist sector. Even though it is dated a good time later (5 February 1964), I will quote an article which appeared in *Pueblo* under the title 'Opus Dei' because it reflects a widespread opinion in that sector. The article says that 'Suddenly out of the blue new men have appeared, with no political tradition' and it could not see 'how members of Opus Dei can have reached such high posts without the support of a cohesive structure'. And this, despite writing, a few lines higher up, that 'We know many members of Opus Dei and have a high opinion of their expertise, qualities and effectiveness.' The logical conclusion of this statement would have been that they had got to those posts thanks to their talents and merit, without any need of any 'cohesive structure'.²⁰

López Rodó's analysis is that the Falange, as a political party, has its own apparatus and its aim is to get into power. The mistake which the Falangists make is to attribute a similar structure and aim to everyone else. The members of Opus Dei who took part in Spanish politics then were, instead, most of them

¹⁶ Gomá y Tomás, Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, *Por Dios y por España 1936-1939*, Barcelona 1940.

¹⁷ Gómez Pérez, Rafael, op. cit.

¹⁸ AAVV, *Pro e contro...*, op. cit.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ López Rodó, Laureano, *Memorias* (vol.1), Barcelona 1990.

“independent professionals”, half a dozen among the many people called by Franco to join his government at that time. They had followed the normal path which many others had followed to reach high office.

Another point worth making is that it would have been odd if none of the thousands of members of Opus Dei in Spain in Franco’s time had been involved in politics. “Had this not happened one would have suspected that there was some prohibition within Opus Dei against acting in public life or in a specific political orientation, whereas in reality we are absolutely free to act according to our honest wit and understanding and each one of us taking personal and exclusive responsibility for his actions.”²¹

Finally, regarding the personal political opinions held, things could hardly have been more varied. “There was also the unfounded rumour that the members of Opus Dei taking part in politics formed a homogeneous group. But it is obvious that, as a natural consequence of their complete political freedom, their positions and opinions were very diverse. For example, let us remember that Fernando Herrero Tejedor, Javier Domínguez Marroquín and José Ramón Herrero were Falangists. Juan María de Araluce Villar and Pedro Mendizábal were Traditionalists. Mariano Navarro Rubio was a Syndicalist. Hermenegildo Altozano, Antonio Fontán and Florentino Pérez Embid were members of the Private Council of the Count of Barcelona, whereas Gregorio López Bravo, Vicente Mortes and I were in favour of restoring the monarchy through Don Juan Carlos de Borbón. Alberto Ullastres and Juan José Espinosa were independent politicians. Finally, there were those opposed to the Regime, the best known of which was Rafael Calvo Serer.”²²

Irritated by these liberalising tendencies, the Falange unleashed a campaign against Opus Dei

In the following years, the Falange, for its own political aims, encouraged a campaign of denigration, which was responsible to a large extent for the black legend against Opus Dei. As recent historians have pointed out, it was not surprising that the Falange should have rejected those young technocrat ministers, who were proposing a way of going about politics which was light years away from that which had run the State and politics in Spain until then: what could be called a “European model” which was later to create the conditions for a bloodless change in the political system.

Antonio Fontán, who could certainly not be accused of sympathising with the regime, describes the situation as follows: “[The tendency towards an increase of freedom] augured a long conflict with those representatives of the Falange who wanted no change. The Falange was a one-party minded organisation on whom Franco had relied from the beginning, without letting them have a situation of unlimited power (...). The economic situation at the end of the fifties had become gradually more critical, and Franco desperately sought experts who could lift the country

out of the crisis brought about by the autarchic economy favoured by the Falange. He ended up asking help from some competent professionals who had been trained in the United States and Germany and who seemed likely to introduce long overdue economic reforms.

Among these, together with other Catholics, were some Opus Dei members like Alberto Ullastres who became Minister for Economic Affairs and Navarro Rubio, the Minister for the Treasury. Both of these, as independents, found themselves facing crossfire from Falangist civil servants who greatly resented the appointment of these new economic experts. They labelled them technocrats, reproached them for not sharing the Falange ideology, accusing them of introducing political changes camouflaged as economic reforms. Indeed, not a few Catholics ‘within the system’ were striving to ensure that individual rights of human freedom got progressively more attention. Irritated by these liberalising tendencies, the Falange finally unleashed an organised campaign against Opus Dei, which in the circles of the single party was seen as fertile ground for the push for reforms.”²³

This is the explanation for the Falange’s opposition. The opposition is documented in a letter which Mgr Escrivá wrote on 28 October 1966 to the Minister José Solís, the head of the Falange. This letter was not allowed to be published in Spain.²⁴ It was published in its entirety in *Intervista sul fondatore dell’Opus Dei*. The letter asks firmly: “I beg you to put an end to this campaign against Opus Dei, since Opus Dei has done nothing to deserve it.”²⁵

There were also some complex affairs like the Matesa case, a story of international financing which in 1969 cost the jobs of some Ministers who belonged to Opus Dei. The case started in a confused way and was brought to a brusque end by Franco. On this occasion too, the name of Opus Dei came into the limelight. It is not really a case here of trying to clarify what happened. But the affair was given international resonance, and as it resurfaces from time to time it is worthwhile at least mentioning a few facts which few commentators have drawn attention to. For instance, what started the whole thing off was a denunciation by Víctor Castro, the Director General of Customs, and a member of Opus Dei. Besides this, one of the Ministers appointed by Franco in his next government was a Falangist and member of Opus Dei. It was not, therefore, an attack on Opus Dei as such, but rather a political instrumentalisation of the non-political fact that some persons belonged to the institution.

Among those who have not given good service to the truth there are alas some foreign journalists and historians who have not infrequently let themselves be driven by passion to make affirmations which do not correspond to reality. Now, looking back years after the events, we might feel inclined to laugh them off. However, such behaviour has helped to perpetuate mistakes which could well have been avoided. In his

²³ Fontan, Antonio, op. cit.

²⁴ Gómez Pérez, Rafael, op. cit.

²⁵ del Portillo, Álvaro, *Intervista sul fondatore dell’Opus Dei*, Milan 1992 [English translation: *Immersed in God*, Princeton, N.J., 1994].

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

study, Rafael Gómez Pérez provides a brief list of writers “utterly beyond reproach” who have fallen into this category. Thus, for the *New York Times*, the Minister Fernández de la Mora was a member of Opus Dei; according to *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Carrero Blanco was a member; Max Gallo, a much quoted historian for anything to do with Franco, affirms, in his *Histoire de l’Espagne franquiste*, that Opus Dei is the owner of the Ya newspaper (which instead belonged to the Spanish bishops at that time).²⁶ Anyone can make a mistake. But if the mistake is by irreproachable chroniclers or historians, how can we get to the facts?

Finally, among the opponents can be counted (and they were not the least in number) ample sectors of the clerical world. It was from this quarter that the criticisms regarding “Ministers of Opus Dei” actually originated. Here, the reality becomes more delicate and difficult to discern.

When Spanish political life began to reawaken, especially from the fifties onwards, there began to appear cases of opposition to the regime on the part of men who because of this did not feel any less representatives of “Catholic” views. “It is symptomatic, in this sense, that one found an intention to profit from Catholicism in order to try ways of opposition; a further proof of the fact that in Spain the Christian background was a majority factor which had to be taken into account.”²⁷

But the most serious problem is a different one. Ever since the war ended there entered into politics people defined by some commentators as “official Catholics”, that is, people regarded highly by the regime and by the Church hierarchy as exponents of a common political and social design. Some of these wanted Opus Dei as such to give, as they were giving, a clear, total and official support to government policy.

Later, when relations with the regime cooled, there was an identical plea from these people to support their opposition to the regime. It was a support which in both cases Opus Dei could not and would not give, for spiritual reasons and because of the farsightedness of the Founder. His reasoned refusal was not understood. In this case too, simplifications of his refusal are unjust. We have already explained that there were members of Opus Dei both in the government and in the opposition.

Alvaro del Portillo tells of a particular episode. “In 1947, when the Founder stayed some time in Spain to prepare for the transfer of the government of the Work to Rome, he had a meeting with Martín Artajo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who, before he took this position, had been President of Catholic Action in Spain. To the Father’s astonishment, as he later told us, Artajo told him that he could not understand ‘how it was possible for someone at the same time to be consecrated to the Church, with a bond of obedience, and still serve the state.’ The Father explained that there was no difficulty at all, because the matter of the obedience owed to the Church was the same for him as for all other Catholics, whether or not they were consecrated to God; the obligation was of an equal degree, though under a different title. But the minister could not understand this clear and obvious truth, and

he gave orders that members of Opus Dei or those thought to be such were not to be admitted to the diplomatic corps, even if they had passed the qualifying examination. This completely unjust ruling was applied in several specific cases.”²⁸

Mgr Escrivá’s decision to move to Rome in 1946 shows his clear wish to remove himself from local political pressures

The Italian magazine, “*Famiglia Cristiana*”, in a number that came out shortly before the beatification of Josemaría Escrivá, published an extensive report on Opus Dei, and went into the alleged involvement with the Franco regime. The report quoted some passages of a letter which Mgr Escrivá had written to Pope Paul VI in 1964, and which had hitherto been unpublished. The report says: “Also, regarding participation in social life, there was increasing criticism of Opus Dei, accused of aiming at key places in politics and economics, especially in Spain, where some members had been ministers of Franco and some others had been implicated in financial scandals. In his letter to Paul VI, Mgr Escrivá replies: ‘Permit me to say, Holy Father, that the numerary and supernumerary members of Opus Dei who work with Franco in government posts or in the administration do so of their own free will and under their own personal responsibility: and not as technical men, but as politicians, just like any other citizens—who are undoubtedly far more numerous—who work in similar posts and belong to Catholic Action, the Asociación Católica Nacional de Propagandistas, etc. As far as I know, the only one to ask the hierarchy for permission to work in the Franco government was Martín Artajo (president of Spanish Catholic Action), for thirteen years Minister of Foreign Affairs (...). When, instead, Prof. Ullastres and Prof. López Rodó were appointed respectively minister of Commerce and Commissioner for the Economic and Social Development Plan, I got the news of those two appointments, which they had freely received, through the press.’”

The report continues: “In his letter to Paul VI, Mgr Escrivá expresses his concern, even in 1964, regarding the post-Franco era and he rejects the accusation of being pro-Franco which had been made against Opus Dei. He tells the Pope of recent talks he had had with Spanish cardinals and bishops, with whom ‘I took the liberty of also telling them that, if the revolution were to break out, stopping it would be very difficult: and therefore—using words of Sacred Scripture—“Don’t think that a single scapegoat [i.e. Opus Dei, Editor’s Note] will be sufficient: all of you will be scapegoats.” Because one could gather ample collections of public and excessive eulogies which the bishops have addressed to the regime, which is something that no one can do with me, although I recognise that Franco is a good Christian.’ And he continues: ‘I think it would be opportune to prepare as soon as possible an evolution of the Spanish regime, to avoid anarchy, communism, which would destroy the Church in Spain.’ He does not consider it useful for Spain to have a single Catholic political party, which he

²⁶ Gómez Pérez, Rafael, op. cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ del Portillo, Álvaro, op. cit.

sees as a dangerous thing 'because it could begin being useful to the Church and end up using the Church, which would then be unable to free herself from it, and might instead have to suffer a kind of moral blackmail. It seems that this freedom of Catholics [which Mgr Escrivá was advocating] ought to give rise to a suitable variety—not an atomisation—of temporal solutions: and at the same time, it ought to lead to a solid unity in those matters which are essential to the Church, which would be above all group and party commitments.”

“The Italian style of the letter,” *“Famiglia Cristiana”* concludes “is not elegant, but the message is lucid and up to date.”²⁹

Clearly there was a difference of opinion between the founder of Opus Dei and many other Spanish Catholics, including members of the hierarchy. And it seems that the ill-feeling towards Opus Dei arose from the persistent refusal of the founder and members to act in politics according to an official criterion, like a “single party”.

It is also important to point out that Mgr Escrivá’s decision to move to Rome in 1946 and to transfer the central government of Opus Dei as soon as possible to the eternal city, shows his clear wish to ensure for the Institution the universality proper to its essence and which it had had since its beginnings, and also to remove himself from local political pressures, which could become quite strong. In an issue of *“Limes”*, a geopolitical journal, Salvatore Abbruzzese says that “For Escrivá de Balaguer, international expansion forms part of the very substance of Opus Dei, it is one of the conditions of its existence.”³⁰ In fact, the founder had planned to begin apostolic work in other countries back in 1935, but the Spanish civil war and later the world war meant he had to limit this expansion to Portugal. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, members of Opus Dei went to England, France, Italy, United States and Mexico. Meanwhile, work was done to obtain the papal approvals in keeping with this international character.

Clearly the Institution could not be considered a “Spanish phenomenon”, because it was not one, even though it was born in Madrid and its first steps were taken south of the Pyrenees.

Criticism of the “one party mentality” appears frequently in the published writings of Blessed Josemaría

Criticism of the “one party mentality”, which is not applicable to Opus Dei, being as it is an institution which cannot and does not wish to condition the free decisions of its members in temporal matters, appears frequently in the published writings of Blessed Josemaría, including the letter to Paul VI we have quoted. The originality and diversity of Opus Dei can also be appreciated if it is seen in the context of the “theology of the laity”, which was to be taught in all its fulness by the Second Vatican Council.

Thus, Mgr Escrivá writes: “I have always been annoyed by the attitude of those who make a profession of calling themselves Catholic, and also of those who want to deny the principle of personal responsibility, upon which the whole of Christian morality is based. The spirit of Opus Dei and of its members is to serve the Church, and all men, without using the Church. I like Catholics to carry Christ not in name, but in their conduct, giving a real witness of Christian life.”³¹

And, going into greater detail, in answer to the question “Hasn’t the fact that some members of the Work are active in the public life of Spain politicised Opus Dei in that country in some way?”, he replied: “No, not in Spain, or in any other place. (...). People who have a military concept of apostolate and spiritual life will always tend to see the free and personal work of Christians as a collective activity. But I assure you, as I have said again and again since 1928, that variety in thought and action in what is temporal and in what is a matter of theological opinion poses no problem for the Work. On the contrary, the diversity which exists and always will exist among the members of Opus Dei is a sign of good spirit, of an honest life, of respect for the legitimate opinion of each individual.”³²

As for direct contacts between the founder of Opus Dei and General Franco, it is a well known fact that they knew each other personally. It would be difficult to imagine that things could have been otherwise, given the prominence of both.

Franco was a practising Catholic and well aware of the good reputation of the founder of Opus Dei. On one occasion the Founder was even asked to preach a retreat to the Head of State. The retreat took place with not too much concern for protocol and reflected the founder’s keen pastoral concern. As Berglar writes “When in the early forties Escrivá was giving a retreat to Franco and his wife, he considered it appropriate within this context to remind the Generalissimo of the fact of death. Franco’s response was that he did think about death once in a while, and he had made the appropriate preparations. Apparently he viewed death as just one more political problem. Later, when the bishop of Madrid heard about these things, he said to Don Josemaría the first time they met: ‘Now you’ll never be a bishop in Spain.’ Whereupon the founder replied ‘Being a priest is enough for me’.”³³

It is reasonable to think that Mgr Escrivá, once resident in Rome, would have been quite aware of the opinion held of Franco abroad, after the collapse of the Italian and German dictatorships and the generalised anti-totalitarian sentiment at the end of the Second World War. An opinion which, instead, was less easily known within Spain.

It seems clear that he consciously accepted the risk of an international “black legend” developing (and which would afterwards would be difficult to erase) as a price that had to be paid to respect the freedom of those sons of his who, with personal responsibility, chose to side with Franco in politics. This is suggested by some public words of his during a visit to Spain in

²⁹ Giacomelli, Renzo, *La santità nel bel mezzo della strada*, in *Famiglia Cristiana*, 8/1992

³⁰ Abbruzzese, Salvatore, *Opus Dei e CL: due modelli di espansione geopolitica*, in *Limes*, Jun-Aug 1993

³¹ Interview for *Le Figaro*, 1966, quoted in *Conversations with Mgr Escrivá*, London 1968

³² Ibid.

³³ Berglar, Peter, op. cit.

1964 and reported in *Le Monde* (which was a favourite channel for transmitting to Spain information that could not be printed there): "Perhaps my only fanaticism is to be fanatical about freedom. How can I be free if I do not respect the freedom of others? In Opus Dei each one thinks as he wishes, provided he does not offend Christ. That is why we are friends of freedom of consciences."³⁴

In the book *Intervista sul fondatore dell'Opus Dei*, we read of another meeting with the Generalissimo at the request of Mgr Escrivá in order to defend the freedom of opinion of a member of Opus Dei.

"It happened that a member of the Work had written an article against the Franco regime. The reaction of the authorities was very harsh, and he had to go into exile. On this point the Father had nothing to say, since it had to do with questions into which he did not enter; issues in which his children were involved as free and responsible citizens. However, among other insults thrown at that member of the Work, it was said that he was 'a person without a family'. At that point our founder reacted, literally, like a father defending his own son. He returned immediately to Spain, where he requested (and immediately received) an audience with Franco. Without going into any kind of political discussion, he just stated quite clearly that he could not tolerate a son of his being spoken of as 'without family': this young man had a supernatural family, the Work, and our founder considered himself his father. Franco then asked, 'And what if they put him in prison?' The Father answered that he would respect the decisions of the judicial authorities, but that if they did take him to prison, nobody could keep him from bringing to that son all the spiritual and material assistance he would need."³⁵

Bishop del Portillo also quotes the 1964 letter to the Pope, adding a number of interesting details. "He was concerned about the problem of the succession to Franco. He did not hesitate to make his concern known to Franco himself, and he did seek to bring this sensitive issue to the attention of the Spanish bishops who came to see him. But our founder was wise enough to resist any and all hints, some of which came from the Vatican, suggesting that he take initiative in this regard. He refused to act as an intermediary for certain individuals, because it was not his mission to get involved in politics. He made his position on this matter quite clear, in a manner that left no room for misunderstanding, in a letter of conscience he addressed to Pope Paul VI on 14 June 1964."³⁶

Let us go back to where we began this chapter. On the one hand there is Opus Dei, with the unanimous pronouncements of the founder and of all the members regarding the freedom and responsibility of each one. On the other hand, a lot of accusations, inferences and imputations. In the middle, the facts, which if they have any merit it is that they speak for themselves.

Much more important than the noise of the news item, is the appearance of a phenomenon charged with significance and content, made up of thousands of people who, day after day, in the most varied occupations, seek to get to know Jesus Christ, to make him known, to take him everywhere

Coming now to the end of our journey, it is time for each one to draw his conclusions.

However, before that, perhaps I could be ask something which until a few years ago was almost unmentionable: What if things were really so? If Opus Dei really was a rare phenomenon, unique even, where people come together purely for spiritual reasons, to try to do well, on their own responsibility, what their conscience dictates? If behind this there was none of the things which people have claimed? If there was, simply, nothing else?

Looking at things positively, this is what is so fascinating about Opus Dei. To know there is an Institution (an institution of the Church) which does not form a group, nor allocate any jobs or anything of the sort. And which asks for everything ("Seek holiness, in union with Christ") and yet asks nothing ("It's for you to decide how to act") and which confines itself to providing the spiritual help necessary. An institution whose founder was so crazy with fatherly love that he was prepared to confront the Generalissimo face to face with no other motive than the practical one of affection for that son who had been offended.

The Media have often fixed their attention on the political or at any rate public events in which members of Opus Dei take part. This focus, as I have tried to point out, is limiting. Much more important than the noise of the news item, from the deep historical view, is the appearance of a phenomenon charged with significance and content, made up of thousands of people who, day after day, in the most varied occupations, seek to translate into reality a message which can be summarised in a few words of the founder: "To get to know Jesus Christ. To make him known. To take him everywhere."

It is quite secondary what job one does. The fundamental and unprecedented fact is this "Christian fact" of mobilising men and women all over the world, striving to live the fullness of the gospel calling in their temporal activities.

³⁴ Gómez Pérez, Rafael, op. cit.

³⁵ del Portillo, Álvaro, op. cit.

³⁶ Ibid.

OBITUARY

SR RAFAEL CALVO SERER

Señor Rafael Calvo Serer, who died in Pamplona on April 19, at the age of 71, was a prominent Spanish newspaper proprietor whose pioneering efforts during the latter years of the Franco regime helped lay the ground for today's flourishing press freedom in that country.

Calvo Serer achieved fame largely as the publisher of *Madrid* the evening newspaper which was closed down by the Franco regime in November 1971, when it had achieved the precarious status of the capital's only really independent daily. It had already suffered numerous temporary closure orders and fines, as a result of its publishing information and editorials to which the Government objected.

The end came dramatically after the regime had stubbornly ignored pleas by the newspaper's journalists and printers, and its offices had to be sold off. The building was blown up in April 1973 as crowds watched, to make way for a new property development.

The censors had first struck, closing down the paper for two months when an ingenious editorial was published on May 30, 1968, entitled, "Retirement at the Right Time. No to General De Gaulle." Every discriminating Spanish reader knew it referred not to the French leader, but to General Franco.

Calvo Serer, faced with a trial and probable prison sentence, fled to Paris, where he continued to harrass Franco with his signed articles in *Le*

Monde, *Le Figaro*, the *International Herald Tribune* and other foreign dailies. The regime had prepared charges against him of "endangering the security of the state" and he was subsequently charged *in absentia* with political offences.

In 1974, when the regime was nearing its end, Calvo Serer played an active part in the foundation of the Democratic Junta, a coalition of clandestine democratic parties which was preparing for the future. In June, 1976, seven months after Franco's death, he returned to Spain and was imprisoned briefly, only to be amnestied soon afterwards.

That same year Spain's Supreme Court ruled that the closure of his newspaper by the government had been illegal. In 1977 the same court confirmed that verdict and ordered the post-Franco government to pay compensation and damages. With democracy established, the Supreme Court set the amount owed to Calvo Serer as 518 million pesetas (£2.6 million) plus interest.

Calvo Serer's militant opposition to the dictatorship did not seem conditioned in any way by his self-confessed membership in the Roman Catholic lay organisation, Opus Dei, several of whose members were ministers of the Franco Governments during the time of his persecution. He always insisted that his own actions had demonstrated that political freedom existed within Opus Dei, even for strong-willed and strong-minded liberals like himself.