

**OPUS DEI (Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, simply)**

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Opus Dei is an institution of the Catholic Church whose mission is to put into practice the doctrine of the universal call to holiness and to promote among people of all social classes the sanctification of professional work in the circumstances of ordinary life. Its legal status is that of a personal prelature, the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei or simply Opus Dei. In other words, it is a universal hierarchical institution of the prelature type, as provided for in the Second Vatican Council, established to undertake special pastoral tasks and endowed with its own statutes. Through the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, an association of clerics intrinsically linked to the prelature, it helps diocesan priests live the doctrine of the universal call to holiness in the exercise of their holy ministry.

### **F.M. Requena**

## **Bibliography**

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**OPUS DEI (Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, simply) > 1° History**  
**1° History**

Opus Dei was founded in Madrid by Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer (*cf. supra*) on 2 Oct. 1928. On that date — Saint Josemaría reaffirmed on numerous occasions — he received a vision in which God showed him what would soon become known as Opus Dei. On that occasion, he perceived through a profound, bright light the universality of the call of God to holiness and the apostolate. It revealed a limitless panorama of Christians of the most diverse conditions and latitudes sanctifying themselves in the course of their work and the most diverse tasks, all with the possibility and duty of fully accomplishing their condition as Christians and loving the world as a place to encounter Christ and the manifestation of his grace. The subsequent history of Opus Dei and its legal and institutional development find their hermeneutic reference in that spiritual experience of October 1928.

At that time, Saint Josemaría was a 26-year-old priest. On 14 Feb. 1930 he also came to understand that women had to be part of Opus Dei. The first members, who were mainly men, arrived and the Academy DYA, the first centre, started in 1932. In those early years, before the Spanish Civil War, Saint Josemaría began to draft documents on the spirit and activity of Opus Dei. In 1934, he published *Spiritual Considerations* that, after the civil war and much expanded, became *The Way*, his best-known and most widely read work. The expansion of Opus Dei to Valencia and Paris was being prepared when civil conflict broke out in Spain. The expansion would have to wait until the end of the civil war. From the outset, Saint Josemaría worked with the knowledge and encouragement of the Diocesan authority.

In 1939, with the civil war over, stable apostolic work began in Valencia, where Opus Dei soon gained new faithful. Almost immediately, it reached Barcelona and Valladolid (1940), and shortly after, Zaragoza, Bilbao, Seville and Santiago. The number of Opus Dei members — at that time university students and young graduates — and its apostolic activities grew considerably during the 1940s. The work with women also intensified and, in 1942, they were able to open their first centre in Madrid.

A year earlier, Opus Dei had been approved as a Pious Union by the Bishop of Madrid. On 14 Feb. 1943, the founder saw in the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross the means of incardinating the priests who formed part of the pastoral phenomenon of Opus Dei. In that same year, with the "nihil obstat" of the Holy See, the Bishop of Madrid established it as a society of common life without vows.

From the outset, the faithful of Opus Dei were and presented themselves as common Christians, a fact borne out by their official documents. They did not identify themselves with special symbols and they carried out their apostolic activities with the naturalness of those who moved among equals. With the passing of time, it became clear that the canonical solution adopted could not be definitive : Opus Dei was a new form of apostolate that required a new legal formulation.

Meanwhile, the work increased. The number of people — men and women — requesting admission grew. The first priestly ordination of Opus Dei faithful took place on 25 June 1944. The first three priests, Álvaro del Portillo, José María Hernández Garnica and José Luis Múzquiz, all engineers by profession, were ordained by the Bishop of Madrid. Their causes of canonization are now underway. With the Second World War over, and already with around twenty centres and several hundred faithful in Spain, it was possible to begin the development of Opus Dei in other countries. It began in Europe : Portugal (1945), Italy and Great Britain (1946), and Ireland and France (1947). This increasing expansion made it advisable to modify the legal statutes. On 24 Feb. 1947, Pius XII sanctioned Opus Dei as a Secular Institute. It continued to grow on this new legal basis, which was superior to the previous statutes, but was soon also seen to be inadequate.

In 1946, the number of faithful was 268 (239 men and 29 women). By early 1950 it had risen to 2,954 (2,404 men and 550 women). In 1946 there were 4 priests, by 1950 this had risen to 23. The socio-cultural range of its members widened, at the same time as married people began to be admitted. There were more than 100 Opus Dei centres in various European, American and African countries, four times more than in 1946. In 1948, the Roman College of the Holy Cross was established in Rome. It was designed to be an international centre frequented, over the years, by thousands of male members of Opus Dei from different countries, who would receive there intense spiritual and doctrinal training and complete their curriculum of ecclesiastical studies. In 1953, a similar centre in a different location was founded for women — the Roman College of Saint Mary.

On 16 June 1950, through the *Primum inter* Decree, Pius XII definitively approved Opus Dei as a Pontifical Law institution. From then on it was possible for diocesan priests to join the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross without altering their subjection to their own ordinary and their situation in their respective dioceses. Opus Dei continued its expansion throughout the world, reaching Mexico and the United States in 1949 ; Argentina in 1950 ; Colombia and Venezuela in 1951 ; Germany in 1952 ; Guatemala and Peru in 1953 ; Ecuador in 1954 ; Uruguay and Switzerland in 1956 ; Brazil, Austria and Canada in 1957 ; Japan, Kenya and El Salvador in 1958 ; Costa Rica in 1959 ; Holland in 1960 ; Paraguay in 1962 ; Australia in 1963 ; the Philippines in 1964 ; Belgium and Nigeria in 1965 ; and Puerto Rico in 1969.

In the 1950s and 1960s, some members of Opus Dei, especially in Spain, in the free exercise of their profession and as a consequence of the personal prestige they had attained, became increasingly well-known among the public for their political responsibilities or for their cultural, intellectual and economic activities. Specifically, between 1957 and 1974, nine ministers in the Franco governments were members of Opus

Dei. Although there were strong political discrepancies between them, they appear to have contributed to the economic modernisation of the country, as well as to its international opening. At the same time, other members of Opus Dei were completely opposed to Franco's regime and suffered the consequences of their opposition. Although they were few in number compared to the total membership, this involvement was misunderstood by some who wished to attribute political or economic interests to Opus Dei, without understanding that those activities were the result of personal and freely-taken decisions on the part of the individuals who undertook them. Even today, the historiography in this respect appears to move in a terrain that is more ideological and controversial than academic.

From the 1950s it was considered that the status of Secular Institute was not compatible with foundational charisma, although this had been the legal configuration that, as it involved a supra-diocesan regime, had facilitated its universal dissemination. In the early 1960s, the founder put to the Holy See the need to revise the legal status of Opus Dei, which had spread to the five continents and had more than 33,000 faithful. It would be the Second Vatican Council that finally opened the way with the figure of the personal prelature.

The history of Opus Dei during the last five years of the life of its Founder was marked by the consolidation and expansion of the apostolic work on the five continents, by the wait for the desired definitive legal solution, by the challenges the Church faced in the post-conciliar period, and by an intensive catechesis undertaken by Saint Josemaría between 1972 and 1975 in Europe and America in the presence of thousands of people. He died suddenly on 26 June 1975 in Rome. At that time, Opus Dei had some 60,000 faithful.

Álvaro del Portillo, his closest collaborator since the 1930s, was chosen as successor. During his government, Opus Dei attained the definitive legal solution planned for by its Founder. On 19 Mar. 1983, the apostolic constitution "Ut sit" was executed. With this, on 28 November, Pope John Paul II established Opus Dei as a Personal Prelature of a universal nature, endowed with its own statutes. In January 1991, the Holy Father ordained the prelate of Opus Dei, Monsignor Álvaro del Portillo, as a Bishop. During the government of Álvaro del Portillo, the apostolic work of Opus Dei began in another 21 countries : Bolivia in 1978 ; Zaire, Ivory Coast and Honduras in 1980 ; Hong Kong in 1981 ; Singapore in 1982 ; Trinidad and Tobago in 1983 ; Sweden in 1984 ; Taiwan in 1985 ; Finland in 1987 ; Cameroon and the Dominican Republic in 1988 ; Macao, New Zealand and Poland in 1989 ; Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1990 ; Nicaragua in 1992 ; India and Israel in 1993 ; and Lithuania in 1994. Monsignor Álvaro del Portillo died on 23 Mar. 1994 and was beatified in Madrid on 27 Sept. 2014.

He was succeeded as head of the Prelature by Monsignor Javier Echevarría, another close collaborator of Saint Josemaría for more than two decades. He was ordained bishop in January 1995. He led Opus Dei for 22 years until his death on 12 Dec. 2016. During those years, Opus Dei began its stable activity in 16 new countries. Monsignor Fernando Ocariz (Paris, 1944) is the current prelate of Opus Dei.

In October 2002, Pope John Paul II canonised the founder of Opus Dei in Saint Peter's Square in the presence of almost half a million people from all five continents.

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#### **OPUS DEI (Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, simply) > 2° Spirit**

### **2° Spirit**

The spirit of Opus Dei, sanctioned by the Holy See in its own statutes, is amply explained in the writings of its founder. In the 1930s he began to write texts aimed at teaching the faithful of Opus Dei. In the 1960s he revised and completed that material, leaving it ready to be used in the teaching of those who form part of Opus Dei and, sometime after his death, to be published. In addition, since the 1950s and 1960s transcriptions and audio and video recordings of his preaching have been preserved.

Characteristic aspects of the spirit of Opus Dei include its secularity ; the belief that work is a sanctifiable and sanctifying act ; the commitment to live with a contemplative soul in the midst of the world ; the sense of divine filiation as a foundation of spiritual life ; the conviction that all Christians should make a personal commitment to spread the Gospel among their equals ; to make the Eucharist the centre of their inner life ; the spirit of understanding and coexistence ; devotion to the ecclesiastical magisterium ; love for freedom ; and taking personal responsibility. Opus Dei does not have its own theological doctrine and in its social, professional and political activities it does not set any limits on its faithful, other than those indicated by the Catholic faith and morals. There are currently under way the causes of canonisation of thirteen faithful of Opus Dei : men and women, priests and laypersons, single and married, all of whom died with a reputation for holiness.

#### **F.M. Requena**

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## **3° Organization**

The Prelature of Opus Dei is governed by the Catholic Church's general law, by the "Ut sit" Apostolic Constitution and by its own statutes or the Particular Law of Opus Dei granted by the Holy See. The Prelature is governed by a Prelate who resides in Rome. In the government of Opus Dei, the prelate is assisted by a council of women, the Central Advisory, and another of men, the General Council. They are both based in Rome. The prelature has a collegiate government : the prelate and his vicars always perform their tasks with the cooperation of the corresponding councils, which are mainly made up of laypersons. The prelature's general congresses are normally held every eight years and are attended by members from the different countries in which Opus Dei is present. These congresses study the apostolic work of the prelature and present their proposals for future pastoral activity to the prelate.

The prelature is divided into areas or territories known as regions. At the head of each region — the area of which may or may not coincide with a country — there is a regional vicar with his councils, the Regional Advisory for women and the Regional Commission for men. Some regions are subdivided into delegations with smaller areas. In this case, the same governmental organisation is replicated : a vicar of the delegation and two councils. Finally, on a local level, there are the Opus Dei centres that organise the training and pastoral care resources for the faithful in the prelature's area. The centres are either for women or for men. Each has a local council chaired by a layperson — the director — with at least two other faithful from the prelature. For the specific priestly care of the faithful belonging to each centre, the ordinary of the prelature designates a priest from its presbytery. None of the government posts, except for the prelate, is for life.

The Priestly Society of the Holy Cross — an association intrinsically linked to Opus Dei — is made up of priests. Priests and deacons of the most diverse dioceses can also apply to join the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, without this diminishing in any way their diocesan status or their responsibility to their own bishop.

**F.M. Requena**

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## **OPUS DEI (Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, simply) > 4° Members**

### **4° Members**

According to the *Pontifical Yearbook* for 2016, Opus Dei has 91,892 faithful, of which 2,094 are priests. Fifty-five percent of Opus Dei's members are women and almost 90% are resident in Europe and America. Opus Dei does not have different categories of members ; they are distinguished by the different ways in which they carry out the same vocation, depending on their personal circumstances. Most of the faithful (currently around 70%) are *supernumeraries*, normally married men or women. The rest of the faithful commit to an apostolic celibate life. *Associates* live with their families or wherever it is most convenient for professional reasons. *Numeraries* normally live in Opus Dei centres, a circumstance that allows them to be fully available to attend to apostolic tasks and the teaching of other faithful of the prelature. *Numerary assistants* are mainly devoted to the domestic needs of the prelature's centres as their normal working activity.

Some numeraries and associates, although few in comparison to the number total of faithful, are ordained as priests and constitute the Prelature's presbytery. They mainly, although not exclusively, attend to the faithful of Opus Dei and their apostolic tasks. Finally, Opus Dei also has *co-operators* who are not members of the Prelature, but cooperate in its activities with their prayer, alms or work. *Co-operators* can be non-Catholics and even non-Christians.

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## **OPUS DEI (Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, simply) > 5° Activity**

### **5° Activity**

The fundamental apostolate of the faithful of Opus Dei is personal Christian testimony in the work and normal life circumstances of each person. The sole activity of Opus Dei as an institution is in the personal field and consists of providing its faithful, and those attracted by its work, suitable spiritual training to allow them to live a radically Christian vocation in the material world. Spiritual direction, retreats, doctrinal talks and classes in theology and Church social doctrine are some of the activities organised for this purpose. They take place in Opus Dei centres, churches or parishes or in the homes of participants and they are open to anyone. The specific training given to the diocesan priests of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross is similar to that received by the prelature's lay faithful : doctrinal or ascetic classes, monthly retreats, etc., in addition to presupposing the other methods ordered or recommended in each case by the bishop.

Opus Dei encourages its faithful not only to sanctify work itself, but also to undertake, normally in cooperation with other people, apostolic activities, of which in some cases the prelature guarantees the spiritual teachings imparted. These activities, which are very varied, are exclusively spiritual and apostolic, not for profit, and of a civil and secular nature. They include primary and middle schools and universities (among which can be mentioned the University of Navarra in Spain and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome) ; houses for spiritual retreats and cultural meetings ; centres for the promotion of women ; medical dispensaries in underdeveloped areas ; clinics ; schools for peasants ; vocational training institutes ; student residences and cultural centres.

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